Ohio State Looking To Avoid Season Sweep Against Indiana

Ohio State was able to complete a season sweep – of three games, no less – over Michigan on Friday, securing an 81-79 win over the Wolverines to move on to the semifinals of the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament.

Now just one game away from the conference title game, the Buckeyes are on the other end of the equation, looking to avoid a trio of losses to Indiana, ranked second in the country and earning the top seed in the conference tournament.

Ohio State's previous losses to Indiana came by 13 points on Jan. 26 and by 24 points on Feb. 13, the biggest win by the Hoosiers in series history. The biggest factor in those losses was Indiana forward Mackenzie Holmes, the Big Ten Defensive Player of the Year (as well as first-team All-Big Ten honoree), who combined for 59 points on 26-of-31 shooting (83.9 percent)

"They have great guards that can shoot, and they also have a solid post," Ohio State guard Taylor Thierry said Friday. "Mackenzie Holmes is really good. She's very physical and athletic."

The losses came amid a challenging stretch for Ohio State, which finished the regular season on a 4-6 run after starting the season 19-0. The Buckeyes have fared better as of late, winning five of their last eight with a ranked win over the Wolverines, but Ohio State has struggled all season against the other top teams in the conference, finishing the regular season a combined 0-5 against Maryland, Iowa and Indiana.

Beyond Holmes, the Buckeyes will have to deal with an number of potential game-changers on Indiana's roster, including guards Yarden Garzon, Chloe Moore-McNeil and Sara Scalia, all of whom reached double digits in Indiana's 94-85 win over Michigan State on Friday. This doesn't even include guard Grace Berger, who was named first-team All-Big Ten and is second in scoring among Hoosiers this season, averaging 12.4 points and a team-high 5.9 assists per game.

One are Michigan State was able to find success was from beyond the arc. Despite finishing just 11 of 28 from deep, the Spartans started the contest 8 of 15 in the first half while holding a 40-34 lead heading into the break. The Buckeyes are fifth in the conference in three-point shooting at 34.3 percent from the game but were 8 of 15 from deep against Michigan, with five different players connecting from range.

"We just have to play our game and trust the process and trust each other and get stops and make it as hard as possible for them to score," Thierry said.

One addition that will help Ohio State is that of guard Jacy Sheldon, who made her return against the Wolverines after missing 21 of the last 22 games for the Buckeyes. She played on a minutes restriction but still finished with 5 points and two assists, including a late three-pointer that helped Ohio State maintain a late lead against Michigan.

Sheldon did not play in any of Ohio State's losses this season, including the pair to Indiana, and she remains an important factor entering Saturday's matchup if she's able to see the court for any extended time.

"My gosh, it was such a huge help, honestly," Thierry said of having Sheldon back. "Just somebody coming off the bench and giving other players breathers. She's an amazing player offensively. Defensively, she adds that energy we really need, and she really keeps us focused and connected. She's great on the press, too.

"We play a little faster with her in the game," Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff added. "Just the overall pace is better."

Ohio State and Indiana will tip off at 2:30 p.m. on the Big Ten Network, with the winner set to face either Iowa or Maryland on Sunday at 4 p.m.