

Ohio State Overcomes Slow Start In 78-36 Win Over New Orleans



Ohio State (10-3) started slow from the field on Thursday at Value City Arena but broke through over the final half and change, sparking a 78-36 win over New Orleans (5-7).

The Buckeyes - who were without head coach Chris Holtmann and sophomore center Felix Okpara, both of whom were dealing with the flu - were just 5 of 22 from the field to begin the game and 1 of 6 from deep, but outscored the Privateers 47-19 in the second half to secure the win. Associate head coach Jake Diebler filled in for Holtmann.

Ohio State opened with a 4-2 just 2:45 into the game, but the teams combined to miss their next 10 shots and commit four turnovers. The next basket came on a three-pointer from New Orleans guard Khaleb Wilson-Rouse with 14:51 left in the half, though Ohio State guard Bruce Thornton responded with a triple of his own to retake the lead.

The Buckeyes increased their lead to 14-9 following a dunk by sophomore guard Evan Mahaffey, but the Privateers took off on a 6-0 run that lasted 4:37 to take a 15-14 lead with 5:49 left in the half. But the Buckeyes responded with a 9-0 run - boosted by two triples from fifth-year forward Jamison Battle - to retake the lead, and eventually went into the half up 31-17 behind 15 combined points from Battle and Thornton.

Ohio State entered the half with a 14-point lead despite shooting just 36.4 percent from the field and 25.0 percent deep, though it held New Orleans to 23.1 percent shooting from the field and just one make on nine attempts from beyond the arc.

The Buckeyes opened the second half with a dunk by Mahaffey that set the tone for the remainder of the contest. Mahaffey and senior forward Zed Key - who got his first start of the season with Okpara out - combined for the next three baskets for the Buckeyes. Thornton then scored and hit a pair at the line, and freshman forward Devin Royal also hit at the charity stripe to push Ohio State's lead to 44-23 with

13:22 left in the game.

Ohio State did not escape the contest unscathed, however, as Thornton checked out with 13:03 after taking a hard fall and later returned to the bench after getting checked out in the locker room. Even so, the Buckeyes were able to push the lead to 70-37 with 3:35 left after three triples from Battle in the span of two minutes.

Freshman center Austin Parks and sophomore guard Colby Baumann then hit at the line for their first career points, pushing the lead to 73-33 with 2:38 left in the half before closing out the remainder of the contest. The 36 points allowed by the Buckeyes are the fewest since a 71-31 win over Louisiana-Monroe on Dec. 27, 2013

The Buckeyes were led by Battle, who had 17 points on 6-of-12 shooting, including 5 of 8 from deep, while Key (16 points), Thornton (11) and Bonner (10) also reached double digits, and Battle posted a game-high nine rebounds. New Orleans guard Jordan Johnson led the Privateers with eight points.

Ohio State will be off for the next week before playing in a neutral-site contest with West Virginia on Dec. 30 at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse in Cleveland.