

Ohio State Shocks Duke, 71-66



For the first time since at least February of 2020, Ohio State took the floor in Value City Arena in front of a sold-out crowd – although a more-than-fair share of Duke fans that made the trek to Columbus played a major role in that. With the Blue Devils in town Nov. 30, the Buckeyes earned their first shot at a true marquee win of the season, despite a trio of major matchups against Xavier, Seton Hall and Florida, which, while solid, certainly aren't the top-ranked squad from Durham.

And perhaps spurred on by the most raucous crowd the program has seen in some time, the Buckeyes took advantage of their shot. Ohio State went blow for blow with Duke from the jump and emerged with one of the biggest victories of Chris Holtmann's tenure, 71-66, and the first win over the nation's No. 1 team since Jan. 7, 2018, when Ohio State toppled Michigan State.

The game nearly slipped out of hand for the Buckeyes quickly. After a quick start and a leap out to a 13-7, three Ohio State turnovers helped spark a quick 6-0 Duke run to knot the game. E.J. Liddell snapped the stretch with a quick bucket but Duke would score 12 of the next 14 points in the game to stretch its lead to eight points, capped with an impressive dunk with the foul from projected top pick Paolo Banchero, who missed the free throw but racked up 10 first-half points.

Perhaps the biggest cheer of the first half went to the trio of Archie Griffin, Jerry Lucas and Ryan Shazier, who were taking in the game together and earned a shoutout from the in-house announced during the eight-minute break. The home crowd was without a whole lot else to cheer for, as Duke jumped to a 43-30 lead.

A Justin Ahrens deep ball shortly out of the break cut the Duke lead down to single digits, 51-42, but Duke responded as it had all game with points of its own to answer Ohio State's miniature resurgence. The Blue Devils cashed in a pair of Mark Williams free throws to move back into an 11-point lead.

It wasn't until several minutes later that the game would pick up again. A Zed Key bucket cut the Duke lead back to nine points and snapped a dry spell for both offenses that took hold after those Williams free throws. Ahrens dropped it to six, the lowest since early in the first half, with a transition three-

pointer off a fast break.

Behind the excellent offensive play of Key, Ohio State just kept hanging around. Duke heated back up from the floor and expanded the lead back to double digits at 62-51, but the Buckeye defense tightened, and Key contributed seven of Ohio State's next nine points in cutting the margin again down to six, 65-59. It was a huge performance for a player that Holtmann has been pushing to take that next step.

Key's efforts were rewarded. With the Buckeyes again within striking distance they finally struck, cutting the deficit down to five at 66-61 before a Cedric Russell deep ball drew them as close as they'd been all half. Russell connected on a free throw during Ohio State's next possession and after a defensive stop that electrified the sold-out venue, Liddell connected on two more to give Ohio State its first lead since the early stages of the first half.

With the press tables shaking from the noise in the arena, Duke took the ball up the court and doled out responsibilities to its top prospect, but he couldn't connect on a free throw, and after a second-chance opportunity went begging, Ohio State took over possession again holding onto its one-point lead with 41 seconds to play.

And again, as they had been down the entire stretch of the game, the Buckeyes were aces. Liddell delivered a mid-range bucket to move the edge to three, Duke's desperation attempt from deep went begging, Russell bagged two more free throws to ice it and, three seconds later, Ohio State students stormed the court, putting an exclamation point on one of Ohio State's biggest wins in at least a decade.

Key led all scorers with 20, trailed by Wendell Moore Jr. (17) and Liddell (14).