

Ohio State Wrestling Begins Big Ten Slate At Michigan State



Ohio State wrestling returns to the mat after a 27-day break with a dual at Michigan State in the Big Ten opener on Saturday in East Lansing, Mich.

The Buckeyes last competed on Dec. 12 against Pittsburgh, defeating the Panthers 30-7 at the Covelli Center. Their final non-conference dual with American University was canceled because of inclement weather in the Washington, D.C., area on Jan. 3.

Ohio State head coach Tom Ryan said his team has practiced, enduring the monotony of conditioning and training throughout that time. They also embraced the Omicron variant of COVID-19 and its spread throughout Columbus. Still, Ohio State will dive straight into its Big Ten slate after a month without competition.

"We wanted to compete in the American dual to get us back on the mat before Big Ten play," Ryan said. "American ultimately decided to cancel, and we agreed with it. We were supposed to leave for D.C. that morning (Jan. 3), but they felt the weather would be bad. We offered to have the dual meet with no spectators, but they felt the best thing would be to cancel it, so we did."

Ryan said he wanted to see a few things from Ohio State's final non-conference dual. First, he thought it would be helpful for his players to have a final weigh-in before entering the conference slate. Second, he believed his wrestlers would benefit from facing an opponent rather than teammates.

"We looked like we needed some fresh looks for our guys," Ryan said. "Our last competition was Dec. 12 against Pittsburgh, which is almost a month ago at this point. We wanted to get away before Big Ten competition, cut weight and have an efficient performance against a quality opponent in American."

Ohio State was dealt an unfortunate hand to start 2022, but Ryan doesn't expect anyone to feel sorry for the team. He said the circumstances forced his wrestlers to be more disciplined heading into Saturday's dual against Michigan State — an opponent OSU has dominated in the last 16 seasons.

The programs have met 72 times since 1926, with the Spartans leading the all-time series 40-31-1. However, the Buckeyes have won 15 of the last 16 duals including an 11-match win streak dating back to 2011.

On Saturday, No. 7 Ohio State (4-0) will square off with Michigan State (5-0) at Jenison Field House with nine wrestlers ranked in the InterMat Wrestling top 25 poll, outnumbering the Spartans by six.

Sammy Sasso, the No. 2 wrestler at 149 pounds, will go for his 25th-consecutive win in dual competitions when he faces either Eddie Homrock or Jaden Enriquez. His streak includes wins in 18-consecutive Big ten duals.

Elsewhere in Ohio State's lineup, Malik Heinselman (No. 14/125), Carson Kharchla (No. 7/165), Ethan Smith (No. 7/174), Kaleb Romero (No. 7/174), Gavin Hoffman (No. 20/197) and Tate Orndorff (No. 12/HWT) will compete for the Buckeyes.

True freshman Will Betancourt will make his Buckeye debut at 133 pounds against Michigan State redshirt senior Rayvon Foley, who moved up from 125 pounds in the offseason. The Lancaster, Penn., native lettered four times at Manheim Central High School and was a three-time Fargo All-American.

Betancourt was also a Pennsylvania state champion and Puerto Rico national team member in 2019. He won an individual championship for the Buckeyes at the Storm Open on Dec. 5 in Painesville, Ohio, and has a 4-0 record in 2021-22.

Redshirt sophomore Klay Reeves receives his first-career start at 141 pounds. He wrestled unattached from the program as a freshman and did not compete in 2020-21. He is 6-2 this year after dropping from 149 to 141 and will face either Jordan Hamdan or Matt Santos on Saturday.

Jashon Hubbard makes his return to the starting lineup after Ohio State elected to wrestle Bryce Hepner at 157 pounds in its most recent competitions. The redshirt junior is 4-1 in 2021-22 with an individual championship at the Storm Open, a win over former Buckeye Elijah Cleary of Pittsburgh and a loss to No. 2 Austin O'Conner of North Carolina.

"We have to do things the right way in our first dual back," Ryan said. "We have to deny ourselves, separate ourselves and show true toughness and resilience. The team understands what they need to do to go out there and win, and I think we have a good chance."

The Buckeyes take on the Spartans at 5 p.m. with the dual streaming exclusively on Big Ten Plus. Fans can follow live updates of the match on the Ohio State wrestling Twitter account (@wrestlingbucks).

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