

What We Learned From Ohio State's 64-56 Win Over Cincinnati



CINCINNATI - Chris Holtmann's team isn't perfect, but man, is it gritty.

Ohio State walked onto Cincinnati's campus for the first time in nearly a century and came away with a 64-56 win against a Bearcat team that was re-opening its newly renovated Fifth Third Arena. The sold out crowd was rocking, yet a young Buckeye team that started two sophomores and a freshman didn't seem phased.

It is a long season and a lot can change after just one game, but there is a lot to take from Ohio State's big road win to open the season, starting with the play of the Buckeyes' young contributors.

Young Bucks Not Afraid of The Big Stage

After a season in which he averaged just 8.6 minutes per game, Kyle Young got his first career start as a Buckeye and played like a seasoned veteran. The sophomore from Massillon, Ohio scored 10 points and corralled eight rebounds in the victory and played the most minutes of any Buckeye, registering 36 of a possible 40 minutes.

Young converted on both of his field goal attempts and also connected on 6-of-7 free throw attempts, but perhaps his impact was felt the most in scramble situations, as he collected multiple loose balls.

"Kyle's motor was pivotal tonight for us," Holtmann said of Young's performance.

Young looked like a different player than he did a season ago and if he can continue to play like he did against the Bearcats, Ohio State might not need to utilize Jaedon LeDee much this season. Despite the departure of Micah Potter, LeDee did not play against Cincinnati.

Chris Holtmann's opening comments after a 64-56 win over Cincinnati.
pic.twitter.com/0YrsLIKV34

— James Grega Jr. (@JGrega11) November 8, 2018

In addition to Young's performance, freshman Luther Muhammad showed multiple flashes of brilliance,

but also showed his lack of maturity at times.

Muhammad poured in 11 points on 4-of-10 shooting and was 2-for-3 from long range. His second three-pointer, which came with 5:23 to play in the game, put Ohio State up by 16. However, Muhammad was whistled for a technical foul for taunting a UC defender after the make. Holtmann said the conversation was not pleasant on the sideline after the foul, but Ohio State's head coach added that Muhammad's fire and enthusiasm is what makes him a great player.

"It was an interesting conversation and it was pretty one-sided," Holtmann said of his talk with Muhammad on the bench. "But listen, he realized it. You can do a lot of that stuff in AAU. It's different here. Luther is a tremendous competitor and he recognized he made a mistake in that situation and that is all I wanted to communicate to him."

In addition to Muhammad and Young's performances, freshman Duane Washington played 19 minutes and finished with three points and four rebounds. Justin Ahrens, like LeDee, did not see game action.

Small Ball Will Be Utilized Often

With Potter gone, Ohio State figured to play more small ball, however the Buckeyes played more than maybe some thought against Cincinnati.

Holtmann's squad got into early foul trouble against the Bearcats, largely due to UC's size advantage whenever Kaleb Wesson went to the bench. Instead of countering with LeDee, Ohio State utilized a lineup with Young in the post and three guards, usually C.J. Jackson, Keyshawn Woods and Muhammad with Andre Wesson or Musa Jallow rounding out the lineup.

The faith in LeDee right now doesn't appear to be high enough for him to play important minutes, which means Young is going to play the majority of the game. Kaleb Wesson's conditioning has improved plenty, but probably not enough for him to play more than 30 minutes a game. In addition, he will often find himself in foul trouble due to his style of play.

Kaleb Wesson scored a team-high 15 points in the win over Cincinnati tonight.
pic.twitter.com/rqrJELNS3o

— James Grega Jr. (@JGrega11) November 8, 2018

New Year, Same Identity

There are a lot of new faces on Ohio State's roster this season, but the identity of the 2018-19 Buckeyes will be the same as the previous year.

It won't always look pretty, it won't always be easy, but Holtmann's squad is going to battle for every loose ball and will play tough, tenacious defense, especially on the perimeter.

Jae'Sean Tate and Keita Bates-Diop are gone, but Ohio State's gritty, against-the-world attitude was evident again on Wednesday night in the Queen City. The Buckeyes were not expected to win and were

playing in a hostile environment and even when the Bearcats cut the OSU lead to four with under a minute left, the Buckeyes didn't flinch.

C.J. Jackson finished with 13 points, including a clutch layup with 29 seconds to go to seal Ohio State's 64-56 win over Cincinnati. pic.twitter.com/5GDsN3E3z0

— James Grega Jr. (@JGrega11) November 8, 2018

Ohio State might not have the vocal leadership that it had last year with Tate, but Jackson is as much of a leader as anyone in the Big Ten right now with the way he has stepped up in late game situations throughout his career. His game-clinching layup in the closing moments against Cincinnati adds to clutch performances against the likes of Indiana, that Ohio State fans will remember for a long time.

It is still too early to tell what Ohio State's final record will be or even how the Buckeyes will fare in the Big Ten, but one thing is for certain: This team will scratch and claw for every game, and that should give OSU fans plenty to be excited about moving forward.

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