

Buckeyes Let Second-Half Lead Slip, Fall To No. 15 Wisconsin 71-60 For Second Straight Conference Loss



Ohio State fell victim to poor shooting and a dominant second-half performance from Wisconsin guard Max Klesmit down the stretch to fall to the Badgers 71-60 Wednesday night at Value City Arena, giving them their second consecutive conference loss in a row and just its second home loss of the season.

Unlike the team's previous game against Indiana, the Buckeyes' offense came out of the gates firing, connecting on six of its eight shots — three of those baskets from Thornton — to jump out to a 13-8 lead. Ohio State continued to shoot well as the first half progressed to keep a slight advantage, but the early lead soon grew to eight points, 25-17, due to the shooting prowess of fifth-year forward Jamison Battle, who connected on two straight step back three-pointers as the shot clock expired.

That was the largest lead the Buckeyes held all half, though, as the Badgers embarked on an extended 9-3 run — aided by six Ohio State misses in seven tries — to cut the deficit to 28-26 with 3:55 remaining. After a made basket from Evan Mahaffey, the Badgers trimmed the Buckeyes' lead to just one point, 30-29, after a two-pointer from Wisconsin guard A.J. Storr.

Ohio State extended its lead to four after Battle's fourth three of the half, but the Badgers instantly responded with five straight points, giving them their first lead since the first minute of the game. This allowed the away team to take a 35-33 lead into a locker room and close the half on a 18-8 run.

The Badgers were able to climb back into the game as the half progressed and eventually take the lead due to Ohio State's poor shooting. After Battle's three with 7:51 left, the team missed nine of their last 14 shots, while Wisconsin hit on six of their final 11 attempts from the field. The Badgers also got 11 points from their bench in the first frame, compared to just four for Ohio State.

A slow start from both teams coming out of the half allowed the Buckeyes to hang in the game, where

they found themselves trailing just 43-40 with 14:16 left. Ohio State then cut the deficit to one point, 43-42, but Wisconsin responded with five straight points by forward Steven Crowl to go up 48-42.

The game then turned on a dime, with the Buckeyes exploding for six straight points, capped by an and-one from Okpara and, after a block from the Buckeyes center on the other end, a Scotty Middleton three to retake the lead, 50-48 with 8:33 remaining.

Ohio State's lead stayed at two, 56-54, with 5:49 left, but a triple from Wisconsin guard Max Klesmit quieted the crowd and allowed the Badgers to reclaim the one-point advantage. Klesmit then took over, scoring another five straight points, giving the Badgers full momentum and allowing them to take a 62-56 with 3:12 remaining.

The Buckeyes cut the lead to four points on two straight occasions after consecutive layups from Roddy Gayle Jr. — just his second and third baskets of the game — but the Badgers responded with an interior basket from guard Chucky Hepburn. Ohio State attempted one last gasp on the next possession, but a missed one-and-one free throw from Thornton allowed Wisconsin to ice the game with two free throws of their own and end the game on a 7-0 run, giving them an 11-point win.

The Buckeyes were led in the loss by Battle and Thornton, who scored 18 and 13 points, respectively on a combined 13-of-26 shooting. The team got little production outside of the two Buckeyes, with no other Buckeye reaching double figures on the night. Gayle was third on the team in scoring with nine, while Battle had a team-high eight rebounds.

Wisconsin was led by Storr and Klesmit, who contributed 17 and 18 points, respectively on 13-of-24 shooting, with all of Klesmit's points coming in the second half. Tyler Wahl also reached double figures with 11.

Ohio State will have its next chance to emerge victorious in Big Ten play on Monday afternoon when it travels to Ann Arbor to take on the Wolverines. The game is slated to tip off at noon and air on FOX.