

Lengthy Scoring Droughts Doom Ohio State In Stunning 62-59 Loss To Penn State



Ohio State's (17-1, 7-1 Big Ten) 17-game winning streak came to a stunning end in a 62-59 loss to Penn State (10-9, 1-7 Big Ten) on Sunday. The Buckeyes, who were missing star freshman point Jalonni Cambridge because of an illness, were plagued by lengthy scoring droughts throughout, including a game-ending 6:45 field goal drought.

The first five minutes of the game only indicated that the Buckeyes would beat the previously winless Nittany Lions soundly.

Junior Guard Chance Gray and junior forward Cotie McMahon combined to hit four three-point jumpers in the first 4:19 of the game, to help lead a game-opening 14-2 scoring run.

Although Ohio State's offense entered into a scoring drought of 3:29 following Gray's last triple, the defense was solid enough to maintain a 16-5 lead late in the first quarter.

The Buckeyes didn't seem to have much reason to be alarmed until their offensive woes bled into the second quarter. Ohio State didn't score a single point in the first four minutes of the second quarter, and during that time Penn State scored seven straight to cut the Buckeye lead to 18-17. The Buckeyes responded with five straight points on a three-point jumper from freshman guard Ava Watson and a layup from graduate forward Ajae Petty.

The Nittany Lions didn't let up though, instead, they wrapped the first half on a 13-4 scoring run in the last 5:04 of the second quarter to take a 30-27 lead at the midway point.

The Buckeyes appeared to snap out of their funk when they opened the second half like they did the first half with a three-point barrage as McMahon, Greene and Thierry each made a triple in the first 4:01 of the second half. The Nittany Lions simply refused to go away though.

Sophomore guard Moriah Murray and redshirt sophomore center Gracie Merkle scored all 10 points in a 10-2 run that put the Nittany Lions back on top 45-44.

Gray scored five quick points in the last four minutes of the third quarter and the Buckeyes tied the game at 51 heading into the fourth quarter.

Penn State stormed back in front 56-51 with five early fourth-quarter points, but Ohio State's defense forced three straight misses on one end, and Gray made a layup and three-point jump shot on the other end to tie the game at 56. After Gray's quick spurt, both teams plunged into lengthy scoring droughts. The Buckeyes missed their next five shots after Gray's triple, and the Nittany Lions finally broke through with a layup at the 2:31 mark to take a 58-56 lead.

Petty had a chance to tie the game at 58 on the Buckeyes' very next possession after she was fouled, but she only made one of two free throws.

The Buckeyes forced Murray into a miss one play later, but senior guard Gabby Elliott grabbed a crucial offensive rebound and scored to put Penn State up 60-57 with 1:45 to go.

Needing a score in crunch time, senior guard Taylor Thierry turned the ball over, allowing Penn State to drain precious seconds off the clock. The Buckeyes eventually got a stop with exactly one minute to go.

The Buckeyes drew closer with two free throws from McMahon at the 40-second mark. Only down one point in the last minute, the Buckeyes still had time to get a stop and score a potential game-winning basket, but instead, Elliott was sent to the line to shoot two free throws with 22 seconds left. Elliott made her first free throw and missed her second, but the Buckeyes couldn't get the defensive rebound and were forced to foul again. Penn State only made one of two at the free throw line once again but still led 62-59 with 16 seconds to go.

The Buckeyes looked to Gray to hit a potential game-tying three-point shot, but her attempt was blocked with 13 seconds left. McMahon came up with the loose ball, and again the Buckeyes gave Gray the ball from beyond the arc. Gray's shot with 3 seconds to go was no good, and the Nittany Lions picked up their first Big Ten win over the previously undefeated Buckeyes.

Despite the loss, McMahon was her same reliable self, she made 7-of-14 field goals (50.0 percent) scored a team-high 19 points, and led the team with six assists. Petty led the team with seven rebounds.

The season-low 59 points scored by the Buckeyes was in large part a product of the team shooting just 22-of-54 from the field (40.7 percent).

The Nittany Lions meanwhile had a solid shooting day and made 25-of-52 field goals (48.1 percent).

Penn State had four double-digit scorers and was led by Elliott, who scored 14 points, shooting 6-of-11 from the field (54.5 percent)