

No. 1 Ohio State Set To Take On No. 8 Michigan State In Big Ten Tournament



The Ohio State women's basketball team enters the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament as the No. 1 seed, and after two days of play, the Buckeyes know who they'll be facing in the quarterfinals.

No. 8 Michigan State eked out a 73-69 win over No. 9 Purdue, meaning the Spartans will have a third opportunity to knock off Ohio State this season at 11:30 a.m. on Big Ten Network. The Buckeyes took both meetings during the regular season, winning 89-83 on Jan. 12 and 61-55 on Feb. 27 in their regular-season finale.

In the first contest, Ohio State was led by junior guard Jacy Sheldon's career-high of 33 points on 12-of-15 shooting, while senior guard Taylor Mikesell added 25 points and was 5 of 8 from beyond the arc.

Despite 27 points from Michigan senior guard Nia Clouden and 21 from freshman forward Matilda Ekh, the Buckeyes pulled out the win by shooting 57.4 percent from the field – their second-highest mark of the season – and 15 of 16 from the free-throw line.

In their most recent matchup, Ohio State was able to limit Clouden to just 19 points on 21 shot attempts and completely neutralize Ekh, who finished 1 of 14 from the field (and 0 of 9 from deep).

Though the Buckeyes were severely outrebounded with the Spartans holding a 60-38 edge, by far the most given up by Ohio State this season, they got some crucial plays down the stretch from sophomore Kateri Poole, who knocked down a pair of triples in the second half, and freshman forward Taylor Thierry, who pulled down three rebounds in the final minute to secure the win.

If Ohio State wants to move on in the tournament, it will need to win – or at least make up some ground in – the rebounding battle, and head coach Kevin McGuff knew it would be a focus for his team before they knew their opponent.

"We've gotten better defensively (and) with our rebounding," he said Wednesday. "But I think those are two areas that we need to have a good week with, just making sure we prepare for whomever we play and other than that, just trying to be the best version of ourselves."

Clouden is continuing to play at her All-Big Ten caliber in the tournament, evidenced by her 23-point performance against the Boilermakers on Thursday. Thierry, who was tasked with defending Clouden for stretches in their February matchup, knows firsthand how difficult it will be for Ohio State to stop her.

"She's really tough to guard," she said after their 61-55 win. "She's an amazing player. All I knew is that as long as I just kept my hands off of her, kept my hands up, that's the best I can really do."

The winner will move on to the semifinals to face either No. 5 Indiana or No. 4 Maryland, who will play following Ohio State-Michigan State. Indiana defeated No. 13 Rutgers 66-54, while the Terps earned a double-bye as the four seed.

Also on Friday, No. 7 Northwestern, who defeated No. 10 Minnesota 65-60, will face No. 2 Iowa at 6:30 p.m. Following that, No. 6 Nebraska, who beat No. 14 Illinois 92-74, will play No. 3 Michigan.