

No. 13 Ohio State Utilizes Fast Start, Strong Defense In 79-55 Win Against North Carolina In The Bahamas



No. 13 Ohio State (3-1) got off to a strong start in the Baha Mar Hoops Pink Flamingo Championship in The Bahamas on Monday, picking up a 79-55 win over East Carolina.

The Buckeyes lead by 10 points in the first half and increased the lead to as many as 24 points while holding the Pirates to just 35.1 percent shooting from the floor, and forcing 20 turnovers.

Ohio State jumped out to an early 10-0 lead, connecting on 5 of 8 shots to begin the game while East Carolina missed on its first five attempts of the contest. The Pirates responded with the first made three-pointer of the contest by either team and later cut the deficit to 17-11, but the Buckeyes entered the second quarter leading 21-11.

After dueling threes to begin the second quarter - one each by East Carolina's Micah Dennis and Ohio State's Jacy Sheldon - the Pirates embarked on an 8-2 run to make it 26-22 with 6:47 left in the half. Ohio State fifth-year guard Celeste Taylor broke the run with a triple off an East Carolina turnover, but the Pirates took off on another 8-2 run, this time make it just 31-30 with 2:47 remaining in the second quarter.

The Buckeyes eventually went into the half up 38-32, but East Carolina outscored Ohio State 21-17 in the second frame behind 58.8 percent shooting from the field, and committed just two turnovers after having eight giveaways in the first quarter.

Ohio State was led in the first half by Sheldon and junior guard Taylor Thierry, who combined for 21 points on 9-of-10 shooting, with Thierry adding five rebounds and five assists, though she did end up spending time on the bench after picking up three fouls.

The Buckeyes opened the third quarter on an 11-2 run - boosted by five points from sophomore forward Cotie McMahon - and after later back-to-back triples from fifth-year senior guard Rikki Harris, Ohio State's lead went up to 55-39 with 3:37 left in the quarter.

Ohio State's defense was the biggest shift as it jumped ahead in the third quarter, as the Pirates were just 4 of 14 in the quarter - 28.6 percent - and committed six turnovers. It was one of those giveaways that led to fifth-year forward Rebeka Mikulasikova getting to the line and knocking down a pair to put Ohio State up 57-39.

The game then came to a screeching halt after a hard foul on Thierry, as technical fouls were called on ECU's Jade Tillman and Amiya Joiner, resulting in Tillman's ejection, as well as Ohio State's Taylor and Harris. It resulted in a pair of free throws for Sheldon, and Harris hit another triple that eventually gave the Buckeyes a 62-44 lead entering the fourth.

Ohio State was held scoreless for the first 2:30 of the final frame as East Carolina cut the deficit to 62-47, but Mikulasikova responded with a three-pointer that kickstarted an 11-4 run to put the Buckeyes up 73-53 with 4:08 left in the game before going up 79-55 off a second-chance layup by Taiyier Parks.

Sheldon led the Buckeyes with 20 points on 7-of-10 shooting and was 4 of 5 from beyond the arc, while Thierry added 14 points, eight rebounds and four assists on 5-of-6 shooting. Mikulasikova (12 points), Harris (11 points) and McMahon (11 points) also reached double digits, while ECU guard Synia Johnson led the Pirates with 14 points.

Ohio State will remain in The Bahamas for its next game, set to take on Oklahoma State on Wednesday at 6:30 p.m., with the game set to be streamed on FloHoops.