

No. 19 Ohio State Falls 80-69 To No. 16 Michigan State In Regular-Season Finale



The No. 19 Ohio State men's basketball team fell to No. 16 Michigan State 80-69 at the Breslin Center in East Lansing, Mich., on March 8.

"We had our chances, we just couldn't get enough stops there when we needed to," Ohio State head coach Chris Holtmann said. "We've won games with a short bench, but we looked a little bit fatigued, more in the halfcourt defensively, when they require so much effort to defend them - give them credit for that."

Despite the loss, the Buckeyes (21-10, 11-9) received solid performances from junior guard C.J. Walker, sophomore guard Duane Washington and freshman forward E.J. Liddell.

Walker scored 14 points on 7-of-10 shooting, while Washington and Liddell added 16 points and five rebounds, and 12 points and four boards, respectively

The three-point shooting of Michigan State senior guard Cassius Winston and freshman guard Rocket Watts and the defensive efforts from forwards Aaron Henry and Xavier Tillman made the difference for the Spartans (22-9, 14-6).

Winston hit 4 of 7 triples, while Watts went 4 for 10 from deep. Henry and Tillman both recorded two blocks and two steals in the senior day victory.

The foursome of Winston, Watts, Henry and Tillman combined for 73 of the Spartans' 80 points. Winston led the way with 27 points and six assists on 10-of-14 shooting, while Watts added 19.

Ohio State overcame a 38-32 Michigan State halftime lead and found itself in a 42-42 game with 15 minutes left.

"They were missing some shots early in the second half, so we got a chance to cut the lead and tie it up," Washington said. "But they were getting a lot of calls, and we were just doing what we could, controlling the controllables and just trying to play hard."

Across the next five minutes, the Spartans pushed their lead to 56-51, but Watts scored six straight points to give the home team a 62-51 edge with 9:14 to play.

The Spartans led 74-60 with 4:08 remaining, but the Buckeyes did not have enough energy in the tank, allowing another 6-0 spurt capped at 80-60 by a Winston three-pointer with only 2:35 on the clock.

"They hit some tough shots, got some calls that went in their way," Washington said.

Ohio State scored the game's final nine points, but the final efforts would not be enough.

Tillman, a defensive player of the year candidate, outplayed junior big man Kaleb Wesson in a key matchup. Wesson scored eight points and grabbed six rebounds with one assist, one block and one steal on 1-of-8 shooting, while Tillman turned in 15 points on 6-of-10 shooting with nine boards, five helpers, and the pair of blocks and steals.

"His effort did a lot today," Walker said of Tillman. "Whether he was fronting the post, defensive rebounding or offensive rebounding, he just brought a lot of effort today. It made it hard getting post touches."

Michigan State shot 48.3 percent from the floor (29 of 60), 30.8 percent from three (8 of 26) and 77.8 percent from the free-throw line (14 of 18). Ohio State had similar success at 45.3 percent on field goals (24 of 53), 31.3 percent on triples (5 of 16) and 84.2 percent on foul shots (16 of 19).

Each team turned it over nine times, but Michigan State facilitated their offense more efficiently than the Buckeyes, dishing 19 assists compared to only six.

The Spartans also won the battle on the glass, grabbing 11 offensive rebounds and 36 overall while limiting Ohio State to 30 boards, including six on the offensive end.

"I don't think we brought enough toughness today," Walker said. "They out-rebounded us a lot. There were a lot of loose balls that we didn't get and they got. They hit the floor first, and that affects the game in a lot of ways. They got a lot of momentum and second-chance points."

After falling behind 4-0 in the opening minutes, the Buckeyes rallied for a 7-0 stretch, claiming a 7-4 advantage on a Washington layup just under three minutes into the game.

The Spartans answered with a 12-0 run behind solid defense and eight straight points from Watts, leading 16-7 with 14:38 until the midway intermission.

Ohio State battled back but the Green and White continued to answer any attempts at momentum with Tillman hitting a jumper to push the Spartan lead to 31-19 with 6:22 until the break.

The Scarlet and Gray ripped off a 9-1 run to cut the lead to 32-28 with 3:27 on the first-half clock.

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