

No. 2 Ohio State Uses Strong Defensive Performance In 80-57 Win Over No. 15 Maine To Open NCAA Tournament



No. 2 Ohio State (26-5, 16-2) took care of business in the opening round of the NCAA Women's Basketball Tournament on Friday, using strong play on the defensive end in a 80-57 win over No. 15 Maine (24-10, 14-2) at Value City Arena.

The Buckeyes forced the Black Bears into 22 turnovers on the afternoon that resulted in 24 points for Ohio State, while it also held a 15-2 advantage in second-chance points and added 15 points on the fast break.

Upset-minded Maine - which shot just 30.2 percent from deep entering the contest - connected on its first four attempts from three (with three coming from senior guard Olivia Rockwood) to take a 14-11 lead with 3:55 left in the first quarter.

Out of a timeout, the Black Bears missed their first three-point attempt of the game as Ohio State guard Celeste Taylor knocked down the Buckeyes' first on the other end, allowing Ohio State to close the first frame on a 9-2 run to lead 22-16.

Ohio State held Maine scoreless for the first 3:04 of the second quarter, and after a layup from Black Bears guard Anne Simon, the Buckeyes responded with a 12-0 run, with the entire scoring output coming from fifth-year guard Jacy Sheldon, fifth-year forward Rebeka Mikulášiková and junior guard Taylor Thierry. All told, it was part of an extended 27-4 run dating back to 3:25 in the first quarter.

Maine scored on its next three possessions - with two baskets from Simon and a jumper from junior forward Adrianna Smith - but the Buckeyes were able to take a 43-24 lead into the half after a buzzer-beating triple from fifth-year guard Madison Greene.

The Black Bears shot 52.6 percent in the first half, slightly outpacing the Buckeyes at 51.9 percent, but committed 13 turnovers that turned into 14 points for Ohio State, while the Buckeyes also held a 9-2 advantage in second-change points.

Ohio State continued playing strong defense out of the half, as Taylor forced a turnover on Maine's first possession and helped hold the Black Bears to just one make in their first four attempts of the quarter. Simon hit a layup with 5:19 left to cut the deficit to 50-33, but the Buckeyes scored on their next three possessions to push the lead back to 57-33 with 3:54 left after a triple from Taylor.

The teams traded baskets over the next few minutes, and a pair of free throws from Sheldon - part of a 19-point performance in which she surpassed 2,000 points for her Ohio State career - put the Buckeyes up 66-45 going into the fourth.

Ohio State and Maine then traded three-pointers early in the fourth, with each team knocking down a pair from deep as the Buckeyes maintained a 74-53 lead with 5:50 left in the contest. From there, Ohio State was able to clear out the benches and close out the win.

Sheldon led the Buckeyes with 19 points on 7-of-14 shooting, while McMahon, (13 points), Thierry (12 points) and Taylor (12 points) also reached double digits, and Taylor had a team-high six rebounds. Simon led the Black Bears with 25 points.

Ohio State will play the winner of No. 7 Duke and No. 10 Richmond, with that contest set to tip off shortly after the Buckeyes' game finished.