

No. 3 Ohio State Headed To Elite Eight After Upsetting No. 2 UConn, 73-61, Behind Strong Defensive Performance



No. 3 Ohio State is headed to the Elite Eight for the first time since 1993 after using a stellar defensive performance to knock off No. 2 UConn, 73-61, on Saturday.

The Huskies shot 45.3 percent from the field but committed 25 turnovers, which Ohio State was able to turn into 23 points, in one of the best defensive outings by the Buckeyes this season. The win came despite UConn out rebounding Ohio State 38-34.

Ohio State has tried to make an emphasis this season on not starting slow, given the frequency at which the team has required significant comebacks for some wins, but that advice was not heeded against UConn.

The Buckeyes struggled early with the Huskies' size and what appeared to be some jitters, beginning just 1 of 7 from the field as UConn got off to a 10-2 lead. A timeout from Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff with 5:57 left in the quarter helped to settle the team, which was then able to start up the press and begin forcing turnovers, a common theme of the matchup.

A basket from forward Eboni Walker and a fast break layup from freshman forward Cotie McMahan helped stop UConn's early run, but the Huskies responded with a triple from forward Lou Lopez Senechal gave UConn a 17-9 lead with 2:37 left in the first quarter.

Ohio State was able to score the final six points of the frame, forcing four turnovers by UConn over the final three minutes, to trail just 17-15 despite shooting 6 of 16 from the field to start things out. Momentum continued to build for Ohio State in the second quarter, forcing turnovers on UConn's first three possessions, and McMahan hit the Buckeyes' first three-pointer of the game to take an 18-17 lead.

McMahon hit another triple on Ohio State's next possession after another turnover by the Huskies, and the Buckeyes were able to extend it to a 17-0 run to lead 26-17 with 5:46 left in the second quarter. During that run, Ohio State forced 11 turnovers by UConn, which was also without forward Aaliyah Edwards for most of the stretch after she picked up her second foul back in the first quarter.

And while Ohio State was impressive enough in holding UConn scoreless over the first 4:33 of the second frame, it was made more impactful given that the Huskies did not even attempt a shot during that time, largely unable to advance the ball.

Ohio State's run was finally broke by a layup from UConn guard Azzi Fudd and a later three-pointer to cut the deficit to 30-23, but the Buckeyes were able to keep the lead at double digits, up 36-26 at the half.

Going into the break, McMahon led all scorers with 18 points on 6-of-11 shooting. Outside of McMahon, the Buckeyes had just 18 points on 7-of-21 shooting, with guard Jacy Sheldon adding the next most with 8 points. The Huskies shot better from the field, knocking down 43.5 percent of their shots during the first half, but 18 turnovers resulted in 19 points off turnovers for Ohio State.

UConn looked better coming out of the half, turning the ball over just twice in the first few minutes of the third quarter and cutting the deficit to 40-32 with 6:40 left in the frame, but Edwards then picked up her fourth foul and was sent to the bench, leaving the Huskies without their most notable scoring and post presence.

Coming out of a media timeout with 4:50 left in the quarter, the Huskies looked to build some momentum with a jumper from forward Dorca Juhasz - who played her first three collegiate seasons at Ohio State - and layup from Lopez Senechal to make it 44-39, the fewest the deficit had been since early in the second quarter. But the Buckeyes responded with back-to-back baskets from guard Taylor Mikesell and Sheldon - the latter being a three-pointer - to go back up 49-39.

While Ohio State later saw McMahon pick up her fourth foul, keeping her out until midway through the fourth, the Buckeyes still maintained a 54-44 lead going into the fourth after a late basket from Thierry.

Ohio State, not allowing an opening for UConn, then opened the fourth quarter with a pair of three pointers (one each from Sheldon and guard Rikki Harris) as well as a pair of free throws from Harris to go up 62-46 with 8:23 remaining, forcing UConn head coach Geno Auriemma to call a timeout.

Out of that timeout, the Huskies took off on an 9-2 run to cut the deficit to single digits, 64-55, with 4:31 remaining. But McMahon, who checked back in with 5:37 left, broke the run by converting on an and-one opportunity to put the Buckeyes back up 67-55.

The teams continued to trade points until a jumper from Mikesell put Ohio State up 71-60, and Sheldon later hit a pair at the line to go up 73-61 with 1:49 remaining, at which point the Buckeyes were able to close things out at the line to knock off the Huskies for the first time in program history.

McMahon led the Buckeyes with 23 points on 8-of-17 shooting, while Sheldon finished with 17 points, seven rebounds and five assists, and Thierry added 11 points. The Huskies were led by Lopez Senechal's 25 points, while Fudd added 14 points and Juhasz scored 13.

After securing the fourth Elite Eight berth in program history, Ohio State will get the winner of No. 4

Tennessee and No. 1 Virginia Tech on Monday at 9 p.m. with a trip to the Final Four on the line.