

No. 3 Ohio State Unable To Sustain Strong Shooting Performance In 84-74 Elite Eight Loss To No. 1 Virginia Tech



No. 3 Ohio State was unable to carry a strong first-half shooting performance to the finish line in a 84-74 loss to No. 1 Virginia Tech in the Elite Eight on Monday, falling just short of the program's first Final Four appearance since 1993.

The Buckeyes shot a blistering 64.3 percent (18 of 28) from the field and 55.6 percent (5 of 9) in the first half but shot just 27.6 percent in the second half, outscored 36-29 across the final 20 minutes.

What was advertised as a basketball game was instead a track race to start things out, with the teams combining to hit their first 10 shots of the contest - including four three-pointers - as Virginia Tech led 17-10 just 3:46 into the game. Ohio State's lauded defensive press did little to slow the Hokies, who connected on their first seven shots and did not commit a turnover until midway through the opening frame.

After going down, the Buckeyes took off on a 15-5 run - boosted by a triple from guard Taylor Mikesell, one of three in the quarter for the fifth-year senior - to take a 25-22 lead at the end of the first quarter. Despite Virginia Tech's strong start from the field, the Hokies missed on eight of their final nine shots off the frame with just three points - all coming from free throws - over the last four minutes.

Ohio State's run continued into the second quarter, forcing a turnover on Virginia Tech's first possession and getting a fast break score from guard Taylor Thierry. Hokies forward D'asia Gregg responded with a jumper on their next possession to break the Buckeyes' run, and it kickstarted a 9-2 run that culminated in Virginia Tech taking a 31-29 lead with 6:22 left in the first half.

Mikesell's dominance from deep continued, however, as she responded with a three-pointer - at that point her fourth of the game - to regain the lead, and later hit her fifth on as many attempts to put Ohio

State up 41-36 with 2:38 left.

Her three-pointer wound up as the last basket of the half for the Buckeyes, who missed on their last three attempts as Virginia Tech closed on a 12-4 run to lead 48-45 going into the break.

Both teams saw three players reach double-digit scoring in the first half, with Mikesell leading all scorers with 19 points on 6-of-7 shooting and 5-of-6 shooting from deep. Freshman forward Cotie McMahon and guard Jacy Sheldon each added 10 points as the Buckeyes shot 64.3 percent from the field, staying ahead of the Hokies' 55.2 percent shooting.

After a fast-paced first half, scoring nearly came to a halt in the opening minutes of the second half. The Buckeyes got a layup from Sheldon with 8:11 left in the quarter but missed their next four shots, with their next points coming over three minutes later on a jumper from McMahon, and the Hokies led 55-51 with 4:52 left in the third.

The Buckeyes' cold shooting continued throughout the frame, with Ohio State hitting just one of its next five shots after McMahon's basket, resulting in head coach Kevin McGuff calling a timeout trailing 58-53 with 1:52 remaining in the quarter.

Coming out of that break, the Buckeyes reintroduced the press and were able to force some turnovers, but it amount to little as Ohio State gave up a three at the buzzer and trailed 63-55 entering the fourth. During that third quarter, Ohio State was outscored 15-10 and shot just 26.7 percent (4 of 15) from the field and was 0 of 5 from deep.

Ohio State looked to build some momentum to begin the fourth after McMahon knocked down a pair at the free-throw line, but Virginia Tech responded with back-to-back baskets from center Elizabeth Kitley to take a 67-57 lead with 8:33 left in the game.

But despite Ohio State being known for comebacks this season, there was not another one to be had for the Buckeyes. Sheldon scored on a layup and at the line to make it 67-60, but Virginia Tech scored the next six points, capped off by a three-pointer from guard Georgia Amoore to go up 73-60 with 4:36 remaining.

Ohio State got big shots down the stretch from Mikesell and Sheldon, including a three-pointer from Mikesell to make it 80-74 with just 44 seconds remaining, but the Buckeyes were unable to complete the comeback as Virginia Tech closed things out at the foul line. The Buckeyes shot just 28.6 percent (4 of 14) in the fourth quarter in the Elite Eight loss.

The Buckeyes were led by Mikesell in her last Ohio State game with 25 points on 8-of-15 shooting, while Sheldon (19 points) and McMahon (18 points) also finished in double digits, with McMahon posting a team-high seven rebounds. The Hokies got a game-high 25 points from Kitley, while Amoore finished with 24 points.