

No. 6 Ohio State Set For No. 11 Missouri State In First Round



No. 6 Ohio State returns to the NCAA tournament after three seasons away from the big dance, the Buckeyes will have their hands full on Friday with No. 11 Missouri State, who defeated Florida State in the First Four on Thursday.

The Buckeyes made the tournament as a six seed following their 23-6 conclusion to the regular season and Big Ten Tournament, while the Bears finished 24-7, falling to Northern Illinois in the Missouri Valley Conference Tournament.

This was the first year that the NCAA women's tournament held First Four games, meaning the Buckeyes did not learn their opponent until Missouri State took down Florida State 61-50 on Thursday.

In that win, the Bears held Florida State to just 27.3 percent shooting, and just one Seminole hit the double-digit scoring mark. Missouri State had four finish in double digits, led by Mya Bhinhar's 12 points on 5-of-11 shooting. The Bears also forced 17 turnovers and outrebounded Florida State 45-41, with 19 of those coming on the offensive glass.

The Bears boast one of the nation's best defensive squads, holding opponents to just 54.5 points per game (12th in the nation) and 36.3 percent shooting from the field. Ohio State head coach Kevin McGuff said on Selection Sunday that the Buckeyes have gotten better as the season progressed and that they've hung their hats on their ability to score in transition.

"We'll have to definitely do that here in the NCAA Tournament," he said. "And I just think that we also need to pay particular attention to making sure our scouting's on point to give our defense a chance to really give us an opportunity to not be taking the ball out of the net and get out in transition. And then also just really work hard just to kind of find our rebounding, because that's been a little bit hit-and-miss here down the stretch."

One area that Ohio State could look to take advantage is at the free-throw line, because the Bears commit over 18 fouls per contest and their opponents score 22.5 percent of their points from the free-throw line, according to Her Hoop Stats, which is the 339th most in the nation out of 356 teams.

The return to the tournament comes after some challenging years for Ohio State. The Buckeyes likely would have qualified for the 2020 tournament before it was canceled due to the pandemic, and Ohio State was on pace to make the field last season before a self-imposed postseason ban was handed down.

Now, with the school three years removed from its last tournament appearance and only three players on the roster with tournament experience - all transfers - the Buckeyes have a chip on their shoulder.

“We felt ready (the last two years) and we wanted to prove something then and we weren’t able to, and it feels like we were always in the position where we’re having to prove ourselves,” senior guard Braxtin Miller said. “Being here this year, there’s a hunger of wanting to just give it our all. Especially for a team that’s so close - we want to do it together and for each other, and say we did something really special.”

Ohio State and Missouri State will tip off at approximately 2:30 p.m. on ESPNU, with the winner set to take on either No. 3 LSU or No. 14 Jackson State, which tips following the conclusion of Ohio State-Missouri State.