

# Ohio State Defeats Rutgers 72-66 Behind Explosive First Half



The Ohio State men's basketball team defeated Rutgers 72-66 behind an explosive first half in front of 15,552 fans at Value City Arena on Feb. 12.

"Shoot, a win is a win in the Big Ten," junior big man Kaleb Wesson said. "They're not going to look pretty in the Big Ten. A win is a win."

The Wesson brothers led the Buckeyes to victory, assisted by excellent play from sophomore guards Duane Washington and Luther Muhammad.

Senior wing Andre Wesson scored 13 points and grabbed a game-high 10 rebounds and Kaleb Wesson added 16 points and five boards on 5-of-7 shooting. Washington provided 10 points and five assists off the bench, while Muhammad posted 10 points on 3-of-4 shooting with two three-pointers.

"They were big," Andre Wesson said of Washington and Muhammad. "They put together a couple good days of practice and it led over to the game. Obviously, we're happy Lu's playing better, and Duane was facilitating the ball."

Kalen Wesson calmly drained two foul shots for a 69-63 edge with 37 seconds remaining, but Rutgers junior guard Geo Baker drilled a three-pointer to cut the lead in half.

"Kaleb's free throws were huge," Holtmann said. "Stepped up there like an older guy, great poise and confidence."

Andre Wesson split a pair of free throws, but Baker missed his next triple and Ohio State junior guard C.J. Walker sealed the game with two free throws.

"We kept saying that to our guys, the second half is going to be a different half, and it certainly was that," Holtmann said. "We survived against a really good team. Credit to our captains for leading the way there down the stretch."

Kaleb Wesson knocked down a three-pointer to push Ohio State's second-half lead to 61-44 with 7:36

left, but Rutgers responded with an extended 19-6 run to make it 67-63 with 37 seconds until the final whistle.

After Kyle Young opened the second half by splitting the pair at the line to make it 46-30, Geo Baker connected on a triple to cut Ohio State's lead to 13. Muhammad answered Baker's triple with one of his own, and Ohio State extended its lead to as many as 18 on its way to a Big Ten win.

Rutgers outplayed Ohio State in the second half, shooting 48.1 percent (13 of 27) from the floor and 50 percent (6 of 12) from beyond the arc, while holding the Buckeyes to just 31.8 percent shooting (7 of 22) and 33.3 percent (3 of 9) from three. The Scarlet Knights outscored Ohio State 36-27 across the game's final 20 minutes.

"I did not love our defensive approach in the second half," Holtmann said. "I just didn't. But overall, we've got to do some things better, but give them credit. We were sloppy with the ball a few times late. And I just didn't love our defensive connectiveness.

"And I didn't think, offensively, we finished enough plays in the second half. Sometimes you've got to survive games like this. You've got to make just enough plays, and we did that. It's a credit to our guys."

In the first half, the Scarlet Knights cut the Buckeyes' lead to 25-16, but a quick 6-0 stretch featuring a sweeping left-handed layup by Washington bookended by Andre Wesson finishes gave them a 15-point lead.

Ohio State battled back and forth with Rutgers until the visiting Scarlet Knights cut the lead to a manageable nine-point deficit with 1:05 until the midway intermission. Andre Wesson and sophomore wing Justin Ahrens hit back-to-back three pointers in the final 41 seconds, however, giving the Buckeyes a 45-30 edge at halftime.

Excellent shooting carried Ohio State through the first half, knocking down 15 of 29 field goals (51.7 percent) and 7 of 17 triples (41.2 percent). The Buckeyes held Rutgers to 42.9 percent (9 of 21) from the floor and 33.3 percent (3 of 9) from beyond the arc.

After Rutgers cut an early Ohio State lead to 8-6, the Buckeyes engineered a 7-0 run capped by a Kaleb Wesson triple to put them out in front 15-6 with 12:23 until halftime.

The nine-point advantage was the largest Ohio State held at that point until Kaleb Wesson converted an old-fashioned three-point play to make it 20-10.

When asked if the poor second-half performance spoiled the victory, Holtmann was quite candid about how that's not his perspective.

"It's too hard to win in this league," Holtmann said. "You think I'm going to come in here with a sour, 'Oh man?' — Nick Saban might, but I'm not going to."

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