

Ohio State Head Coach Jake Diebler Praises “Closer” Bruce Thornton After Texas Win



In previous seasons, Ohio State has often had issues closing out games, with the Buckeyes taking several early first-half leads before squandering them late in the second half.

Those blown leads were often a product of the team not having a player they can count on to put the ball in the basket when the going gets tough and the rest of the offense goes stagnant, but this season, Ohio State may have found that missing element.

In Ohio State’s 80-72 season-opening upset win over No. 19 Texas on Monday night, junior guard and likely three-time team captain Bruce Thornton took matters into his own hands with the game on the line, scoring his team’s final nine points to carry the Buckeyes to the eight-point win.

Thornton began to take control of the game after Texas had cut Ohio State’s lead to seven points, 71-64, with 4:32 remaining off of two made free throws from Longhorns forward Kadin Shedrick. Just 33 seconds later, though, the preseason All-Big Ten guard gave momentum right back for the Buckeyes when he took Texas guard Chendall Weaver into the paint on a drive, pivoted multiple times, and laid in a contested left-handed layup for a three-point play.

This seemed to springboard Thornton for the rest of the night. The guard added two more two-pointers in the paint with 2:49 and 1:54 left, both of which helped extend the Buckeyes’ lead to 12, then tacked on a pair of free throws with 53 seconds remaining to bring the advantage to 12, 80-68, once more.

Thornton’s superb end to the game allowed him to finish with a team-high 20 points on an efficient 7-of-10 shooting on the night, a strong start to what could be another All-Big Ten season for the junior.

Diebler acknowledged after the game that Thornton could have had an even better night if he had been more aggressive during the first half. But regardless, the coach said the way Thornton ended the game was a welcome sight for him and his team, and served as an example of the fearless player his veteran point guard has evolved into during his Buckeye career.

"It's great. It's great," Diebler said when asked what it's like to have a closer like Thornton on the team. "I felt like he passed up a couple shots in the paint earlier in the game, and made some really good adjustments. He got downhill a little quicker as the game went on, and that opened up some things for us.

"But listen, there's no point guard I'd rather have in the country to close out a game than Bruce Thornton. He plays with such poise and toughness and confidence."