

Ohio State Knocks Off Minnesota, 75-64



E.J. Liddell's layup through contact and his free throw that followed it less than a minute into the second half proved one of the most important sequences of Ohio State's 75-64 win over Minnesota Jan. 27. It pushed Ohio State's lead to eight points - six straight to open the second half - at 38-30 and drew a second foul on Treyton Thompson, who worked as one of Liddell's lone Gopher adversaries for rebounds.

Oh, and it gave Liddell 1,000 points as a Buckeye, making him the 60th player to don the scarlet and gray to break into four digits and the first since center Kaleb Wesson in 2020, forward C.J. Jackson and Jae'Sean Tate in 2019 and forward Keita Bates-Diop in 2018.

"This milestone means a lot, honestly," Liddell said. "Coming here, making a big impact for the team. I think I saw I would be like the 60th player in the history to do that and that's just a pretty cool experience, just knowing I have my name in the record books and whatnot."

If he keeps his 19.4 points per game average that he entered Minneapolis with for the remaining 12 games (including a rescheduled game with Nebraska yet to be announced), he'll finish the year with 1,232 points, placing him between Ronnie Stokes - who welcomed Liddell to the club on the radio call - and Larry Siegfried. But for as good as Liddell has been at filling it up this season, it was his fellow forwards that kept the Buckeyes on top after he knocked down that three-point play.

Center Zed Key snapped a nearly two-minute drought for Ohio State's next basket, forward Kyle Young scored eight points on his own to keep pace with seven points from Minnesota's Jamison Battle and Key knocked in four more buckets with another Liddell layup sprinkled in, giving Ohio State 23 of its first 26 points in the second half exclusively from the bigs in the paint or a direct result of play in it.

The Buckeyes finally went back outside after a Sean Sutherlin 3-pointer cut Ohio State's lead to nine points, but don't think for a second that it was anyone but the 1,000-point man knocking down that triple to give Ohio State a 12-point lead at 61-49, its largest of the contest.

Ohio State's dominance in the paint was the defining story of the game if Liddell's scoring milestone didn't claim it for itself. Minnesota's undersized lineup was bullied down low, losing the rebounding battle 48-22 and surrendering 40 points in the paint - including 24 in the second half alone.

It was that excellence in the frontcourt that helped Ohio State to its first win on Minnesota's raised floor in The Barn since Jan. 6, 2015, when D'Angelo Russell's 27 points lifted the Buckeyes in overtime, 74-72. Ohio State had dropped its last three in Minneapolis, all by double digits.

As the game constricted down the stretch, Ohio State's success in the paint continued and kept the Golden Gophers at an arm's length, never drawing closer than nine points, even with an OSU scoring drought that lasted more than two minutes. Right before Liddell snapped that streak with a pair of free throws, Chris Holtmann, perhaps inspired by his team's effort in cleaning the boards, extended a timeout slightly by working with OSU managers to clean up the floor near the Buckeye bench. As it turned out, Holtmann had lost a piece of gum to the hardwood.

It was Holtmann's lone loss of the evening, as he claimed his 100th win as Ohio State's head coach. Liddell led the Buckeyes in scoring with 23 points and 15 rebounds, trailed by Young's 14 points and four boards. Key added in 12 points and eight rebounds of his own, while Battle led Minnesota in scoring 15 points and rebounds, with six.