

Ohio State Looking To Get Back On Track On The Road Against Rival Michigan



Coming off consecutive losses where the Buckeyes squandered promising second-half leads, Ohio State is looking to right the ship through the middle portion January. That challenge starts on Monday, when head coach Chris Holtmann's team will travel to Ann Arbor to take on the rival Wolverines.

While it may seem like an easy opportunity for Ohio State to get back on track against a reeling Michigan team, who was without head coach Juwan Howard for a significant portion of the early season and enters the contest with a 6-10 overall record and five-game losing streak, those within the Buckeyes' program know a rivalry win on the road does not come easy.

Assistant coach Jack Owens said on Friday that he and his team are aware that Monday's game will have some extra juice to it — which will likely include a raucous Michigan crowd that will be celebrating the football team's national championship victory at some point during the game. To avoid these types of distractions and come out of the Crisler Center with a win, Owens said his team will need to buckle down and play a complete game.

"Anywhere you go in the Big Ten is going to be a good environment where you have to play for 40 minutes," Owens said. "We do expect a good crowd and all those sorts of things when you go on the road. But at the same time, it's about our play. No matter what, we have to do our jobs for 40 minutes. But we expect a great fight from Michigan, they're looking to stop their losing streak as well. So we're looking forward to a great game, hard-fought game, on Monday for sure."

This mentality is also shared amongst the players, including sophomore guard Evan Mahaffey. Although he is new to the rivalry, the former Nittany Lion — who told reporters Friday that Ohio State showed him a highlight tape of the Buckeyes defeating the Wolverines on the road in 2022 during the team's recruiting pitch for him — said he is aware of the implications and extra motivation that comes with playing in this game, all factors of which will have Michigan ready to end their losing streak with a convincing rivalry defeat.

"I played at Michigan last year, so I know how (loud) that really gets," Mahaffey said. "But I didn't play against Michigan as an Ohio State Buckeye. So it'll definitely be a little bit different. Just hearing some of the stories from the guys that have played against them at their place in the past, (I know) it's definitely going to be a very loud environment.

"(It's) just the history between the two (teams). You see it on campus all the time with football. You hear about the way people talk about this game. So there's definitely a different type of noise around it. It makes it exciting, though."

Despite the poor record, Michigan still boasts some talented players who are capable of stuffing the stat sheets at a given night. The Wolverines enter the rivalry game with a quartet of double-digit scorers, a group that is spearheaded by sophomore guard Dug McDaniel and graduate forward Olivier Nkamhoua, who are averaging 17.8 and 16.9 points per contest, respectively, on a combined 49.7 percent shooting.

Senior forward Terrance Williams II (12.6) and graduate guard Nimari Burnett (10.1) have also averaged double figures in scoring this season, making for a strong offensive attack for the Wolverines that has allowed them to score 80.1 points per game, fourth in the Big Ten.

This type of production has caught the attention of the Buckeyes and recognize Monday's game as a significant challenge — one that they feel they are well-prepared for and, most importantly, motivated to emerge victorious from.

"I think we're all ready for it," Mahaffey said. "I think we're all ready for the challenge, ready for how it presents itself. We're really excited to go on the road, to The Team Up North, and just dominate."

The Buckeyes matchup with the Wolverines is set for a noon tip off, with the game airing on FOX.