

Ohio State Moves On With 74-58 Win Over Michigan State



Ohio State's continued improvement on defense came through again on Friday afternoon as the No. 1-seeded Buckeyes took down No. 8 Michigan State in the quarterfinals of the Big Ten Women's Basketball Tournament, 74-58.

The Buckeyes - who have been known this season for their prowess on offense but have stepped up their defensive play as the regular season came to a close - jumped out to a 22-8 lead after the first quarter, forcing nine turnovers by the Spartans in the first 10 minutes

Sophomore guard Rikki Harris, who donned a face mask after taking some bumps in Ohio State's win over Michigan State on Feb. 27, led the Buckeyes in the first with eight points in the first quarter on 3-of-5 shooting and pulled down two offensive rebounds.

Michigan State had an easier time getting to the basket in the second quarter, connecting on half of its shots from the field (9 of 18) and turning the ball over just twice. However, Spartan forward Nia Clouden, who had 27 and 19 points in their previous matchups, to just two first-half points on 1-of-6 shooting.

Though the Buckeyes let up on the defensive end, they still shot 53.3 percent from the field and scored 22 points in the second frame - 11 of which came from senior guard Taylor Mikesell on 3-of-4 shooting from deep - to lead 44-29 heading into the half.

Ohio State then ran into trouble early in the third quarter. After a layup from junior forward Rebeka Mikulasikova on Ohio State's first possession of the quarter, the Buckeyes were held without a basket for over four minutes as the Spartans took off on a 10-4 run to begin the second half.

Junior guard Jacy Sheldon snapped the drought with a jumper to make it 50-39 with 4:59 remaining, but the Spartans outscored Ohio State 9-7 for the remainder of the quarter to trail by single digits, 57-48,

heading into the fourth. The lead may have been smaller if not for graduate forward Tanaya Beacham, who knocked down a pair of long twos and added three free throws in the frame.

Sheldon boosted the Buckeyes back to a double-digit lead to start off the fourth, completing an and-one play to give Ohio State a 60-48 advantage. Spartan guard Matilda Ekh helped keep Michigan State in the contest, responding to Sheldon's basket with a jumper of her own and later hitting a triple - of which she finished 5 of 11 - to make it a nine-point game, 62-53, with 7:00 remaining.

After a pair of free throws from Ekh to make it 64-55 just over a minute later, Michigan State guard DeeDee Hagemann weaved through the entire Ohio State defense to score at the basket, cutting the deficit to just six points, 64-58, forcing Buckeyes head coach Kevin McGuff to call a timeout with 4:10 remaining.

While the game was close up to that point, out of the timeout, Ohio State put things completely out of reach by scoring on three of its next four possessions - including 3-pointers from Harris and Mikesell - to take a 72-58 lead with 1:35 remaining.

The Buckeyes then closed things out with a jumper from Sheldon, earning a 74-58 win over the Spartans in the Big Ten Tournament quarterfinals. Sheldon led with 19 points on 5-of-13 shooting, while Beacham pulled down a team-high eight rebounds and both Harris and senior guard Braxtin Miller dished out five assists. Ekh led the Spartans with 21 points, while Clouden was held to just seven points.

Ohio State will go on to face either No. 5 Indiana or No. 4 Maryland, which is being played immediately following the conclusion of this game.