

Ohio State Outlasts Wisconsin 65-57 To Advance To Second Round Of Big Ten Tournament



Ohio State withstood a second-half surge from Wisconsin to pick up a 65-57 win in the opening round of the Big Ten Tournament on Wednesday at the United Center in Chicago.

The 13th-seeded Buckeyes led by as many as 27 points, but the No. 12 Badgers closed the game on a 37-18 run while cutting the deficit to as little as four during the second half. Ohio State shot just 36.4 percent during the second half while turning the ball over nine times in the frame, but the Buckeyes did just enough to escape from the Badgers — who shot 36.8 percent in the closing half while taking 16 more shot attempts than Ohio State.

Justice Sueing got the Ohio State offense rolling early, connecting on a three-pointer and jumper to help the Buckeyes forge an 11-4 lead with 14:28 remaining in the opening half. Guard Sean McNeil then took control of the game, scoring seven-straight points for the Buckeyes to increase the advantage to 18-8 with 11:08 left.

After Wisconsin forward Carter Gilmore connected on a pair of free throws, the Buckeyes emerged on a 9-2 run — led by four points from Bruce Thornton — to increase their lead to 27-12 with a little over seven minutes remaining in the frame. Thornton's scoring outburst continued, as he nailed a jumper and three-pointer on Ohio State's next two field goal attempts, to lift the advantage to 32-16 with 4:44 left in the half.

Thornton's late surge contributed to the Buckeyes connecting on 10 of their last 12 attempts from the field, helping Ohio State close out the half with a 36-18 lead over the Badgers.

Ohio State shot a blistering 68.2 percent (15 of 22), including a 4 of 7 mark from three, while Thornton led the way with 13 points on 6-of-7 shooting and McNeil connected on all four of his attempts during

the frame to tally 10 points. While Ohio State's offense clicked, its defense stifled Wisconsin as the Badgers shot just 30.4 percent (7 of 23) and missed all seven of its three-point attempts in the frame.

The Buckeyes opened the second half by exploding on an 11-2 run while running away from the Badgers with a 47-20 advantage — their largest lead of the night — with 15:31 remaining in the half. The Badgers quickly responded with a 13-3 run of their own, cutting the deficit to 17, while the Wisconsin-heavy crowd at the United Center began to rally behind the Badgers.

McNeil silenced the crowd by scoring five-straight points to push Ohio State's lead back to 22, 55-33, with 11:01 left. Wisconsin forward Tyler Wahl responded to McNeil's outburst with one of his own, scoring the game's next eight points to pull the Badgers within 14, 55-41, with 8:38 to play. Both offenses fell into a funk from there, as the teams combined to go on a 4:13 scoring drought — while the Buckeyes' extended to 6:36 across the second half — until Sueing hit a turnaround jumper with 4:25 left.

Connor Essegian, Chucky Hepburn and Wahl connected on three-pointers in three-consecutive possessions to close the gap to as little as five, 57-52, with 2:13 remaining. McNeil connected on a pair of free throws while Isaac Likekele went 1 of 2 from the charity stripe to increase the lead up to 60-52 with 1:09 to go.

Wisconsin gave Ohio State one last push, as a layup from Hepburn pulled the Badgers to just a 61-57 deficit with 52 seconds to play. But, the Buckeyes put the game away at the free throw line, where Sueing and Okpara split a pair and Roddy Gayle Jr. hit two to put the game out of reach.

McNeil produced a team-high 17 points for the Buckeyes while connecting on 3 of 4 three-point attempts. Thornton added 15 points, while Sueing produced 16 points to go along with five rebounds. Sensabaugh flirted with a double-double, finishing with nine points and 11 rebounds.

The Badgers were led by Wahl, who scored 17 of his 19 points in the second half while grabbing 10 rebounds. Although Wahl connected on 8 of 16 field goal attempts, the Badgers shot just 34.4 percent as a team while shooting an abysmal 4 of 22 from three-point range.

Ohio State advances to the second round of the Big Ten Tournament, where it will square off against fifth-seeded Iowa on Thursday with tip-off set for 25 minutes following the conclusion of the Rutgers-Michigan game — which starts at noon. The game will be televised on Big Ten Network.