

Ohio State Overcomes Poor Shooting Performance, Outlasts Merrimack 76-52 For Second Win Of Season



Ohio State returned to the win column on Wednesday night, overcoming a poor display of shooting and utilizing a strong second half to cruise to a 76-52 win at Value City Arena.

The Buckeyes (2-1) seemed to have no problems early on attacking the Warriors' vaunted zone defense, scoring on their first two possessions of the game off back-to-back three-point makes from guard Roddy Gayle Jr. to take an early 6-0 lead with 18:27. But the next 19 minutes of the half would be a completely different story for the Buckeyes' offense.

Ohio State struggled to put the ball in the net the next 19 minutes of the first frame, failing to connect on 7 of its final 26 shots (26.9 percent) to close out the half. But they would still be able to hold a 35-29 lead at halftime that swelled to as many as 12 points at the 8:19 mark, mostly due to the team's success at the charity strike.

Thanks to an inexplicable 14 first-half personal fouls from Merrimack (2-2), the Buckeyes earned a trip to the foul-line 20 times and connected on 15 of those attempts (75 percent), a number that exceeded the team's 10 makes in 17 tries for the entire game against Texas A&M on Friday.

Ohio State did get some offensive production away from the free-throw line in the first half. That came mostly from Gayle, who recorded 13 of the team's 35 first-half points on an impressive 5-6 shooting from the field. He also collected three rebounds and three assists in the first frame.

The defense was also able to stave off a few Warriors runs—which cut the lead to 24-18 and then 28-23—in the first, holding Merrimack to 12-of-26 shooting (46.2 percent) in the first 20 minutes, with only three makes from the free-throw line. Perhaps more importantly, Ohio State also forced 11 nine Warrior turnovers that led to nine points off turnovers.

In the second half, it looked as if Merrimack was on the verge of an upset when they trimmed the deficit to 35-31 after a made layup from guard Bryan Etumnu at the 19:26 mark. But momentum would soon turn back in the Buckeyes favor after back-to-back makes from Gayle and Mahaffey, which sparked a 12-0 personal run from the sophomore guards that brought the lead back up to 43-31 at the 14:03 mark.

While the Warriors attempted to mount a late comeback, cutting the lead down to 49-43 with 9:24 remaining, Ohio State buckled down with another run to create some added separation. This time, the Buckeyes embarked on an extended 16-0 run in 4:05 of game action that was spearheaded by three-point makes from Gayle (1), Bruce Thornton (1) and Jamison Battle (2).

This final run would provide the Buckeyes with the cushion they needed to put the game away. Holding the Warriors to 8-of-24 shooting (33.3 percent) shooting in the second half and, conversely, shooting an improved 17-of-31 from the field on offense, Ohio State would increase the lead to as many 27 points to cruise to its second win of the season

The Buckeyes were led in the win by Gayle, who recorded a season-high 20 points on an efficient 8-of-12 shooting from the field, along with 3-of-4 shooting from three. Battle also reached double figures with 13 points, while Key recorded his first double-double of the season with 11 points and 12 rebounds. The Warriors were led in the loss by guards Devon Savage and Etumnu, who recorded 20 and 11 points, respectively.

The Buckeyes will be back in action on Sunday when they welcome Western Michigan to Value City Arena at 4:30 pm