

Ohio State Overcomes Sluggish First Half, Defeats UCLA 67-60 In CBS Sports Classic



Ohio State returned to the win column at the State Farm Center in Atlanta on Saturday, overcoming a poor offensive showing in the first half and benefiting from a series of clutch shots down the stretch to defeat UCLA 67-60 in the CBS Sports Classic.

The Buckeyes (9-2, 1-0 in Big Ten) shot just 35.4 percent from the field and failed to make a three-pointer in the first half but woke up after halftime, connecting on 15 of their 27 shots and hitting their first triple of the game from fifth-year guard Jamison Battle to give the team the final advantage with 46 seconds left. Their second-half outburst was led by Battle and sophomore guards Roddy Gayle Jr. and Bruce Thornton, who scored 32 of the team's 45 second-half points.

Despite its first-half shooting struggles, Ohio State did get off to a strong start on the offensive end, hitting on its first three shot attempts — two of those makes coming in the paint from sophomore guard Roddy Gayle Jr. — to take an early 6-2 lead. That efficiency soon hit a wall, though, where they missed seven of their next eight shots and committed two turnovers, allowing the Bruins to slowly climb back and tie the game at 8 with 11:27 remaining in the half

After a series of additional misses from each team, the Buckeyes scored four straight points from Gayle to go up 12-8 with 9:32 left. But that lead was short lived thanks to a 6-2 run by the Bruins, which allowed the team to take its first lead at 16-14, an advantage that was then increased to 19-16 heading into the under-four-minute TV timeout following a made free throw from UCLA forward/center Adem Bona.

Ohio State committed two straight turnovers and missed a free throw coming out of the break, but two consecutive field goals from fifth-year forward Jamison Battle and sophomore guard Evan Mahaffey allowed the team to reclaim a 20-19 lead that forced a quick UCLA timeout. But the Bruins outscored the Buckeyes 4-2 in the final 2:06 to hold a 23-22 advantage heading into the locker room. The Buckeyes 22 first-half points were the lowest the team has scored in the first frame all season.

After a sluggish first half from both teams, the Bruins and Buckeyes picked it up on the offensive end coming out of the locker rooms. Ohio State made three of its first six attempts — which included sophomore guard Bruce Thornton's first field goal of the game — while UCLA connected on three field goals of their own and two free throws to take a 31-29 lead with 15:59 remaining.

Following a quick 4-0 run from Gayle that gave the Buckeyes a 33-31 lead, the Bruins took off on a 5-0 run of their own to give them a 36-33 advantage, a run that was capped by the first three-pointer of the game from either team by UCLA guard Will McClendon. That lead was then inflated to 41-37 thanks to an old-fashioned three point play from guard Dylan Andrews giving the Bruins their largest lead of the game.

The Buckeyes then scored five straight points of their own to take back a 42-41 lead with 10:02 left, preceding an extended back-and-forth between the two teams that included six lead changes and lasted over two minutes. This stretch ended with Ohio State coming out on top, who created some separation with a 7-2 run to take a 53-50 lead with 4:20 left in the game.

After UCLA cut the deficit to two on a Mack free throw, the Buckeyes responded with two free throws from Key and a thunderous alley oop dunk from Okpara to inflate the lead 57-51. Then, after a basket from the Bruins, Ohio State delivered the final blow off another make from Okpara, who missed the and-one free throw but still gave the Buckeyes a 59-53 advantage with 2:03 left.

The Bruins had one last run, cutting the deficit to just 59-56 with 1:21 left, but the Buckeyes put the game to bed after Battle connected on a three-pointer as the shot clock expired, giving Ohio State a 62-56 lead, and the eventual seven-point victory.

The Buckeyes were led in the win by the scoring trio of Battle, Gayle and Thornton, who scored 46 of Ohio State's 67 points on a combined 16-of-37 shooting. Okpara added 10 points on 5-of-7 shooting, while fifth-year guard Dale Bonner grabbed five rebounds. Andrews (13), Bona (12) and Mack (14) all reached double figures for the Bruins, while junior guard Lazar Stefanovic added six points and six rebounds.

Ohio State will look to start a new win streak on Wednesday when they welcome New Orleans to Value City Arena, with the game slated to tip off at 6 p.m. and stream exclusively on BIG+.