

Ohio State Seeking Defensive Growth During Losing Stretch



To this point in the season, Ohio State has largely produced wins at the rate of its offense.

The Buckeyes boast the third-best adjusted offensive efficiency rating in the nation, according to Kenpom, while producing 78.9 points per game — ranking third in the Big Ten. While Ohio State has made its money on the offensive end of the floor, the Buckeyes' defense has lagged behind.

Ohio State's defense ranks 97th in KenPom's defensive efficiency rating while allowing 66.2 points per game — which sits at eighth in the Big Ten. As the Buckeyes endure a three-game losing streak, assistant coach Jack Owens said the unit is just looking to continue to grow despite several challenges that have been thrown its way.

"As a team, we just have to continue to do what we do and just be better," Owens said. "Obviously, you lose Zed (Key) for an extended period of time, who's arguably our best post defender and an older guy that we can rely on.

"I just think as a unit and as a team, we just have to continue to get better on that side of the ball," he continued.

Ohio State's struggles have been amplified across the losing stretch. The Buckeyes have allowed 73.7 points per game in their last three contests, which is 9.2 points more than their 64.5 points per game average in the 13 games prior. Opponents have shot 46.3 percent from the field — up from 39.6 percent in the first 13 contests — and 37.9 percent from three — up from 27.4 percent — in the past three games.

Although Ohio State's numbers in the first 13 games were potentially inflated thanks to several buy games against the likes of Maine, Alabama A&M and St. Francis (Pa.), the Buckeyes have still shown a noted decline in the last three games.

The most recent sign of OSU's defensive struggles was Minnesota's offensive outing on Thursday. The Golden Gophers shot well above their 43.2 percent average entering the contest — dropping 70 points while knocking down shots at a 50.0 percent clip.

As the Buckeyes search for improved play on the defensive end of the floor, guard Isaac Likekele said Ohio State's defensive intensity needs to grow due to the talented nature of some of the offenses in the Big Ten.

"To be honest, we got to really lock in on that part of games," Likekele said. "We've got a few wins outscoring teams, but it's the Big Ten, night after night, you're playing against talented teams so you've got to get stops. I feel like a lot of it comes from our rebounding, in sort of a sense, but that's something we can get better at, something we need to get better at if we want to be the team that we want to be."