Ohio State Seeking Return To Consistency On Offense

After Ohio State snapped its five-game losing streak thanks to an offensive outburst in its 93-77 win over Iowa on Jan. 21, it appeared that the concerns that surrounded the Buckeyes' offense were a thing of the past.

Ohio State roughed up Iowa's defense to the tune of 56.3 percent shooting, bolstered by an 8 of 16 mark from beyond the arc, in the win. However, the Buckeyes slid back to their old habits in their 69-60 loss to Illinois on Tuesday, returning to similar levels of production seen during the five-game losing stretch. Against the Illini, the Buckeyes shot 36.7 percent, and went 4 of 10 from beyond the arc, while dishing out just eight assists on their 22 makes.

"Our guys were made aware that the way we played, it wasn't so much about how the game ended, but the way we played throughout the course of that game was not acceptable," associate head coach Jake Diebler said. "It was not a good representation of, certainly, what this team is capable of, but what we're about as a program. So, that had to be brought to light and our guys responded well (in practice) yesterday, but we have to see that consistently."

Against Iowa, Ohio State saw contributions from across the board, with five Buckeyes finishing in double figures, including freshman forward Brice Sensabaugh, who produced a career-best 27 points on 10-of-12 shooting. The Buckeyes dished out 15 assists in the win and punished the Hawkeyes inside with a 50-32 advantage in the paint. The Buckeyes' outing against Iowa came in stark contrast to the previous five games, in which Ohio State averaged 66.6 points per game while shooting 40.0 percent as a team. In those five losses, the Buckeyes produced just 8.0 assists while turning the ball over 10.2 times per contest.

But, as mentioned before, Ohio State immediately fell back into that offensive rut against Illinois, and Diebler emphasized that there were several key areas in need of a tune-up to get the offense back on track going forward.

"Our two-point field goal percentage has dipped significantly, and I think even if you look at some of our high-major nonconference games and compare that to Big Ten games, that's been an issue for us," Diebler said. "The reason for that, in looking at all the film and all of the finishes and what our two-point field goal attempts look like, it's two-fold. One of them is we're struggling to read the crowds in the paint and we're forcing some shots where we should be hitting an open man for an uncontested three or an opportunity to attack another closeout while the defense is in rotation.

"We're taking too high of a volume of contested mid-range jump shots. That's an area that we have to grow in, and have to grow in right now," he continued. "It's just really hard to have an efficient offense when you're taking the volume of contested mid-range shots that we are right now. I think some of this is that we have players that are capable of making those, and we have players that thrive in that space, so we're not trying to take away opportunities for guys and we want guys to have freedom, and giving guys a lot of freedom this year to read the game.

"But, part of this is we have to adjust better to how teams in our league are guarding us."

Prior to the five-game losing streak, the Buckeyes boasted one of the more efficient offensive units in the country — producing 81.0 points per game while connecting 49.2 percent of shots from the field. Ohio State rose to as high as No. 1 in KenPom's adjusted offensive efficiency ratings prior to the losing stretch.

As Ohio State had one of the top offenses in the country through the first two months of the season, Diebler noted that Big Ten opponents keyed in on how to slow down the unit prior to entering the brunt of the conference slate.

"We were so efficient leading into conference play, and teams knew that," Diebler said. "We got scouted and we just haven't consistently been able to adjust and that's the thing that I think we have to really grow in quickly."