

Ohio State Suffers Worst Loss Of The Season, Falls 70-49 To Northwestern At Home To Put Dent In NCAA Tournament Resume



Ohio State (15-12, 7-9 Big Ten) put a considerable dent in its NCAA tournament résumé Thursday night in front of 12,864 unhappy fans inside Value City Arena with a blowout 70-49 defeat to Big Ten bottom-feeder Northwestern (14-13, 5-11 Big Ten) that was in large part caused by an atrocious offensive performance.

All signs before the game pointed to the Buckeyes taking care of business at home against the shorthanded Wildcats — who are playing the rest of the season without veteran starters Brooks Barnhizer and Jalen Leach — but Jake Diebler’s team instead seemed uninspired from the jump and turned in their worst collective showing of the year.

Plagued by a team-wide flu bug that forced Aaron Bradshaw, walk-on guard Colby Baumann and assistant coach Luke Simons to miss the game, Ohio State labored its way to season-lows in points, field-goal percentage (32.7 percent, 17 of 52) and three-point field-goal percentage (19.0, 4 of 21), while also committing a near-season low 16 turnovers that led to 18 Wildcat points.

The poor offense was coupled with another lackluster showing inside, where Northwestern held a 36-27 rebounding advantage and 40-22 edge in paint points, all of which helped it build a lead that grew to as much as 28 points and hand the Buckeyes a shocking 21-point loss on their home floor.

“(The effort) wasn’t what it needed to be,” Diebler said after the game. This is not an acceptable way to play this game. The way we were letting our offense affect our defense almost felt almost like a new, young team, which we haven’t been. You’d expect something like that to happen at the beginning of the season. That can’t happen again, clearly.”

The nightmare night started early for the sickly Buckeyes, who missed seven of their first 20 shots and

committed nine early turnovers to help Northwestern jump out to a 27-17 lead with 5:11 left in the half.

Ohio State showed some life in the ensuing minutes to cut the deficit down to five, 29-24, with 1:22 left after a three-point play from Micah Parrish, but on the other end it allowed Northwestern to get four straight offensive rebounds, leading to a layup from junior guard Justin Mullins that allowed it to lead 31-24 at halftime.

It didn't take long for things to get out of hand for the Buckeyes out of the break. They went without a field goal on 16 of their first 17 offensive possessions and committed four more turnovers to allow Northwestern to start the half on a 27-6 run and take a commanding 58-30 with 9:24 left after a contested layup from junior forward Nick Martinelli.

"We tried to hit some home runs, and they made us pay for it," Diebler said of the Wildcats' early-half run. "We took some low-percentage shots, some long-contested twos, and ultimately they made us pay because they were getting much better looks."

Ohio State stopped the bleeding with a 10-2 run to trail 60-40 with 5:49 left following a Parrish layup, but the hole it put itself in was far too large to mount any semblance of a comeback. The Buckeyes missed seven of their final nine shots and allowed the Wildcats to break their full-court press with relative ease to cruise to the 21-point victory.

Ohio State had just two players score more than six points in the win, with Parrish (16) and Bruce Thornton (13) leading the way on a combined 11-of-25 shooting. The other eight Buckeyes who earned playing time combined for 20 points on 6-of-27 (22.2 percent) shooting.

Ohio State also tallied just eight assists, the third-lowest total of the season.

Northwestern — which earned its third straight win over the Buckeyes for the first time since 1966-67 — was led by Martinelli, who was one of four Wildcats in double figures in scoring with 18 points and five rebounds. They scored 25 bench points compared to the Buckeyes' eight, with 15 coming from graduate guard K.J. Windham.

Ohio State will look to quickly shake off the loss on its difficult two-game West Coast trip to California, which starts on Sunday with a matchup against UCLA at 3:45 on CBS and ends on Wednesday night (10:30 p.m., BTN) against USC.