

Ohio State Thunders Past Wisconsin, 73-55



Ohio State did not open its first home Big Ten matchup with the energy that Chris Holtmann spent the week preaching. After speaking at length about the importance of matching up physically with the always-tough Badgers and of limiting turnovers, Ohio State stumbled out of the gates in Value City Arena. But it recovered well, leaning on a superlative performance from its stars to earn a 2-0 conference start with a 73-55 victory.

In just the first eight minutes of play, the Buckeyes suffered six turnovers, which helped to spark a quick 15-2 Wisconsin run, jumping out to a 17-9 advantage after a Tyler Wahl layup with a free throw on top.

The Buckeyes didn't linger on the slow start, though. They rattled off a 10-2 run of their own to knot the game at 19 for the under-eight-minute break, bolstered by a Jamari Wheeler three-pointer that tied the game back up and a three-point play the old-fashioned way for E.J. Liddell. Out of the break, the Penn State transfer nicked the ball from Chucky Hepburn and broke down the floor for a layup, and a possession later, he connected with Zed Key for an awe-inspiring alley-oop to put the Buckeyes up by four points.

With 14 points from Liddell and seven from Cedric Russell to thank, Ohio State would maintain that edge into the half, holding a 34-29 advantage despite 24 points from Wisconsin's backcourt pairing of Brad Davison and Johnny Davis - not to mention the 10 turnovers on Ohio State's sheet in the first 20 minutes, which led to nine UW points and helped to minimize a nearly 20-point edge in shooting percentage (58 percent to 39 percent) in OSU's favor.

Hepburn opened the scoring in the second half but served as only a brief reprieve for the Badgers' anemic shooting, as they would miss their next 10 shots during a dry spell that lasted well over five minutes. Ohio State could only take advantage to the tune of eight points, though, extending its lead to 42-31 but nowhere beyond until Wisconsin scored again on a Davis layup.

Though Davis' bucket would spark the Badger offense a bit, it seemed to do more to activate Meechie

Johnson Jr. After two nearly disastrous passes in the half court, Johnson corralled the ball enough to dish off to Key for another alley-oop. Two possessions later, he drained his second three-pointer of the half, and to cap a quick run and force a UW timeout, Johnson ripped the ball cleanly from Wahl and dished to Liddell, who fired a pass into Key for another fast-break bucket, giving Ohio State its largest lead of the game at 49-36.

After a Liddell bucket and another Key dunk, just about every fan in attendance was mimicking Key's new signature roof-raising celebration, as the Buckeyes raised their lead to 17 points and put it just about out of reach of the struggling Wisconsin offense.

Although the game would devolve into a battle of fouls over its final 10 minutes, Ohio State's lead did not waver.

Liddell led the game with 28 points, the Buckeyes got 11 more from Key and 14 rebounds from Kyle Young. Davis was Wisconsin's top scorer, with 24 points.