

Ohio State Women's Basketball Faces Michigan For Spot In Big Ten Championship Game



With a pair of dominant wins already under its belt through the first two games of the Big Ten tournament, Ohio State is now just one away from a place in the championship game.

The Buckeyes, who now sit at 20-11 overall, and are in a great position to lock up a high seed in the NCAA tournament, just won as the underdog in a three-six seed matchup against Iowa, but will come in as the higher-ranked team in the semifinal game against seventh-seeded Michigan.

On the Wolverines' trip to the semis, they came back from an early double-digit deficit to take down Nebraska, and pulled off the largest upset of the tournament thus far with a win against Northwestern, the two seed in the conference and the No. 11 team in the country.

"Michigan's a great team and it's going to be a definite battle obviously, even just with the rivalry it always is," junior guard Braxtin Miller said. "We got them last time and they're going to be coming up for us, so we're just gonna have to play hard and do what we can."

Ohio State and Michigan played just once in the regular season, with the Buckeyes taking it at home 78-69. In the game, Ohio State shot very well from the floor, hitting 50.9 percent (28 of 55) of its shots, and half (11 of 22) of its threes.

In that game on Jan. 9, the teams were tied heading into the fourth quarter, where the Buckeyes outscored the Wolverines 23-14, eight of which were scored by freshman guard Madison Greene, who finished with a team-high 23 points.

"The first game we played them, it was a great game. It's one of the best games all year in terms of the competitive nature of it," head coach Kevin McGuff said following the win over Iowa. "They have an elite post player in Naz Hillmon and they also shot the ball really well today. So they really showed some balance. So they're a great team. We know we'll have a challenge and so we'll get some rest and prepare for tomorrow's game."

Hillmon, Michigan's sophomore forward and First-Team All-Big Ten member, will be the primary focus on the defensive side. She leads the team with 17.3 points and 8.4 rebounds per game, doing all of her damage inside with a team-high 57.4 percent on field goals.

Despite the loss in the first game, Hillmon was dominant for the Wolverines with 24 points and 15 rebounds on a perfect 8-of-8 shooting against the Buckeyes on Jan. 9.

But Hillmon is not alone, with two underclassmen guards in sophomore Amy Dilk and freshman Hailey Brown, making a strong impact thus far in Big Ten tournament play.

Dilk is the primary facilitator and ball handler on offense for Michigan, and led the way in the Wolverines' tournament opener against Nebraska with 22 points, six assists and zero turnovers on 8-of-15 shooting. Brown was the difference maker against the Wildcats, adding 19 points on 6-of-9 shooting.

"Obviously, they have really good guards and obviously Naz Hillmon is there so it's going to be a fight under the rim," sophomore forward Dorka Juhasz said. "So we have to be careful with fouls and everything, and rebounding."

Juhasz said that this game will come down to the defensive side of the ball, and the ability for Ohio State to match the intensity the team brought in the win over the Hawkeyes.

"It's going to be defense and our energy, and just get some easy layups in transition," Juhasz said. "They're playing their third game, we're playing our third game, so it's going to be who wants it more."

Ohio State will face off against Michigan 25 minutes after the other semifinal matchup between No. 1 Maryland and No. 4 Indiana, which takes place at 6:30 p.m. Saturday.

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