

# Ohio State's Second-Half Comeback Falls Just Short in 70-66 Defeat At No. 24 Wisconsin



Ohio State (10-7, 2-4 Big Ten) once again fell victim to a poor first-half performance on the road on Jan. 14, falling 70-66 to No. 24 Wisconsin (14-3, 4-2 Big Ten) at the Kohl Center after nearly coming back from a 17-point halftime deficit.

Like many times over the past few seasons, the Buckeyes dug themselves into an early hole away from Value City Arena when it made just nine of its 28 field goals in the first half (32.1 percent) and committed nine turnovers to hand the Badgers a relatively early 37-20 lead into the locker room.

The Buckeyes, unlike previous times this season and in years' past, clawed back after halftime and eventually played well enough to trail by just one point in the game's final minute, but the 17-point deficit proved to be too daunting as the late comeback fell just two points short at the final buzzer.

Ohio State's start in this matchup was how it began many of his blowout road losses this season. After taking an early 2-0 lead off a Sean Stewart interior basket, the Buckeyes' offense turned stagnant, missing nine of its next 11 shots to find itself in an early 17-6 hole after a layup from senior guard Kamari McGee with 11:53 remaining.

The Buckeyes finally found their rhythm when they made three of their next five shots — one of those being a banked-in three by Aaron Bradshaw — to trail 20-13 with 7:23 left after a floater by John Mobley Jr. But that efficiency didn't last long.

OSU turned sloppy again on both ends — committing three turnovers in a span of 2:16 while struggling to rebound and keep the Badgers off the free-throw line — to allow Wisconsin to go up 29-16 with 4:08 left in the half following a second-chance triple from senior forward Carter Gilmore.

The Buckeyes tried to respond by making two straight baskets to cut the deficit to nine, 29-20, with 2:54 left, but they missed their final five shots of the half and committed another turnover — their ninth

of the half — to allow the Badgers to finish the period on an 8-0 run and lead 37-20.

Ohio State's nine first-half turnovers led to 11 Badger points.

The Buckeyes looked like a completely different team out of the locker room, with Thornton scoring seven quick points and Mobley connecting on his first three to put them within nine, 39-30, with 15:46 left.

Wisconsin tried to create some more separation and did so when it went back up 13, 48-35, with 11:57 left after a thunderous tomahawk dunk by John Tonje, but Ohio State continued to fight back and went on a ferocious 9-0 run to trail just four points, 48-44, after a triple from Devin Royal with 10:18 remaining.

Although the Buckeyes continued to produce on offense, Wisconsin was even more lethal, making each of its next five shots and six more free throws to go back up by eight, 65-57, with 4:17 remaining after a triple from Tonje.

But Ohio State still did not quit, going on a gradual 7-0 run to find themselves within one point, 65-64, with just 16 seconds left after a Micah Parrish layup.

The Buckeyes had a chance to get the ball back on the next possession down one when sophomore guard John Blackwell missed the front end of a 1-and-1 free throw, but they were unable to grab the defensive rebound, allowing Wisconsin to get a second chance and make two more free throws to go up 67-64 with 11 seconds remaining.

That missed opportunity turned out to be costly, as Wisconsin did not allow Ohio State to attempt a potential game-tying three on its next two possessions by fouling intentionally. The Buckeyes did make each of their four attempts from the charity strike to still trail by one, 68-68, with just three seconds left.

After the Badgers went one-for-one on their final trip to the line — Ohio State was also fouling intentionally — the Buckeyes found Royal at the opposite end of the court for a potential last-second heave but his foot was out of bounds, essentially ending the game with 0.5 seconds left.

Ohio State, which shot a much more efficient 51.6 percent from the field (16 of 31) and 40.0 percent from three (4 of 10) in the second half, was led by Thornton, who scored 19 of his 21 points after halftime for his eighth 20+-point game of the season. Royal scored 10 of his 12 points in the second half before fouling out, while Stewart grabbed a game-high eight rebounds.

Wisconsin was led in the win by Tonje (17), Blackwell (15) and Crowl (14), while the 7-0 Crowl added a team-high seven boards and one lock. The Badgers held onto their win in large part because they shot 89.3 percent from the free-throw line (25 of 28), proving their worth as the nation's top free-throw shooting team.