

Poor Late-Game Execution Dooms Ohio State Against Top-Ranked Purdue



Everything appeared to be going Ohio State's way when guard Sean McNeil cashed a step-back three-pointer to lift the Buckeyes to a 69-66 lead over top-ranked Purdue with 40.3 seconds remaining in Thursday's contest.

The Buckeyes and Boilermakers traded the lead 10 times to that point, but it finally seemed like the pendulum had fully swung in Ohio State's favor. Purdue tightened the gap after 7-4 center Zach Edey drained a jump hook over Ohio State center Felix Okpara, making it a 69-68 game with 28.3 seconds to play.

After Edey's bucket, it appeared Purdue would begin playing the free throw game, by intentionally fouling and sending the Buckeyes to the line, in order to gain more offensive possessions. Following a timeout by Ohio State skipper Chris Holtmann, the Boilermakers set up their full-court pressure defense, and Buckeye guard Bruce Thornton found forward Justice Sueing on the inbound pass.

Sueing was immediately hounded by a pair of Purdue defenders, facing a trap in the corner near Purdue's bench. Sueing looked in the direction of Thornton, who had just entered the court and was camped underneath Ohio State's basket, however, his pass did not end up in the hands of Thornton, but rather Purdue guard Ethan Morton swiped it out of the air, giving Purdue life.

"(It was) just not a good pass from me," Sueing said. "I should have taken my time, maybe a little bit longer, but that was the first thing I saw open, it was Bruce."

Holtmann took responsibility for Sueing's late-game turnover, noting that he needs to do a better job of preparing his players for those late-game moments.

"I have to get them more comfortable with that. That's not on Justice, that's on me," Holtmann said. "I have to get them more comfortable in those situations so that one is on me."

Following the turnover, Purdue immediately looked to set up its offense, but the Buckeye defense quickly recovered — forcing Boilermakers head coach Matt Painter to burn a timeout with 17.5 seconds to play. Out of the timeout, the Boilermakers looked to get the ball back into Edey's hands on the block. As Okpara handled Edey in the post, Thornton came over to help on the Purdue big man, leaving guard Fletcher Loyer open on the perimeter.

Edey found Loyer at the top of the key, and Loyer cashed the go-ahead three-pointer to put the Boilermakers in front, 71-69, with 10.5 seconds to play.

"We were just a little bit slow on a couple of rotations," Holtmann said. "They made some tough (shots), but some of that is things we have to clean up."

Ohio State had one final chance to win or send the game to overtime after Thornton advanced the ball and Holtmann called timeout with 6.4 seconds left to work with for the Buckeyes. Holtmann looked to get the ball in forward Brice Sensabaugh's hands for the final shot, as the freshman caught the inbounds pass before handing it off to Thornton. Thornton tried to pull the defense away from Sensabaugh, and Okpara's attempt to lay a screen on Sensabaugh's defender — Morton — was blown up.

Thornton got the ball into the hands of Sensabaugh with 2.9 seconds remaining, but the freshman forward was immediately trapped while Purdue guard Braden Smith jarred the ball free before Sensabaugh could even put up a game-winning attempt.

"The last play was a set action we run to get a three," Sensabaugh said. "I came off the screen and I was kind of expecting the aggressive double switch, and I saw it. It was good defense, I give them credit for that, so I couldn't really get it off."

As the Buckeyes fell just short, due to several late-game miscues, Sueing noted that they just didn't make plays in the right moments to lift them past the No. 1 Boilermakers.

"We just didn't get enough plays done today," Sueing said.