

# Recaps: Series Split With No. 3 Minnesota Leaves Buckeyes Frustrated

Once you get the taste of victory, anything less is sour.

That's the sensation No. 11 Ohio State felt after splitting the series with third-ranked Minnesota at Value City Arena on Friday and Saturday.

The Buckeyes (15-6-1, 8-3-0-2-1 Big Ten) shocked the uber-talented Golden Gophers 5-1 in the opener in what Minnesota coach Bob Motzko called the worst performance in his seven years in charge there.

Naturally, the Gophers (18-4-2, 8-2-1-0-0) responded with a fury in the rematch and the Buckeyes were unable to get the sweep, allowing three goals in the first period in a 6-1 defeat.

By the way, the Gophers in that game dressed 14 NHL draft picks. Ohio State had two.

The loss was the first at home for the Buckeyes (9-1-1).

"We're disappointed," Ohio State coach Steve Rohlik said after the defeat. "We expect to win every time we step on the ice. You've got to have those expectations. Good teams do, but you've got to be ready and be at your best in this league, otherwise you're going to get beat. And tonight, we weren't at our best."

## Power Trip

The difference Friday before 3,315 fans was specialty teams, specifically Minnesota's inability to take advantage of a five-minute major power play while the Buckeyes scored twice when presented the same opportunity.

"It was important to get off to a good start and play with the lead," Rohlik said. "Special teams was the key to tonight's win."

Sophomore Max Montes and freshman Jake Rozzi each had a goal and an assist and Kristoffer Eberly made 29 saves.

The Buckeyes took a 1-0 lead at 11:36 of the first period when sophomore Thomas Weis intercepted a pass and rushed up ice to feed Montes on the right wing. His shot went to the far netting for his ninth goal.

Rozzi doubled the count at 5:19 of the second off a loose puck with graduate Joe Dunlap assisting.

At 12:59, sophomore defenseman William Smith was issued a cross-checking major and game misconduct. The Gophers had three shots but nearly three minutes into the elongated power play Minnesota was given a minor penalty, resulting in 4-on-4 play for two minutes.

Just 45 seconds into the third period, Minnesota's Brodie Ziemer was issued a five-minute penalty for contact to the head as well as a game misconduct.

Ziemer was playing his first game since helping the United States win the gold medal at the world junior championships in Ottawa on Jan. 5.

The Buckeyes' power play remained red hot, scoring for the eighth straight game when graduate Gunnarwolfe Fontaine knocked in the rebound of a Montes shot with junior defenseman Damien Carfagna also assisting.

One minute later, it was 4-0 with a second man-up tally, this time from sophomore defenseman Nathan McBrayer scoring from the point through traffic for his second goal of the season.

Eberly's bid for a third shutout of the season ended at 9:01 on a score by Sam Rinzel.

The Gophers made the desperate move in pulling their goalie at the 12:23 mark and junior Davis Burnside made them pay with a clearing attempt deep in the OSU zone that went into the empty net at 13:21 to complete the scoring and the Buckeyes' first win over a team ranked in the top 3 of the USCHO poll since defeating Minnesota on Oct. 28, 2022.

## **Vengeance**

The Buckeyes knew it would be a challenge the second night and needed to match the intensity of the Gophers.

It all fell apart quickly when OSU incurred a too many players on the ice penalty at 1:26 of the first period and at 2:42, Mike Koster scored for the Gophers in what would become a trend.

The Gophers went 3 for 4 on the power play but that was a bit misleading because the final opportunity came with just 55 seconds left in the game.

"We felt good about our being ready to go when but you can't start with a too many men on the ice, whatever, a minute and some into the game," Rohlik said. "That feeds a team like that and unfortunately we just didn't have our game tonight."

Mason Nevers made it 2-0 at 7:49 on an odd-man break and Connor Kurth (8:04) extended the lead to 3-0 after one of the many Buckeye turnovers.

The second period only got worse with a pair of power-play goals 10 minutes apart to make it 5-0 by the 13:55 mark.

Eberly was then pulled after saving 19 of 24 shots and Logan Terness stopped eight of nine.

A sliver of hope for the Buckeyes came and went beginning at 17:35 when they had a 5-on-3 for 1:46 but six shots produced no goals.

Later, just as Minnesota broke the shutout in the third period Friday, Fontaine scored a power-play goal at 17:45 from Montes and Carfagna to give the turnout of 5,973 something to cheer.

## **Notes**

All three of Rozzi's goals have been game winners. ... OSU has a power-play goal in each of the past nine games. ... The game Saturday marked the first time this season the Buckeyes allowed more than four goals. ... Fontaine leads the team with 24 points and 11 goals. He has seven goals and five assists for 12 points during an eight-game point streak.

## **Next**

The Buckeyes are idle the weekend of Jan. 17-18.

They return to action at Penn State on Jan. 24-25 before home games Jan. 30 (8 p.m.) and 31 (7 p.m.) against No. 1 Michigan State.