

Cooper, Bobcats Blow Past Michigan

Written by {ga=mikeperry}

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NASHVILLE – Michigan freshman point guard Trey Burke, the Big Ten Co-Freshman of the Year from Columbus Northland High School, tried to take over the contest late in the second half.

Ohio junior point guard D.J. Cooper, a member of the Mid-American Conference First Team, wouldn't let him.

Burke tried to get to the bucket with his quickness. Cooper was quicker.

Burke looked to hit from 3-point range to bring his team back. Cooper wouldn't let him.

Burke attacked the basket, wanting to get to the line or get fouled. Cooper held his ground.

Despite Burke getting much of the publicity as one of the top collegiate prospects this season, Cooper out-played him in the second round of the NCAA Tournament as the 13th seeded Bobcats knocked off the fourth-seeded Wolverines, 65-60, at Bridgestone Arena.

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Cooper finished the contest with 21 points and five assists to lead Ohio to its second NCAA Tournament victory in its last three games played.

Burke finished with 16 points and five assists, but connected on just five-of-15 shots from the floor and just two-of-nine from beyond the 3-point arc.

"He's as good a guard as we've played against this year," Michigan coach John Beilein said of Cooper. "He's tremendous. He puts pressure on others to get help."

Just 18:18 into the game Cooper pulled up from about six feet beyond the 3-point arc and hit nothing but net. This was a harbinger of things to come from the 5-11 guard from Chicago.

"Whenever you make your first three, it felt good...felt good to go in," he said. "Gave me a little confidence, you know, to keep shooting a little more."

Cooper would knock down two-of-three from beyond the arc in the first half as the Bobcats built a 35-29 lead at intermission. It could have been more. Ohio held a 35-22 lead with 2:45 left in the half, but the Wolverines ended the half on a 7-0 run.

Ohio didn't panic, even when Evan Smotrycz pulled Michigan within two with a 3-pointer at the 14:56 mark on the second half that made the score 42-40. Ohio responded with a pair of baskets to push the lead back out to six, eventually building a nine-point lead at 59-50 with 8:11 remaining in the game.

Michigan then used a 10-3 spurt to pull within three at 63-60, and had possession of the ball with a chance to pull within one or tie with a triple. The teams went back and forth without scoring a couple of times before the Wolverines, with 1:32, called a 30-second timeout to set up its offense.

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First Zack Novak missed a triple from the right baseline with 1:09 left. Even though television replays clearly showed Smotrycz slapped the ball out of bounds, the officials awarded possession to Michigan. Burke then missed an open three attempt from the top of the key, but Ohio's Reggie Keely knocked the ball out to give the Wolverines yet another try with :44 left in the game.

Burke had another attempt from the top of the key that banged out with 22 seconds left. Smotrycz grabbed the offensive rebound for Michigan, but lost control of the ball. Walter Offutt snatched the ball for Ohio with seven seconds left and sealed the win by connecting on a pair of free throws.

Offutt, an Ohio State transfer, was thrilled he was able to hit the free throws to put the game away.

"Me and Coop, we talk about it at home...being in that situation," he said. "What would you do? What would you think about? Stuff like that. You've got to go up there and knock it down and have confidence. That's what I done, that's what I think about. Fortunately, to get the win and step up and make the shot."

Offutt was one of four Bobcats that scored in double figures, netting 11 while handing out four assists and recording a pair of steals. Reggie Keely and Ivo Baltic added 10 points each.

"I thought different guys made plays throughout," Ohio coach John Groce said. "Every guy that played in the game for us contributed, which has been a real strength of our team all year. Hopefully we can continue to play even better basketball."

"This team has continued to play really well in February and March and have really bought into what we're doing at the defensive end. As long as we do that, then we always have a chance."

Burke paced the Wolverines (24-10) with 16 points while Smotrycz added 15 and Tim Hardaway Jr. 14. Michigan shot just 40.7 percent from the floor.

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"We obviously have a very disappointed locker room right now," Beilein said. "But Ohio University, as you can see, is a very good team and they played a great game. It was a tough loss for our guys, and it's a difficult way to end the season, but we did not lose to a team that wasn't worthy of this win. They're a good team."

Ohio will now face South Florida, a 58-44 win over Temple, in the third round of the Midwest Region Sunday.