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On the Wrong Channel

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NCAA Tournament games are traditionally won by senior leadership, and by

quality guard play. All year Ohio State has had none of the former, and on this night they had very little of the latter. As the remote-control switched back and forth from the Cleveland State game throughout the evening, it was clear that in more ways than one, the Buckeyes were on the wrong channel.

Evan Turner's 25 point, 9 rebound, 8 assist night couldn't overcome the clutch 3-point shooting of the Saints' Ronald Moore, who buried a huge trey in the final seconds of each overtime to edge the Bucks, who finished the season at 22-10. And nothing about the disappointing OSU performance should detract from the strong showing by Siena...in fact, the contrast was striking.

For starters, Siena put on a clinic in team rebounding, hammering the bigger Buckeyes on the boards by a 51-34 count. And although both teams handled the ball like a live hand grenade at times (combining for 40 turnovers), the Buckeyes consistently had trouble handling the Saints' full court press, and there was never a doubt at any point in the game about which team was finishing first in hustle. (*Hint: They were in green...like the guys out-hustling the favorites on the other channel.*)

But after acknowledging some of the ways Siena won the game, it's fair to discuss some of the ways the Buckeyes lost it. To wit:

- the aforementioned rebounding deficit...which included allowing Siena a ridiculous 21 offensive rebounds and thus way too many second chances on the offensive end.

- committing 19 turnovers....inexcusable even when the other guys cooperate with 21 of their own. A good many of the OSU turnovers came trying to just get the ball over the timeline, as the Bucks and their coaching staff showed a mystifying passiveness and an inability to adjust to what they were seeing in the Siena press. (*Again, a look at the other channel would have shown how the Vikings were beating the Wake press like a rented mule.*)

- shooting just 28% (7 of 25) from 3-point range, including an uncharacteristically bad night for Jon Diebler (2 of 11) who averaged about 45% for the season, second in the conference.

Those were general, game-long issues for Ohio State. But down the stretch, it came down to a series of bad decisions, mis-communications, flawed

fundamentals, and a touch of bad luck that combined to doom the Buckeye chances:

- two missed free throws by center B.J. Mullens with 55 seconds to play in regulation, which could have given the Buckeyes a five or six-point lead with under a minute to play.

- managing just one field goal in the last five minutes of regulation (and then having leading scorer Turner miss all three of his shots in the first overtime.)

- after Hill's two free throws with nine seconds left in the first overtime, failing to foul (or even closely guard) Siena guard Ronald Moore, with a 3-point lead, instead allowing him to take an unmolested 3-pointer from the top of the key with three seconds left. After the game, Matta claimed he was calling for the foul, but was unheard or unheeded by the players on the court. Bottom line is that well-coached teams know what to do in that situation without a call from the bench.

- without suggesting for a moment that the referees cost OSU the game, I'll still observe that the touch foul that was called out front on P.J. Hill with 35 seconds in the second overtime, in a tie game, was laughably ticky-tack, considering the situation. And Evan Turner was manhandled pretty thoroughly on his last few shot attempts in the second OT without getting a whistle, at least considering how they were being called on the other end for the Saints. That's the bad luck I spoke of...and that also concludes my whining about the officiating.

The storylines for Matta's Buckeyes in the coming off-season will center around which players will return, and which ones will opt to enter the NBA Draft. It seems unlikely that Big Ten Freshman of the Year William Buford considers himself ready to go pro, which leaves Turner and freshman B.J. Mullens for Buckeye fans to worry about losing to a regular paycheck. For the moment, Turner is saying some very encouraging things about having unfinished business in Columbus, and wanting to return the whole team intact for another run next year. In the end though, Turner may yet cash in on his talent, and Mullens on his projected potential, by bolting for the NBA.

The early exits are proving costly to Matta and the OSU program, and while they are the logical and inevitable consequence of recruiting top-level talent out of high school, they've been keeping the roster largely devoid of upperclassmen. Then

when March rolls around, and the coach is looking for consistency, sound fundamentals and seasoned leadership, he's fishing in shallow waters.

So it seems reasonable to chalk up this early exit from the tournament at least in part to the epidemic of early player exits from the program. I'm sure Coach Matta would be glad to entertain suggestions on how to solve the problem. But on the whole, this season-ending Buckeye game made northeast Ohio fans glad they had something compelling to watch on the other channel, and other Ohio teams to follow as the madness continues. Go Vikings, Flyers and Musketeers!

Once Again the Bridesmaid

The Ohio State wrestling team came tantalizingly close to winning the NCAA Championship on Saturday, having led the scoring going into the last day of competition, and placing three wrestlers into the championship finals, compared to just one for the Iowa Hawkeyes.

But the Hawkeyes had several wrestlers competing in the consolation rounds, and even though their one finalist was upset in the championship, they were able to outpoint the Buckeyes on the final day, to [take the team title](#) with 96.5 points to OSU's 92. It's the second straight runner-up finish for the Buckeyes and Coach Tom Ryan in the NCAA Championships.

Ohio State's [J. Jagers successfully defended his NCAA championship](#) at 141 pounds, but the other two OSU finalists, Reece Humphrey (133 lbs.) and defending NCAA champ Mike Pucillo (184 lbs.) both lost their finals matches.

In just his third year in Columbus, Ryan has the Buckeyes near the pinnacle of college wrestling, and he vows to win it all before long. This is good news, because this second place stuff has been getting really old.

Quotable:

"Well, this shows how far Buckeye Nation has come in wrestling....Last year

we finished second and we were happy with that. This year we were second again, and not satisfied. We will win the NCAA Championship ... it's going to happen." - *OSU Wrestling Coach Tom Ryan*