



After BYU knocked off San Diego State this past Wednesday, Ohio State was the only remaining undefeated team in the country. The Buckeyes had to fight until the very last second against Northwestern to keep it that way. In a surprisingly close game, Northwestern nearly pulled off the upset of the year. Down by one with three and a half seconds to go, a half court heave by Northwestern's Drew Crawford was just off the mark, giving Ohio State the 58-57 victory and their 22nd win in a row.

Northwestern Coach Bill Carmody wanted his team to get a better shot at the end of the game, "It's discouraging, disappointing, because you want to get the last shot in that situation. Or a shot. And we didn't."

Although they lost the game, Carmody had to be pleased with the way his team played. The Wildcats kept the game close without the services of their best player, John Shurna, who sat out after suffering a concussion in their matchup against Minnesota on Wednesday. With the Big Ten's fourth leading scorer on the bench (Shurna averaged 19 ppg), many suspected Ohio State to blow Northwestern out like they blew out 12th ranked Purdue earlier this week. But surprising upsets seemed to be a theme on Saturday as 10 teams in the top 25 all lost to lower ranked (or unranked) opponents. Ohio State was seconds away from being the eleventh.

The Wildcats battled hard from the opening tip-off, making Ohio State work for everything they

got on the offensive end. Northwestern was particularly aggressive when guarding the perimeter, holding the Buckeyes to just one made 3-pointer in the first half. Sullinger was effective early in the post, scoring 10 points and grabbing four rebounds in the first half. Freshman point guard Aaron Craft came off the bench and gave the Buckeyes a lift, scoring eight points on just four shot attempts. But outside of that, the rest of the Ohio State team could only manage nine points by halftime.

With Northwestern playing ball-control offense, the Wildcats used as much of the 35 second shot clock as they could on each possession, limiting Ohio State's opportunities on the other end. This resulted in a 27-25 halftime score even though the Buckeyes shot 50% from the field in the first.

Carmody knew how explosive this Buckeyes offense can be, and he was doing everything he could to slow Ohio State down, "We just didn't want them to go off," Carmody said. "How many 3s did they have? One? Two? ... We just didn't want to let their shooters get going outside. I thought we did a nice job doing what we came into the game trying to do."

Those thinking this would be a blowout saw the beginning of the second half as a confirmation of that suspicion. The Buckeyes opened up the offense after the break, turning their meager two point advantage into a 12 point lead with just over 14 minutes to play. The Buckeyes started the half playing the type of basketball they played against Purdue, going on a 14-4 run in just under six minutes. The Northwestern crowd had been completely taken out of the game, and it looked like Ohio State was on their way to another blow-out win.

After Ohio State's run, the two teams traded baskets before Northwestern put together a good stretch for themselves. The Wildcats were still down by 10 before going on a 13-4 run of their own to make it a 53-52 game. The Buckeyes lead evaporated altogether when Northwestern's Michael Thompson connected on a 3-pointer that put Ohio State down by one. John Diebler answered on the next possession by hitting a three of his own, but two minutes later, Michael Thompson hit a two point jumper that tied the game at 57.

With a minute and a half remaining, Aaron Craft brought the ball up the court and made a short bounce pass to John Diebler. But before Diebler secured the ball, he turned to look where he was going and let the ball slip past his hand and out of bounds. Northwestern missed a jumper on their next possession, but got the offensive rebound and called a timeout. With 49 seconds left and an entire shot clock to work with, the Wildcats drained most of the 35 seconds before

executing their play. A backdoor cut by Northwestern was busted up by David Lighty, who scooted into the passing lane and intercepted the pass with 19 seconds left.

Ohio State didn't call a timeout, and instead chose to go the length of the court and try to steal the game in the last second. The ball was passed to Diebler on the strong side of the court, who then made a great pass to Jared's outside shoulder. Sullinger turned and made a low post move that his defender had no chance of stopping without fouling, which he did. Sullinger missed the first free-throw, but drained the second, giving Ohio State a 58-57 lead. With only three and a half seconds left, Northwestern didn't have enough time to get a good shot off, and their half court attempt bounced off the backboard as the buzzer sounded.

"We're going to celebrate our wins," Buckeyes coach Thad Matta said. "What an incredible basketball game. I think we had some spurts, but give Northwestern credit. They got a rhythm going."

Who's Next:

The Buckeyes will stay at home and host the Michigan Wolverines on Thursday, February 3. The game will be carried by ESPN and will tip-off at 7:00 PM EST.

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