



Thad Matta is in his seventh season as head basketball coach at Ohio State, and he has already etched his name in the record books in some august company. By winning his fourth Big Ten championship in his first seven seasons, Matta joins Bob Knight, Tom Izzo and Wisconsin's Walter Meanwell as the only coaches to reach that level of success that quickly.

[Matta](#) has a career mark at Ohio State of 184-56, a .767 winning percentage, which equals his overall career percentage, including his years at Butler (2000) and Xavier (2001-2004). He has been a success everywhere he has coached...taking three different teams beyond the first round of the NCAA Tournament, something that might have been expected from a guy who hails from Hoopston, Illinois.

But despite one Elite Eight appearance with Xavier, and one Final Four berth at OSU, Matta has not been known for his postseason successes. On more than one occasion his teams have been bounced from the tournament by underdogs of one breed or another, and his resume is still lacking that which Knight and Izzo have achieved...a national championship.

Matta's 28-2 Buckeyes are atop the national rankings as March arrives this season, so if he can enter the tournament in that same position, and avoid losing to an underdog in this year's event, he will have avoided losing at all. The Iowa Hawkeyes gift-wrapped the outright Big Ten championship and the top seed in the conference tournament for him with [a win over Purdue](#) on Saturday, so now all eyes will be on OSU's postseason performance in the role of favorite.

It might help to review Matta's mixed March mark....starting from the beginning....

Matta in March

[2004-05](#) - OSU finished 20-12, but did not participate in postseason play. Their self-imposed ban on NCAA and NIT tournament action was taken in anticipation of NCAA sanctions for violations committed under previous coach Jim O'Brien. The Buckeyes lost 60-49 to No. 23 Wisconsin in the quarterfinals of the Big Ten Tournament to end their season.

Matta's first year at the helm was not without its March madness however, as the Buckeyes hosted undefeated and No. 1-ranked Illinois in the regular season finale, and knocked off the Illini [65-64](#), behind a career-high 25 points from Matt Sylvester, including his 3-pointer with 5.1 seconds left in the game. (Don't know about you, but the days of Tony Stockman and Brandon Fuss-Cheatham sure seem longer ago than six years.)

[2005-06](#) - Matta led the Buckeyes to their first outright Big Ten championship since 1992, compiling a 23-4 regular season record and a 12-4 conference mark. The top-seeded Buckeyes fell just short of the Big Ten double when they dropped the final of the conference tournament to Iowa [67-62](#). Terrence Dials won the Big Ten Player of the Year award, but the big news was Ohio State's return to the NCAA Tournament after a four-year absence.

Playing as the No.2-seed in the Dayton sub-regional, the Buckeyes [got by Davidson](#) in the first round on the strength of a stellar second half performance by Ron Lewis. OSU trailed at the half, but Lewis scored 16 of his 19 points after the break to lead the Bucks to victory. In the days leading up to the tournament, the NCAA had [dropped the hammer](#)

on OSU for the O'Brien-era violations. Ohio State was required to remove all references to their Final Four trip in 1999 under O'Brien, as well as their three other postseason ventures between 1998-99 and 2001-02, the period when they had used an ineligible player. The OSU program was placed on a three-year probation.

The Buckeyes season ended right there in Dayton two days later in a disappointing [70-52 loss](#)

to Georgetown. Roy Hibbert had a big game for the 7th-seeded Hoyas, as Georgetown opened up a quick 20-10 lead, got Dials in early foul trouble, and the Buckeyes never got closer than six points in the second half. As for what might have been....the Hoyas moved on to Minneapolis for the regionals, where they dropped their next game to the eventual champion Florida Gators by a 57-53 score. Ohio State's shot at the Gators was to be delayed for a year.



[2006-07](#) - Thad Matta served notice that his Buckeyes were going to be a perennial power in the conference with his second straight outright Big Ten title, this time adding the conference tournament championship to his resume. OSU lost only three regular season games, all of them on the road to Top Ten teams (at #6 North Carolina, at #4 Florida, at #4 Wisconsin), and finished the regular season at 27-3, with a 15-1 conference record.

Matta's Bucks had a perfect March that year, going 9-0.....(part of a 22-0 streak dating to the Wisconsin loss on Jan.9) before [falling to Florida](#) in the NCAA Championship Finals on April 2.

On the way to the title game, the Buckeyes vanquished [Central Connecticut St.](#), and then [got by Xavier](#) in overtime, after Ron Lewis forced the extra session on [a memorable last-second 3-pointer](#). Then it was on to San Antonio, where they [squeaked by Tennessee](#)

and then pulled away to [down Memphis 92-76](#) behind a dominating showing by Greg Oden to reach the Final Four.

Once in Atlanta, the Buckeyes survived Greg Oden's early foul trouble in the national semis to avenge the previous year's tournament loss to Georgetown by [edging the Hoyas 67-60](#) behind Michael Conley's precocious performance. And that loss in the finals to the defending champion Gators looks a little better now that hindsight has proven that Florida group to be the indisputable Team of the Decade. This was arguably Matta's best March.

[2007-08](#) - It was to be a down year for Thad Matta, relatively speaking, having lost Greg Oden, Michael Conley and Daequan Cook to the NBA, and Ron Lewis to graduation. The team was led in scoring by Jamar Butler and Kosta Koufos, as this year's seniors were freshmen at the time, and the light had yet to come on for then-sophomore Evan Turner. The Buckeyes closed the regular season losing six of their last ten, including a four-game losing streak.

Matta did close out a disappointing (10-8) Big Ten season with March wins over No.15 Purdue and No.18 Michigan State, but then fell to the Spartans in the first round of the Big Ten Tournament and settled for an NIT bid with a 19-13 regular season record. Matta was able to salvage his season somewhat, as the Buckeyes ripped through the NIT field to win the tournament with five straight victories. The seven point [championship game win](#) over Massachusetts was their smallest margin of victory. Matta was 5-2 in March (2-0 in April), but the boast of the NIT Champions..."We're No. 66"...rang hollow in Columbus, where bigger things are expected of the Buckeyes these days.

