Buckeyes Zero In On First Big Ten Title Since 1992

In a defensive struggle very different from the teams first meeting this season , Ohio State defeated Michigan 64-54 yesterday in Columbus. The win, coupled with Illinois's 71-59 win over Iowa, puts the Buckeyes a full game up on both of those teams in the Big Ten standings with just two games left on the regular season schedule.

The Buckeyes finish off at Northwestern, and at home versus Purdue. Winning one of those games would assure at least a tie atop the year end standings for Ohio State, and winning both would lock up the team's first regular season Big Ten title since 1992. Ohio State is now 10-4 in conference play, and 21-4 overall on the season.

The Buckeyes never trailed in this defensive battle, in which both teams shot less than 40% from the floor and got next to no production from their talented guards. Terence Dials was amazing for head coach Thad Matta, scoring 22 points, grabbing 11 rebounds, and playing great defense inside all afternoon. It was the fifth straight double double for Dials, who is playing clearly inspired ball down the stretch of this, his senior season.

The game could not have provided more of a contrast from the teams first matchup a little over two weeks ago, also won by the Buckeyes, but by a 94-85 count. Ohio State was 15-24 from three in that game, and made just 4-18 in yesterday's contest. Buckeye backcourt mates Jamar Butler and Je'Kel Foster improbably combined to shoot just 1-11 from the floor for just 7 points. However, the duo was spectacular on defense all day, holding their Wolverine backcourt counterparts Daniel Horton and Dion Harris to just 5-23 shooting.

This was a crucial win, and it was great to see the Buckeyes win a tough game in which their trademark outside shooting wasn't falling. This was their toughest

game left on the schedule with a Big Ten title within grasp, and also was a potentially damaging blow to the hated Wolverines, who find themselves on the bubble of the NCAA Tournament.

Ohio State beats Michigan. Those four words sound so great strung together.