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By JAMES W. WADE III

Staff Reporter

The Ohio State University (OSU) Men's Basketball great year ended last week with a heartbrea king loss to a determined Kentucky squad. The Wildcats combined athleticism

and excellent coaching to top OSU 62-60 on a last-second shot by Brandon Knight. Brandon Knight's basket from the right wing with 5.4 seconds left gave fourth-seeded Kentucky a 2 point lead, and the Wildcats survived a three-point attempt by William Buford in the final second to upset the top-seeded Buckeyes in an NCAA East Regional semifinal in the Prudential Center.

It was a Final Four atmosphere and featured two teams that probably entered the tournament playing as well as anyone in the country. Alas, only one team can exit victoriously, and on this night, that team was wearing blue. It was the second straight loss in a regional semifinal for Ohio State, which fell a year ago
to Tennessee in St. Louis. Hopes were higher this year, with the Buckeyes finishing the regular season ranked No.l and the top overall seed in the NCAA Tournament.
But their usually effective offensive execution betrayed them down the stretch as they went four minutes between field goals as Kentucky forged ahead 56-53 on Knight's only three-point basket of the game.

After the Buckeyes regained the lead 57-56 with 2:10 to play on a rebound basket by Jared Sullinger and a driving lay up by David Lighty, two free throws and a pull-up
jumper by Deandre Liggins gave Kentucky a 60-57 lead with 36.2 seconds left. Ohio State called time out with 34.8 seconds to play, and a Jon Diebler three-pointer with 21.2 seconds left tied the score again.

Ohio State shot only 32.8 percent from the field for the game and did most of its damage on second-chance baskets and off turnovers, outscoring Kentucky by a combined 33-8 in those areas.

Ohio State started the second half fast, with threes by Buford and Lighty in the first 1:36, to take a 36-32 lead.

But Kentucky coach John Calipari called time out and the Wildcats followed with a 6-0 run to take 38-36 lead before the Buckeyes tied the game on a Sullinger rebound with
15:50 to play.

The rebound gave Sullinger his 18th double-double of the season, tying the school freshman

record by Herb Williams in the 1977-78 seasons.

The lead swung seven times during the next eight minutes, and Ohio State went to the media timeout with 7:48 to play leading 47-46 but with Kentucky's Liggins shooting two free throws when play resumed.

He made one, tying the score for the 10th time in the game. It was tied again, at 53, when Ohio State called timeout with 5:38 to play after Aaron Craft made both ends of a one-and-one after ripping a rebound away from a Kentucky player and getting fouled on the play.

Craft's free throws were the Buckeyes' only points in a span of four minutes after a jumper by Lightly in the lane with 6:54 left.

A rebound basket by Sullinger ended the drought at 2:54, bringing Ohio State within one point at 56-55, and after Lightly forced a Kentucky turnover with a held ball, Lighty gave the Buckeyes the lead again, 58,57, with 1:36 to play.

The teams went to halftime tied at 30 after Ohio State could not build on an early 16-9 advantag e helped by frequent foul calls on Kentucky. The Wildcats were called for 11 in the half and the Buckeyes made 12 of 15 free throws to Kentucky's four of four.

However, even in defeat, there was a silver lining for the team in scarlet and gray. Both Jared Sullinger and Buford pledged to come back in 2011-12, which guarantees another fine season in Columbus. Those two will be joined by Aaron Craft and Deshaun Thomas to form the nucleus of a powerful team, which will get a boost from another fine freshman class.

Look also for Jordan Sibert to become a key contributor next year. While it may not be quite as potent a unit as the one that took the court this year, it will be a fine team if everyone does return and all remain healthy.

Congratulations to a great senior class that will be tremendously missed. We won't soon forget you, David Lighty, Jon Diebler and Dallas Lauderdale.