



Kentucky's Otega Oweh, center, drives past Ohio State's Sean Stewart (13) during the first half of an NCAA college basketball game in the CBS Sports Classic, Saturday, Dec. 21, 2024, in New York. (AP Photo/Frank Franklin II)

# Pope says Cats will bounce back

**BY KEITH TAYLOR**  
Kentucky Today

L EXINGTON, Ky. (KT) — Kentucky coach Mark Pope is confident the Wildcats will respond following a disappointing 85-65 loss to Ohio State last Saturday.

"I know exactly how these guys will respond," he said. "They're going to really, really try as hard as they can to not let this destroy their couple days off. Their job is to get really fresh right now when we get back together on the 26th.

The loss dropped the Wildcats (10-2) six spots in the Associated Press Top 25 poll released on Monday. Kentucky is ranked No. 10, while the Southeastern Conference features five teams in the Top 10. Tennessee (11-0) is No. 1, followed by second-ranked Auburn (11-1). Alabama (10-2) is fifth, while Florida (12-0) is sixth.

Kentucky is in the midst of a 10-day break before ending the non-conference schedule against Brown on New Year's Eve. The Wildcats will begin preparing for their next opponent and the upcoming Southeastern Conference schedule the day after Christmas.

"I know these guys — they'll come in and it's not going to be just empty emotion," he said. "It's going to be like, 'we're going to get better, and these guys will get better, and we've just got to keep trusting what we do.'"

Pope added the Wildcats struggled to find the right answers on the defensive end

against the Buckeyes, while spilled onto the offensive side of the court.

"We had some defensive struggles tonight and then we just fell to pieces offensively, and we just went to our default, and our default is not right yet," Pope said. "Our default is still bad habits. It's not bad habits coming from a bad place in guys' hearts. It's coming from a great place. It's coming from a desperation to help our team. But we don't do that by ourselves.

"We do it disciplined, and we do it the way we do it, and we do it by making plays for each other, and that's still not our default. That's just a trust-building process."

The default, Pope said, came from the team's inability to match Ohio State's intensity level from start to finish.

"We just never could kind of find the pace of the game and we had a tough time finding the pace of the game," he said. "Bruce Thornton (30 points) really controlled the entire game the entire time in every single facet of the game. They were comfortable holding the ball, and it was hard for us to manage that, hard for us to guard in space. I have beautiful players on this team and people and terrific basketball players. We just couldn't find any way to put any energy into this game."

Kentucky guard Otega Oweh agreed.

"We just have to find ways to just have high energy at all times, even when the ball is not going in. On the defensive end I

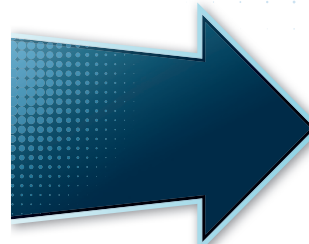
feel like we could have sparked some energy there, maybe get some easy baskets by creat-

ing turnovers. Unfortunately we didn't, but that's okay, we'll learn and get better."

**NEXT GAME:** Brown at Kentucky, 2 p.m., Dec. 31. TV/Radio: ESPNU, UK Radio Network.



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