



Ohio State (19-0) returned to their non-conference form last night by posting a 22 point win over the Iowa Hawkeyes. The Buckeyes defense suffocated the Hawkeyes attack, fueling the 70-48 blowout.

Coming into conference play, the Buckeyes were destroying their opponents by an average of 29 points a game. After an easy win over Indiana in Bloomington, the Buckeyes began a stretch of four games where their margin of victory was just under five points per contest. This Ohio State team understands that 'a win is a win', but three of the four games during that stretch came against some of the Big Ten's worst teams.

The difference in those games compared to their non-conference wins (other than familiarity of opponent) was Ohio State's defense. During non-conference play, only three of the Buckeyes' 13 opponents scored more than 60 points. The scoring totals made a dramatic spike once conference play started as each of Ohio State's first five opponents scored at least 64.

Improving the defense was a point of emphasis for the coaching staff in the practices leading up to last night's game. The Buckeyes responded by holding Iowa to a season low in points scored (48) while forcing 22 Hawkeye turnovers.

“We played harder on the defensive end tonight,” Matta said after the game. “We spent the last couple days trying to get our defense in check.” Senior guard David Lighty echoed his coaches statements, “It was our game plan to come in and play defense for 40 minutes. We have been slacking for a couple weeks.”

Maybe no one on Ohio State’s team put more pressure on Iowa’s offense than Aaron Craft. The freshman point guard was a terror for the Hawkeyes all night, constantly zipping into passing lanes and creating havoc on their ball movement. Craft set an Ohio State record for a freshman by collecting *seven* steals against Iowa.

When Craft was asked about his impressive performance, he deflected the attention to his teammates, “I think that’s a team stat. Everyone was in the gaps and putting pressure on the ball, and I appreciate that. It just kept ending up in my hands. I just happened to get the stat tonight.”

Although the defense was impressive, it wasn’t a perfect night for the No. 1 ranked team in the country. The Buckeyes were uncharacteristically careless with the ball against Iowa, committing a season-high 20 turnovers. That’s an incredible stat when you line it up next to the game’s point differential, but that didn’t make coach Matta feel any better.

“Offensively, 20 turnovers are way too many,” Matta said. “We weren’t as sharp as we needed to be.”

Despite the mounting turnovers, Ohio State was able to use a balanced attack to bury the Hawkeyes. Lighty led Ohio State with 18 points, five rebounds and four assists. Buford added 15, Sullinger had 13 points and nine rebounds, and both Lauderdale and Deshaun Thomas had nine.

The Buckeyes know they have to get a lot better as they continue through their schedule. With the added pressure of being the top ranked team in the country, the Buckeyes will have to take each opponent’s best shot. Fortunately they have veteran players on the team who have been on the top before.

“From our point of view, nothing has really been different at all,” Lighty said. “We approach the game the same way, practice the same way, just always getting better.”

The Buckeyes will need that attitude because things are about to get a lot tougher. Seven of Ohio State’s next nine opponents are currently ranked in the top 25, and four of those seven games will be played in their opponent’s arena.

### **Who’s Next?**

The Buckeyes travel to Champaign on Saturday, January 22 for a matchup against the Illinois Fighting Illini. The game will be carried by CBS and will tip-off at 12:00 PM EST.