



Top ranked Ohio State (20-0) overcame an eight point second half deficit on the road to beat No. 22 Illinois Fighting Illini 73-68 Saturday afternoon.

After taking a one point lead into the locker room at halftime, the Illini used the first eight minutes of the second half to stretch their advantage to eight, creating the largest second half deficit the Buckeyes have faced all season. The Buckeyes were stagnant offensively during that stretch, getting no production outside of six points from Jared Sullinger. Three of Ohio State's most dependable guards (Lighty, Buford and Craft) combined to shoot 6-27 from the field, and it looked as if the Buckeyes were going to suffer their first loss of the season.

"I thought we had them the whole way," Illini freshman Jereme Richmond said. "We knew at halftime they were going to make a run. They're a good team, but I felt like we had them."

They did have the Buckeyes until Ohio State's freshman took over. After Illinois' Mike Davis converted a layup that put them up by eight, the Buckeyes tightened down defensively. Aaron Craft in particular was spectacular when guarding Demetri McCamey, one of the Big Ten's best guards. Craft flustered McCamey all afternoon, holding the point guard who usually averages 16 points and seven assists to a measly five points and five assists.

The Buckeyes went on a 14-0 run, with nine of those points coming from the freshman trio of Sullinger, Craft and Deshaun Thomas. After two Diebler free throws, Thomas came off the bench and hit two *huge* 3-pointers that completely swung the momentum back in Ohio State's favor.

Mike Tisdale talked about Illinois' second half collapse, "We started playing a little tentative, they turned up the pressure," Tisdale said. "They made plays, we didn't."

The Buckeyes used their fourteen unanswered points to gain an eight point lead, and although the Illini made a push in the final minute, the Buckeyes held on to win their toughest conference game of the season.

The unquestioned star of the game was Jared Sullinger. The freshman was an absolute monster inside, scoring 27 points while grabbing 16 rebounds. The Illini had no answer for him down low, and with Sullinger using his body to get great position, Illinois had no option but to foul him. Sullinger was 13-15 from the line, and consistently hit pressure freebies during Ohio State's comeback.

"Pride, heart and composure," Sullinger said after the game. "Those three things -- we really showed a lot of composure."

John Diebler was Ohio State's second leading scorer with 15 points (3-5 from the 3-point line), Lighty had nine, Thomas finished with eight and Buford had seven.

Illinois' bench paced their team in the first half, scoring 22 of their 34 points before the break. Jereme Richmond was a big reason why -- the freshman scored 18 points while grabbing 10 rebounds. Tisdale had 15 and Mike Davis finished with 11, but outside of those three, no Illini player scored more than eight points. Illinois outrebounded Ohio State and shot a better percentage from the field, but the Buckeyes still managed a five point win.

Diebler came away with a lot of respect for Illinois, "They're going to win a lot of games and do really well in the tournament. For us to come out here and escape with a win is big."

Who's Next?

The Buckeyes will host No. 13 Purdue Boilermakers on Tuesday, January 25. The game will tip off at 9:00 PM EST and will be carried by ESPN.