



After suffering their only loss of the season to Wisconsin on Saturday, the Ohio State Buckeyes (25-1) used a 23 point performance from William Buford and great play from Lighty and Craft to beat Michigan State 71-61 Tuesday night.

It was a strange game when you look at the box score and see Michigan State shot a blazing 57% from the field to Ohio State's 43%. Adding to that, reserve point guard Aaron Craft had more rebounds (three) than Jared Sullinger (two). The Buckeyes were thoroughly outrebounded 29-19 and Michigan State's bench outscored Ohio State's by 20. So how did the Buckeyes win?

Michigan State coach Tom Izzo offered an answer, "We did just about everything I wanted to do except we turned over the ball and didn't get to the free throw line."

Izzo was right. Michigan State turned the ball over 19 times and the Buckeyes converted those mistakes into 23 points. Combine that with the difference at the charity stripe -- Ohio State was plus-18 at the line against Sparty as the Buckeyes went 23-29 from the line (Michigan State was just 5-6), and Ohio State's 10 point win starts to make sense.

The most important thing for Ohio State coach Thad Matta was seeing his team react positively

to their first loss of the season, "You have to be careful at this stage of doing too much in terms of the quick turnaround. I think the message was we wanted to see how we were going to come back and respond to losing," Matta said. "I thought they did a good job."

The first half was a back and forth battle that had nine ties and 11 lead changes. Both teams started sloppy, combining to miss six of their first nine shots while committing four turnovers, but the offenses started executing midway through the half. Foul trouble was an issue for both teams as Durrell Summers picked up two fouls in the first minute of the game and Jared Sullinger got called for his second after just 11 minutes of playing time. Sullinger's foul trouble made him a non-factor in the first half as he finished with just four points and one rebound through 20 minutes.

With Sullinger struggling, William Buford stepped up and paced the Buckeyes early. The junior swing-man had 14 points, four rebounds and two assists in the first half. In fact, no other Buckeyes outside of Buford or Lighty scored until the nine and a half minute mark. Taking away Buford's contributions, the rest of the team shot a dismal 37% from the field in the first. Compare that to Michigan State's 63% field goal shooting (15-24) and it's bizarre to think Ohio State took a 35-34 lead into the locker room at half time.

"He was very down and focused going into the game," Matta said of Buford. "He had a good look in his eye. He made a couple shots early and got rolling."

The second half had a different energy. Although the teams traded baskets and leads through the first five minutes, the Buckeyes were able to jump ahead by six with contributions from Lighty, Buford and Diebler. For a moment it seemed like Michigan State's Kalin Lucas was going to do what Jordan Taylor did to the Buckeyes on Saturday when Lucas scored 10 quick points for the Spartans. Using a similar strategy as the Badgers, Michigan State used high-screens from their big-men to try and free Lucas up for a good shot. Instead of going under the screens like he did against Wisconsin, Craft battled and went over the top, wreaking havoc on the Spartans game plan. Craft was a nuisance on defense all night, which was clear on the postgame stat sheet that credited him with four steals.

With just under six minutes left and the Buckeyes up 58-53, Michigan State had the ball as the shot clock was winding down. An errant pass put Michigan State center Garrick Sherman in a bad position on the baseline, and as he was falling out of bounds, Sherman threw a desperation pass to the top of the key when no Spartan player was around to receive it. Thinking the play

was dead, Michigan State's guards didn't pursue the ball. Aaron Craft then raced down the court and picked up the loose ball just before it went out of bounds and laid it in. Craft was fouled as he made the bucket and the sold out Value City Arena erupted. After converting at the line and cashing in the three-point play, Ohio State had all the momentum and cruised to the 10 point victory.

Jon Diebler talked about the play after the game, "That was a heck of a play and a sign of someone wanting to win no matter what. Aaron doesn't take plays off and that one led to a big bucket for us."

"I think for our guys, they're such great kids, you feel for them when they lose," Matta said. "There was a challenge tonight. I honestly wanted to see how they would respond. I thought they did a pretty good job of that."

Who's Next?

The Buckeyes hit the road to take on the No. 11 Purdue Boilermakers this Sunday, February 20. The game will tip-off at 1:00 PM EST and will be televised by CBS.