



Suffering their second loss in three games, the Ohio State Buckeyes needed a victory over Illinois to maintain their lead over Purdue in the conference race and to keep their chances for a top seed in the NCAA tournament alive. The Ohio State Buckeyes (26-2) rebounded in a big way against Illinois, defeating the Fighting Illini 89-70 in Value City Arena.

After building a 15 point halftime lead, the Buckeyes started the second half sluggishly, missing six of their first seven shots while committing two turnovers. The Illini turned Ohio State's rough start into an 11-2 run, cutting the Buckeyes' lead to six. With momentum tilting Illinois' direction, David Lighty stepped up and took over the game. The fifth-year senior scored 13 straight points for Ohio State and terrorized Illinois on defense, notching three steals during his five minute scoring outburst. The Buckeyes only allowed one Illinois basket during the stretch, turning what could have been a competitive game into a rout.

Lighty struggled with his shot in the first half, but exploded in the second for 17 points in the final 20 minutes. He talked about the difference in his production after the game, "I had some good looks in the first half, but they weren't going in so I just stayed aggressive and they went down in the second." He later added, "I think they went to a triangle and two style defense to chase Jon [Diebler] around, and just started leaving me open."

Lighty finished the game with 21 points, four rebounds, two assists and six steals. His all around performance on both sides of the court left Illinois coach Bruce Webber wishing he had a guy like Lighty on his roster, "If you have a David Lighty, a heart and soul that comes everyday that does what you need, we don't have that toughness and leadership." Webber continued his praise of Lighty, "I think he's the MVP, but probably won't get it... Nothing against Jared Sullinger, he's tremendous, but Lighty is their heart and soul and he's the reason they win."

Another reason the Buckeyes won was their amazing efficiency on offense. Ohio State shot a blazing 53% from the field (35-66) and connected on seven of their 15 3-point attempts. Even more impressive, the Buckeyes only committed three turnovers in the game and went the entire first half without coughing the ball up. These were welcome numbers when compared to the Purdue game where Ohio State shot just 38% from the field with 18 turnovers.

It was a complete effort from the Buckeyes as Buford scored 17 points, Diebler had 13 and Sullinger added 12 and 11 rebounds. Ohio State's reserves chipped in as well as Craft scored 12 while dishing out six assists, and Deshaun Thomas finished with six points in limited minutes. It added up to an 89 point effort for the Buckeyes, their highest scoring total against a Big Ten opponent this year.

On the other end of the court, the Fighting Illini were lighting it up from the 3-point line. Illinois started the game *red-hot* behind the arch, hitting eight of their first nine 3-pointers. In fact, 24 of their first 30 points came from three's. When looking at that stat alone, it's hard to believe Ohio State not only survived that first half onslaught, but took a 15 point lead into the locker room. The Buckeyes were able to do so because of nine Illinois turnovers, which Ohio State turned into 18 first half points. And because the Illini continued to give away possessions, the Buckeyes took 12 more shots than Illinois during the first half.

It was back and forth for much of the second half as each team went on multiple runs. Illinois started with an 11-2 run before Lighty led the Buckeyes to a 13-2 response. Illinois answered with 7-0 run of their own, but Deshaun Thomas stopped the bleeding with a 3-pointer and a three point play on consecutive possessions, giving Ohio State six unanswered points. After Illinois scored five quick points, the Buckeyes pulled away to close out the game with a 19 point victory.

"Yes, we've lost two. And as Coach told us, it's not the end of the world," Diebler said after the

game. "The one thing we've realized is we still have a one-game lead in the Big Ten. That's our first goal right now. We're trying to win a championship right now, that's how we approached this game."

Who's Next?

The Buckeyes will host the Indiana Hoosiers on Sunday, February 27. The game will tip-off at 4:00 PM EST and will be televised by CBS.