



The Ohio State Buckeyes (27-2) dominated the Indiana Hoosiers in Columbus Sunday night, posting a 15 point halftime lead before cruising to an 82-61 victory.

The Buckeyes were led by a strong performance off the bench by freshman Deshaun Thomas. When Sullinger and Lighty were forced to sit in the first half because of foul trouble, Thomas came in and provided a huge lift for Ohio State. The freshman scored 16 first half points on 6-7 shooting while grabbing four rebounds.

“It felt great,” Thomas said after the game. “Every day in practice Coach Matta was telling me we need you, and after today I’m proud of myself and my teammates.”

Thomas finished the game with a team-high 22 points and four rebounds, but it was his first half performance that left the biggest impact on the game. Indiana had started the game relatively hot, connecting on four of their first six shots before going cold. After scoring eight quick points, the Hoosiers missed 14 of their next 16 shots in a dismal offensive performance. Despite Indiana’s lack of production, Ohio State wasn’t able to pull away early. The Buckeyes fell victim to some whistle-happy refs, and Jared Sullinger was called for his second foul three minutes into the game.

At the 10 minute mark, Ohio State had just three made field goals and only 13 points. With the Buckeyes struggling offensively, head coach Thad Matta went to his bench and inserted Thomas midway through the half. That decision proved to be a very good one.

After a Lauderdale dunk and a made free throw from Diebler, Thomas went off. The talented freshman poured in 14 straight points for the Buckeyes, scoring from all areas of the court. He hit two 3-pointers during the stretch in addition to getting to the foul line, snatching offensive rebounds and converting down low on tough layups in traffic. His scoring capped off a 17-2 run for Ohio State that turned an eight point lead into a 30-13 advantage with just under five minutes to play. In three and a half minutes, Thomas had outscored Indiana's entire first half output to that point (14-13).

After scoring just 13 points total in his last seven games combined, Thad Matta talked about Thomas' confidence, "He's got such a natural way of finding areas. He has never wavered," Matta said. "The work that he puts in before and after practice... He warms up quick."

Thomas later added, "It was just about getting to my spots and hitting the shots. After the first two threes, I could tell that I was getting warm."

It wasn't just the offense, but Thomas' defense that helped the Buckeyes shut down the Hoosiers. Indiana made just nine field goals in the first half and finished shooting 36% from the field. Indiana had just two assists against nine turnovers going into the locker room, and their inefficiency on offense led to a 38-23 halftime deficit.

The second half started much like the first half ended for Ohio State. The Buckeyes outscored the Hoosiers 13-4 in the first four minutes of the half. With the Buckeyes up 51-27, the game was never competitive and Ohio State cruised to the 82-61 victory.

Freshman star Jared Sullinger didn't have a game we're used to seeing. Sullinger scored just five points and grabbed seven rebounds in very limited minutes. After picking up his second foul three minutes into the game, Sullinger rode the bench until halftime. With the score getting out of hand in the second, Sullinger only played nine minutes before being pulled. His 12 minutes of playing time and five points were both season lows.

Ohio State showed its balance on offense without Sullinger as Buford scored 15, Dibler and Lighty had 11 while Craft and Lauderdale both scored eight. Craft, in addition to his eight points, dished out six assists (to just one turnover) and notched six steals.

With Duke falling to Virginia Tech on Saturday night, Thad Matta knows his team is one of the two likely candidates to reclaim the top spot (the other being Kansas). The coach addressed this after the game, "It comes along with it. What I always say is that we really want to be there in the end and put ourselves in that position."

Who's Next?

The Buckeyes travel to State College on Tuesday, March 1 to play the Penn State Nittany Lions. The game will be televised by the Big Ten Network and will tip-off at 9:00 PM EST.