



After sitting for two games with back spasms, Jared Sullinger made his return to the Ohio State basketball team Wednesday night in their game against South Carolina Upstate. Despite coming off the bench at his own request, Ohio State's preseason All-American gave the Buckeyes 12 points and 10 rebounds in their 82-58 rout of the Spartans.

Jared didn't look like the dominant player we've grown used to watching against USC Upstate, at least early in the first half, and he was asked about it after the game, "I was tired -- two weeks off is a killer," Jared said. "I did a lot of work on the treadmill these last few days, but I was still very out of shape tonight."

Lucky for him, one of his teammates fueled Ohio State's offense. Deshaun Thomas scored a game-high 23 points, one point shy of tying his career high, while adding three assists and two rebounds. Buford scored 14 points and Ravenel had nine in an effort where the Buckeyes shot 56% from the floor (29-51). On the other side, the Spartans shot 45% from the field in a decent effort against one of the best defenses in the country -- but 25 turnovers was the difference in a game that could've been a lot closer with the way it started.

It was a strange first half for the Buckeyes as they started hot, struggled throughout and finished strong. With Sullinger on the bench at tip-off, Evan Ravenel got the start as well as the first two baskets for Ohio State. After missing his first shot, Deshaun Thomas connected on his next three and helped Ohio State build a 12-5 lead. USC Upstate was having trouble handling Ohio State's athleticism early and through five minutes, the Spartans had as many turnovers (five) as

points.

With just under 15 minutes left in the first half, Jared Sullinger entered the game. Unexpectedly, the Buckeyes began to struggle with his return. After taking care of the ball to start the game, the Buckeyes turned it over six times in a seven minute span. Sullinger struggled to find his groove and missed his first three shots while only collecting two rebounds through eight minutes of play. During that stretch, the Spartans put together a 14-3 run that gave them a four point lead.

“They were doing some things defensively that were causing us trouble,” Thomas said. “But the coaches kept stressing execution and that shots would come from it.”

The coaches were right. With eight minutes left in the half, Sullinger started shaking the rust off. The sophomore big man scored six points in the closing minutes of the first half, four of which came from aggressive inside moves. Thomas and Buford chipped in as well, helping the Buckeyes close out the half on a 22-8 run. Through 20 minutes, Ohio State was 52% from the floor on 13-25 shooting. The Spartans were able to shoot 45% against the Buckeyes while outrebounding them 14-9. Like Ohio State, USC Upstate struggled with turnovers, coughing the ball up 13 times. This helped the Buckeyes enter the locker room at half time with a 37-28 lead.

“From our perspective, we played 18 good minutes in the first half,” Spartans coach Eddie Payne said. “In the long run, their game caught up to us, with outcoaching, athleticism and more experienced players.”

The second half was a wild departure from the first. Both teams came out and put points on the board quickly. It was back and forth for the first five minutes as the Spartans matched every bucket Ohio State scored. Torrey Craig, who finished the game with 20 points, kept USC Upstate in the game for as long as he could.

After effectively playing the Buckeyes even through seven minutes of the second half, the Buckeyes were finally able to pull away. Deshaun Thomas and William Buford helped the Buckeyes go on a 9-2 run that put Ohio State up by 16. From that point on, Matta and the coaching staff began to substitute freely.

“We beat a very good basketball team tonight,” Matta said after the game. “When they took the clock down a little bit, moved the ball around and didn’t shoot real quick, it lowered their possessions.”

The Buckeyes travel to Columbia this Saturday to play the South Carolina Gamecocks. The game will tip-off at 12:00 PM EST and will be televised by ESPN.

### **Quick Hits:**

- When Sullinger was asked whether he felt limited at all in his first action since suffering back spasms, he responded, “No not at all. I’m back to full health.”

- Sullinger's double-double against South Carolina Upstate was the fifth of the season and the 23rd of his career.

- Ohio State freshman Sam Thompson had a breakout game for the Buckeyes. Called upon to guard the Spartans' best player, Thompson came in and had a fantastic block from behind on a fast break situation for SCUS. On offense, Thompson had two thunderous dunks, one coming from a great backdoor cut along the baseline. He also showed a decent shooting touch on a nice start-and-stop mid-range jumper.

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