



What an unexpectedly close and entertaining game.

The Purdue Boilermakers came into Columbus tied for sixth place in the conference to take on the league leading and No. 3 Ohio State Buckeyes Tuesday night. It was supposed to be an easy layup for the Buckeyes before playing the conferences second place team in Michigan State on Saturday, but the Boilermakers came in and gave Ohio State a fight it barely survived.

With under five minutes to play, a Purdue free throw tied the game at 73. Ohio State's best offensive player (Jared Sullinger) and best defensive player (Aaron Craft) were on the bench with four fouls. The crowd was caught between that anxious and expectant roar while desperately looking for someone to step up for the Buckeyes.

William Buford answered their call.

The only senior on the team curled and caught a nice pass from freshman point guard Shannon Scott and drilled a 15 foot jumper. Purdue's Kelsey Barlow drove the lane on the next possession, but his shot was emphatically blocked by Sam Thompson. It only took 10 seconds for the Buckeyes to reverse the court and Buford hit another jumper to put Ohio State up by four. The Buckeyes got a stop on the other end and looked to be struggling to find a good look on offense. That's when Buford ran around a perfectly set screen and nailed a dagger 3-pointer that put Ohio State up by seven.

"My teammates were able to give me the ball and set great screens for me," Buford said after the game. "Fortunately I was able to knock them down so I owe it to my teammates."

That stretch lasted just two minutes but when it was all said and done, the Buckeyes had finally taken control of a game that had hung in the balance for 38 minutes. The final two minutes came down to free throw attempts, which Ohio State converted and cashed in for an 87-84 victory.

Ohio State coach Thad Matta was happy his team found a way to win a close game, "I like the fact that we made the plays we had to make down the stretch to win the game... Some way we found ways to challenge shots, found ways to come up with rebounds," Matta said. "I like that we made our free throws down the stretch - that was big."

Purdue came into the game as the worst defensive team in the conference, so Ohio State's efficiency on offense wasn't surprising. The Buckeyes shot a blistering 52% from the field Tuesday night and connected on nine of their 16 3-pointers. Buford led the Buckeyes with a career-high 29 points with seven rebounds, Sullinger added 18 points and six boards while both Deshaun Thomas and Aaron Craft chipped in 13.

It was Purdue's success on offense that came as a surprise. Ohio State came into the game as the top defensive team in the Big Ten, but you wouldn't have guessed that with they way Purdue dissected the Buckeyes. The Boilermakers spread the Buckeyes out and ran high pick-and-rolls effectively all game long. Purdue scored a season-high 84 points against the Buckeyes while also shooting 52% from the field. Ohio State didn't get one steal during the game and only forced four turnovers, its lowest number in 15 seasons. The Boilermakers made 11 of their 19 3-pointers, fueled by a career game from D.J. Byrd who hit seven three's on his way to 24 points.

Purdue coach Matt Painter talked about his teams success on offense, "We made some shots; we don't shoot like that every game. We were able to open it up and play smaller with more skilled guys. I thought [Kelsey] Barlow did a good job of getting away from Craft," Painter said. "When you are playing against the bigs and not one-on-one with Aaron Craft, your percentages of making plays are going to be higher."

It was business as usual for Ohio State to start of the game. Just like they did against Wisconsin, the Buckeyes went inside to Sullinger early and he converted the games first two buckets. A 3-pointer from Craft gave the Buckeyes a 7-0 advantage, but Purdue responded with seven unanswered points of their own. The Buckeyes answered back with a quick 7-2 run, but Purdue just wouldn't go away. D.J. Byrd exploded early, hitting all five of his 3-point attempts on his way to 17 first half points. That, along with Ohio State's inability to defend the pick-and-roll Purdue runs so well with speedy point guard Lewis Jackson, made a rough start for Buckeyes.

It appeared as if Ohio State had really taken control of the game with a 15-5 run that put them up by 10 late in the first, but Purdue took advantage of some bad defense and even worse free throw shooting from the Buckeyes. The Boilermakers closed the half on a 15-4 spurt as both teams went into the locker room knotted at 40.

The second half was played in a much tighter window as neither team was able to pull away. In the second half alone, the lead changed hands 14 times and the game was tied 11 times. That changed for good once Buford took over late, and the team feels like it can use this game as a lesson.

"Every game in the Big Ten is a dog fight," Craft said. "I think it's great to see we were able to find a way to win even though they shot the ball the way they did."

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