



The Gonzaga Bulldogs had Jared Sullinger and Ohio State on the ropes in Pittsburgh yesterday.

A 13-3 run late in the game by Gonzaga made Ohio State's 10 point lead evaporate into nothing with four minutes left. Sullinger had been stonewalled by Gonzaga's frontcourt all game -- he had no points in the paint through 36 minutes -- but that didn't stop the Buckeyes from playing through him down the stretch.

With the game tied at 61, Aaron Craft drifted to Sullinger's side of the court and got him the ball. Sullinger hesitated, made his move and got his first bucket against Robert Sacre, who for much of the game altered or blocked every shot attempt Sullinger made in the paint. Two possessions later, Craft got the ball to Sullinger in the exact same spot and he produced the same result. Gonzaga couldn't make the same kind of plays on the other end -- they had multiple 3-pointers rim in-and-out down the stretch -- and the Buckeyes went on to earn a place in the sweet 16 with a 73-66 victory.

"Right down the stretch we wanted to get the ball in [Sullinger's] hands," Ohio State coach Thad Matta said. "He's a winner. We'll ride that down the stretch."

Sullinger might be a winner, but Aaron Craft was the one who put Ohio State in the position to win yesterday. The sophomore point guard played one of his best games as a Buckeye against Gonzaga, scoring 17 points with 10 assists to go along with his bullish, lockdown defense.

"Tonight there were open lanes," Craft said. "I found some. Did a good job of getting in and

letting my teammates make plays, as well.”

While Craft led the charge, Sullinger and Deshaun Thomas both scored 18 points for the Buckeyes. Although Sullinger didn't have his way in the paint, he started the game with effective shooting on the perimeter and got to the free-throw line consistently down the stretch. Thomas was his usual self on offense, getting after the glass (he had five offensive rebounds) while going 7-15 from the field. The Buckeyes were efficient on offense, hitting on 47% of their shots while limiting Gonzaga to just 39% shooting in the game.

In Matta's eyes, it was Ohio State's poise down the stretch that helped them earn the victory, "We didn't shoot the ball particularly well in the second half, but we knocked the shots down. And everybody made a big shot here and there."

Sullinger got things going early for the Buckeyes, hitting two 3-pointers in the opening minutes to give Ohio State a 6-4 lead. The two teams traded blows as most of Gonzaga's offense came in the paint while Ohio State surprisingly attacked from the perimeter. Seven of Ohio State's first eight shots came behind the arch and the Buckeyes drilled four of them. Craft and Sullinger paced the Buckeyes through the first 10 minutes, but Sullinger picked up his second foul 11 minutes into the game and was forced to sit until half time.

That's when momentum went Gonzaga's way. The Bulldogs were killing Ohio State on the glass, specifically on offense as they snagged nine offensive boards through 20 minutes. Combining that with Ohio State's seven turnovers allowed the Bulldogs to bully their way to a 27-20 lead

Ohio State desperately needed someone to step up, and Deshaun Thomas answered the call. The sophomore forward went on a tear and scored 12 straight points for the Buckeyes to tie the game at 35. Ohio State was scorching from the field, connecting on 61% of their shots while hitting six 3-pointers in the first. The Buckeyes' defense tightened as the half came to a close and an Aaron Craft layup in the closing second -- which capped a 16-7 run -- gave Ohio State a 39-37 lead going into halftime.

The Buckeyes kept their foot on the gas coming out of the locker room, starting the second half with a 13-5 run. It seemed like Ohio State was just a few possessions away from blowing the game wide open, but Gonzaga came back with five unanswered before both teams started trading baskets.

The Buckeyes built another 10 point lead late in the half behind the strong play of Thomas and Sullinger at the free throw line, but that's when the Bulldogs answered with the 13-3 run. It was a bold decision by Matta to put the game in Sullinger's hands at that point, but the All-American delivered Ohio State a victory and its third-consecutive spot in the Sweet 16.

"We were keeping our composure," William Buford said. "Even though they were scoring, doesn't mean we should let that get us down on the offensive or defensive end. We knew we had to knock it down and eventually play harder."

The Buckeyes will travel to Boston to play the winner of the Florida State - Cincinnati game on Thursday, March 22.

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