Ohio State struggled early -- possibly hung-over from Christmas break or its loss to Kansas last Saturday -- but the Buckeyes responded in a big way with an 87-44 rout over Chicago State.

Deshaun Thomas scored a game-high 17 points, LaQuinton Ross scored 15 and a trio of guards (Aaron Craft, Lenzelle Smith, Jr. and Amedeo Della Valle) scored in double digits to help Ohio State secure its third 40-point victory of the season.

After shooting a miserable 31 percent in their eight-point loss to Kansas, the Buckeyes scorched the nets against Chicago State by shooting 57 percent from the field.

"When we made our first shot today, I turned to the coaches and said, 'Hey, we're 1 for 1. That's 1,000 percent. This is awesome,'" Ohio State coach Thad Matta said.

Craft elaborated, “Our shooting was better this game compared to the last few games when you look at our percentages. We are taking our shooting game a lot more seriously because we can not expect to make our shots during games without practicing them more.”

Ohio State’s defense was equally stellar. The Cougars shot just 27 percent from the field against the Buckeyes and were outrebounded 44-18. Ohio State tightened up in the second half as well, holding Chicago State to just one of eight shooting from behind the arch after they hit half of their ten triples in the first.

“It has been a process of getting guys to understand and appreciate what it takes to get your mind ready to play every single minute you take the floor,” Matta said after the game.

Matta spent most of the first half waiting for his team to snap out of its Christmas-break funk.

Chicago State shot the ball very well from the perimeter to start the game, hitting three of its first four 3-pointers to build a 9-7 lead. The Buckeyes stubbornly shot the ball from outside despite

holding a huge advantage in the paint, allowing the Cougars to keep things close.

Ohio State continued to struggle, and midway through the first, the Cougars had battled their way to a 14-14 tie. The Buckeyes were shooting the ball well, but had a hard time increasing the pace of the game against Chicago State's zone.

"I'm sure we did surprise 'em," Chicago State coach Tracy Dildy said of his team's surprising switch to the zone. "I'm sure they watched a lot of film on us and they hardly saw any zone" defense."

It was a solid strategy until Ohio State figured it out.

The Buckeyes dumped the ball inside, triggering a 19-5 run that blew the game wide open. Ohio State outscored Chicago State 24-4 in the paint through 20 minutes, and despite a quick spurt from the Cougars to end the half, the Buckeyes took a 37-24 lead into the locker room at halftime.

"It is something we emphasize, trying to get the ball in the paint," Matta said. "Today presented some avenues for us, but we also missed some opportunities. We did get better as the game went on."

The second half started much like the first half ended. Ohio State connected on its first four shots from the field as the lead ballooned to 21. The Buckeyes temporarily slowed down, missing eight straight shots, but Cleveland State only managed to shave four points out of Ohio State's lead.

That eliminated any chance of a comeback as the Buckeyes cruised to a 43-point victory.

Who's Next?

The Buckeyes start conference play this Wednesday in Columbus with a matchup against the Nebraska Cornhuskers. The game will tip-off at 6:30 ET and be televised by the Big Ten Network.

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