The No. 15 Ohio State Buckeyes blitzed the unbeaten and No. 2 Michigan Wolverines early Sunday afternoon, racing out to a seemingly insurmountable 21-point lead in the first half.

It was barely enough.

The Wolverines surged late, rallying from a huge deficit to tie the game in the second half, but the Buckeyes made enough plays down the stretch to earn a 56-53 victory.

The game played out a lot like Ohio State's losses to Duke and Kansas, where the Buckeyes raced out to an early lead before faltering in the second half. This time around, though, the Buckeyes' defense stepped up to provide Ohio State with its first win over a top-10 team this season.

"I hope we get confidence from this victory moving forward," Ohio State coach Thad Matta said. "This game signifies the halfway point of the season, but we've still got a lot of games left and we have to continue to improve."

The Buckeyes (13-3, 3-1 Big Ten) were fueled by another solid performance from Deshaun Thomas, who scored a game-high 20 points to go along with four rebounds. Both Aaron Craft and Sam Thompson chipped in nine points while big men Amir Williams and Evan Ravenel each scored six. The Buckeyes shot 44 percent from the field and 33 percent from behind the arch.

But if you had asked anyone after the game, Ohio State's defense was the difference.

The Buckeyes' held Michigan (16-1, 3-1) to a season-low 53 points Sunday afternoon. The Wolverines shot just 38 percent from the field while committing an uncharacteristic 13 turnovers. Trey Burke was harassed by Craft, going just four of 13 from the field for 15 points with four assists against four turnovers.

According to Matta, Craft wanted the challenge, "I didn't say anything to him because I knew he was going to play at the level we needed him to in order to win. During a timeout he even said, 'stop helping [on Burke], I'll do the job.'"

The Buckeyes did most of their damage early. After Burke connected on a 3-pointer to open the game, Ohio State exploded with 16 unanswered points. The run was fueled by five Michigan turnovers, allowing the Buckeyes to get out in the open court and score in transition. The surge continued through most of the first half as Ohio State built a 29-8 lead with just under seven minutes to play in the first half.

That's when Michigan finally woke up.

Spike Albrecht gave the Wolverines a huge lift off the bench, scoring seven quick points in the closing minutes of the half. Michigan slowly began to chip away at the lead, using a 14-5 run to make it a 34-22 game going into the locker room at halftime.

The two teams went back and forth to start the second, but Michigan's zone defense was giving Ohio State fits. The Buckeyes missed 13 of their first 17 shots from the field in the second half, allowing the Wolverines to slowly erase the deficit.

With just six minutes left to play, Glen Robinson III connected on a 3-pointer to tie the game at 46.

Michigan coach John Beilein talked about Michigan's huge rally, "We said there's only one way we're going to do this: stop-by-stop; possession-by-possession."

With the game hanging in the balance and the offense in shambles, Matta forced the ball inside. It was a winning decision.

The Buckeyes got back-to-back buckets from Ravenel, and Thomas used a nice baseline move to get to the rim for an easy layup. The six-point burst was what Ohio State needed to put the pressure on Michigan, and the Wolverines buckled. Michigan settled for six straight 3-pointers down the stretch, four of which were very bad shots, and the Buckeyes converted at the free-throw line to seal the three-point victory.

"Defensively we made stops and we also got big rebounds when we needed them," Matta said. "Those were the biggest difference in this game."

Who's Next?

The Buckeyes will hit the road this Saturday to play the No. 22 Michigan State Spartans. The game tips off at 6:00 p.m. EST and will be televised by ESPN.

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