SportsTime Ohio basketball play-by-play announcer Michael Reghi asked, as the second overtime between Ohio and Miami started Sunday night, “How is this to get the two months of conference basketball started? Can you imagine two more months of this?”

Rehgi said a mouthful. Heated rivals Ohio and Miami hooked up in an instant classic to kick off MAC play for both schools, with the RedHawks needing three overtimes to dispatch the Bobcats, 92-88, at the Convocation Center in Athens. If this game is any indication of what we can expect from MAC contests this season we are in for a thrilling ride.

Julian Mavunga and Antonio Ballard both played all 55 minutes for the RedHawks while D.J. Cooper logged a team-high 52 minutes for Ohio. There were 16 ties in the contest, and Miami’s largest lead of the game was eight points early in the second half. The Bobcats’ biggest lead was seven points late in the first half. It was not until :10 remaining in the final overtime that either team had more than a one-possession lead in any of the overtime sessions.

The overtime sessions were up-and-down affairs, with numerous players from each side making huge plays. Here are some of the highlights:

- With under a minute remaining in the first overtime and Ohio trailing 73-70, D.J. Cooper

ripped a steal away on one side of the floor, then nailed a step-back triple over Quinten Rollins to knot the game up at 73-73 and send the contest to a second overtime.

- Antonio Ballard drew the fifth foul on T.J. Hall with 3:58 remaining in the second overtime with a strong move from well under the basket. He powered the ball back into Hall, hit the shot off the glass and connected on the free throw to put Miami up, 76-74.

- With 1:46 remaining in the second OT Ivo Baltic tied the game and drew the fifth foul on Nick Winbush with a strong spin move and lay-up. He connected on the free throw to knot the game at 79-79.

- With :53 remaining in the final overtime Baltic tied the game for the final time with a jumper from the elbow.

- Orlando Williams gave the RedHawks the lead for good with a deep triple from the left wing that gave Miami an 88-85 lead.

The Bobcats pulled within a bucket with five seconds remaining, but the RedHawks hit their free throws down the stretch to seal the deal.

D.J. Cooper was, again, phenomenal for Ohio…but a troubling tendency might be emerging regarding the sophomore point guard. Earlier this season, in Ohio's 112-107 quadruple overtime loss to St. Bonaventure, Cooper scored 43 points, but he faded down the stretch. In the first overtime against the Bonnies, Cooper chipped in 10 points. However, he missed his final shot of the first overtime – a 3-pointer that would have won the game – and followed up by missing his next eight from the field. Cooper was 0-2 from the floor in the second overtime, 0-4 in the third and 3-7 in the fourth as St. Bonaventure pulled away.

In the overtime periods against Miami Cooper scored all six Bobcats in the first extra period, but was just 1-6 from the floor and 1-4 from the line the rest of the way. Cooper, again only a sophomore that stands just 5-foot-8, might need to get physically stronger to be able to hit his shot late in games. His combined 4-for-19 in the final three overtimes against the Bonnies and

the final two against Miami did not help the Bobcats get over the hump.

Miami's Antonio Ballard was the best player on the floor Sunday. He scored a career-high 26 points, pulled down 12 rebounds, hit 8-of-12 from the floor and 8-of-9 from the line in his 55 minutes on the floor. Ballard also connected on both of his 3-point attempts. Nick Winbush also had a productive evening for the RedHawks before fouling out. He scored 19 points and had nine rebounds while shooting 6-of-12 from the floor and 4-of-8 from beyond the arc.

The Bobcats have a difficult two games this week against a pair of the MAC East's elite teams. They travel to Akron Wednesday before returning to Athens to host Kent State Saturday. The RedHawks will look to continue a strong opening to their MAC season by hosting Buffalo Wednesday and heading to Bowling Green Saturday.