It wasn't pretty at all, but Ohio coach John Groce will take it.

His Bobcats, seeded third in the 2012 First Energy Mid-American Conference Tournament, misfired on 19 of their first 22 shots from the floor and led seventh-seeded Toledo just 26-24 at halftime. Ohio was out of rhythm after a six-day layoff and Toledo, coming off a 75-72 win over Central Michigan the night before, took advantage of the Bobcats' rust...leading for a good portion of the first half.

Toledo defeated the Bobcats in their only meeting this season, 77-73 at the Stroh Center in Toledo, and appeared to be the more confident team heading into the locker room.

That confidence didn't last very long and, a little over three minutes into the second half, Ohio had taken control.

The Bobcats opened the second half on an 11-0 run to grab their biggest lead of the night. Although Toledo made a few runs at them late in the game, Ohio never surrendered control of the contest in rolling to its school record-tying 25th win of the season.

"We always talk about the importance of the first four minutes," Groce said. "I thought as big a reason for us winning the game as anything was the first four minutes of the second half."

Ohio gave up just 61.7 points per game during the regular season...third in the MAC and 33rd in the nation. Though the first half was a nightmare on the offensive end for the Bobcats, they did not let their offensive struggles affect them on the defensive side of the floor.

"The thing I'm most proud of is our defense, which is ranked 33rd in the country. It showed up at a high level in the first half and it allowed us to withstand some of the offensive woes," Groce said. "We didn't shoot it particularly well and our execution wasn't very good early, but we were able to execute at the defensive end and that really shows the maturity of our basketball team."

Ohio junior point guard D.J. Cooper knew his team had to stick to the game plan and things would work out.

"We just stuck with our system," Cooper said. "Our shots weren't falling, but we played pretty good defense. We knew if we kept playing good defense we would start knocking dome shots down at the offensive end.

OU held the Rockets to just 35.3 percent shooting in the first half and 41.9 percent shooting in the game. The Bobcats also won the battle of the boards 38-29, including a 15-5 offensive rebounding advantage that led to them out-scoring the Rockets 13-4 in second chance points.

Ohio also held the MAC regular season scoring champion, Rian Pearson at 16.7 points per game, to just eight points on two-of-seven shooting.

"I couldn't do what I wanted to," Pearson said. "I think I got frustrated for a bit, but I tried to keep my teammates involved and try to do what I could do."

"It is the biggest reason we're going to the semi's, it's the biggest reason we just tied the school

record for wins in a season at 25, it's the biggest reason these kids went 8-0 at home...I can go on and on and on," Groce said of the Bobcats' defense. "Our defense has been our identity all year, and as long as we defend we always have a shot."

Cooper led Ohio with 18 points. He added five rebounds and five assists while Walter Offutt and Reggie Keely added 13 each. Eight different Bobcats played at least 10 minutes, which was part of Groce's strategy.

"We've had depth all year, and it has been a real benefit for us," he said. "It was their third game in four days, and we thought we had an advantage there. We wanted to bring waves of fresh bodies in at them, and I thought our guys did a good job of coming in and contributing well off the bench."

Curtis Dennis paced the Rockets with 17 points off the bench. Reese Holliday chipped in 12 points and seven rebounds for the Rockets, who finished the season at 18-16.

"We truly just didn't compete for about eight minutes," Toledo coach Tod Kowalczyk. "We bounced back and made a run at them but it was too little too late."

Kowalczyk thinks he knows what his Rockets have to work on for next season.

"Our interior play has to get better," Kowalczyk.. "This is a physical league and this league is allowed to play physical. ... We have to get bigger and stronger."

Ohio will face second-seeded Buffalo in the MAC semifinals tonight at Quicken Loans Arena. The game will tip off about a half hour after the final horn of the first MAC semifinal game between Kent State and Akron, which is slated to start at 7 p.m.