Under the bright lights at Quicken Loans Arena, in front of a national television audience and capacity crowd, Ohio University's D.J. Cooper put on a show.

The 5-foot-11 junior guard from Chicago threw his Bobcats on his back and carried them to their second First Energy MAC Tournament championship in three seasons, taking over the game in the final 7:08 of the second half. He either scored or assisted on 11 straight points Ohio built a seven-point lead and held on for dear life in its 64-63 win over top-seeded Akron.

Ohio clinched the MAC's automatic berth to the NCAA Tournament where, after defeating Akron for the 2010 MAC title, the Bobcats shocked Georgetown in the first round.

The game was like a heavyweight title fight with each team throwing haymakers. Each time it appeared as if one side was taking control, the other would make a run to get back into the game. The lead only changed hands four times, but just three points separated the teams for the majority of the game. Neither team led by more than eight points.

"It seems like every time we play them it's a battle," Ohio coach John Groce said of squaring off with Akron. "We were fortunate to come out on the winning end. It certainly could have went either way."

The game fittingly had the kind of wild ending MAC Championship Games are becoming known for. With 37 seconds remaining in the game and Ohio clinging to a 62-61 lead, Akron point guard Alex Abreau stripped the ball from Ohio's Walter Offut. After an Akron timeout, Abreau hit

Brian Walsh on the right wing for an open 15-footer that would have given the Zips the lead. The ball clanged off the rim and into the waiting arms of Ohio forward Reggie Keely, who was immediately fouled with 6.2 seconds left.

Keely calmly hit the front end of a one-and-one before, after an Akron timeout, knocking down the second to put the Bobcats up 64-61.

Groce elected to have his team foul instead of giving the Zips a shot at a game-tying 3-pointer. Cooper grabbed Abreau, who hit the first free throw to pull Akron within a basket. Abreau then tried to miss the second, arching the ball high in the air to get a big bounce on the rebound. The ball hit the back of the rim, bounced twice on the front of the rim before falling through with 3.1 showing on the clock.

The officials checked the replay to reset the clock, which had incorrectly started while the ball was bouncing on the rim. They also made sure Akron seven-footer Zeke Marshall did not touch the ball and tip it in, which would have tied the game.

He didn't, and the game ended when Cooper, who was fouled with two ticks left on the clock and Akron out of timeouts, missed his second free throw and Quincy Diggs half-court heave for the Zips sailed wide right.

Cooper ended with a game-high 23 points, six assists and four steals. He was the only Bobcats player to score in double figures. He connected on four-of-nine from 3-point range.

"It's a great feeling," Cooper said of winning the MAC title. "I haven't had this feeling since two years ago. We're just blessed. We worked hard all year for just this moment, and we're going to continue to do it in the tournament."

Groce was thrilled with how his junior guard, who was named tournament MVP, handled things in the second half.

"When you've got good players, and Cooper around good players, you have a chance," he said. "Players make plays, and Cooper made plays the whole tournament."

Akron coach Keith Dambrot, who led the Zips (22-11) to the regular season MAC crown and top seed in the tournament, didn't have much to say following the loss.

"The ball bounced a little better for them in the second half than for us," Dambrot said. "They're good. They won 27 games for a reason."

Abreau, who was named to the all-tournament team, paced Akron with 19 points and seven assists. Quincy Diggs, the regular season MAC Sixth Man of the Year, added 12 points off the bench while pulling down six rebounds.

Marshall, the regular season MAC Defensive Player of the Year, was held to eight points on three-of-eight shooting.

"We just had to control him," Keely said. "He's a big body in the paint and we had to limit his touches and make him work hard all night for his shots."

The Bobcats (27-7) will now wait to see who they play and where they will go for the first round of the NCAA Tournament. The tournament pairings will be announced at 6 p.m. today.