With eight minutes left in Sunday's game, the Ohio State Buckeyes led the No. 21 ranked Minnesota Golden Gophers by 18 points. In the final 20 seconds, Ohio State had to stop a furious rally from the Gophers by blocking a 3-point shot that would have sent the game into overtime. In the end, the Buckeyes were able to hold off Minnesota for a hard earned 67-64 victory.

Ohio State coach Thad Matta talked about the last eight minutes of the game, "It was an odd twist being up 18 there in the second half and there were a couple of plays that happened that really, really turned the momentum," he said. Matta later added, "We weren't as drive oriented as much as we should have been. The biggest thing is running and fast breaks. We didn't get our momentum going out there."

The coach was right. In the final eight minutes of the game, Minnesota outscored Ohio State 27-12. The eight minute stretch produced five more points than the Gophers scored during the entire first half. And if you were to ask Minnesota coach Tubby Smith, the Gophers should have added a few more points to the end-of-the-game run.

When questioned about the final 3-point attempt by Austin Hollins that was blocked by Buford, Tubby Smith was not pleased, "It was a foul. It was a foul. Any other questions?" Replays of the shot (taken right in front of the Gophers bench) show the Minnesota coaching staff jumping out of their seats and imploring the refs for a foul, but the block by Buford looked clean.

In fact, neither coach was entirely thrilled about the officiating in this game. There were a handful of questionable foul calls throughout the contest, and many of them went against the

Buckeyes. Two Ohio State players (Buford and Craft) collected four fouls and David Lighty received his fifth whistle with two and a half minutes remaining in the game. On top of the questionable fouls, there were obvious moments to Jared Sullinger where he felt he was hacked down low, “It was real physical down in the paint," he said. "The refs just look at you like, 'Uh, this is the Big Ten.'"

Outside of the last eight minutes and the officiating, Thad Matta had plenty to smile about. In the first half, the Buckeyes absolutely suffocated the Gophers offense, holding them to a dismal 22 points on 38% shooting. Minnesota’s guards were unable to penetrate the lane because of Ohio State’s man-to-man defense, and excellent post position by Sullinger prevented Minnesota from establishing their very talented inside game. The Buckeyes ended the half on a 13-2 run that gave them a 32-22 lead.

The second half started with both teams exchanging buckets for the first five minutes. Neither team was able to put together a run until Ohio State started heating up from behind the arch. During a two and a half minute stretch, the Buckeyes connected on four straight 3-pointers. Aaron Craft hit the first one followed by a Diebler three that was set up perfectly by a transition pass from Craft. Then Lighty, who had a game high 19 points, hit two 3-pointers on consecutive possessions that pushed the Buckeyes lead to 18.

At that point, the score was 55-37 in favor of Ohio State and things looked to be heading toward a blow-out. As Matta pointed out after the game, that’s not how it ended, “I was as proud of our defense the first 32 minutes as I ever have been. Then down the stretch we got into foul trouble. They were 24 of 27 from the line.”

After Lighty’s second three, things started falling apart for the Buckeyes. In addition to the whistles going against them, Ohio State’s overall ball movement and hustle seemed to take a dip. After Minnesota cut the Buckeyes lead to single digits, Minnesota opted to foul in an effort to extend the game. Craft made two trips to the line in the final minute and a half, producing three of Ohio State’s last four points.

Craft talked about the pressure of those free throws, “It was tense. When it comes to making free throws it helps when you have the team’s confidence behind you.”

When it came to the last play of the game, Tubby Smith said, “The ball was supposed to go in the basket. We need to have better execution. That play didn’t cost us the game; we had our chances.”

Quick Hits:

- Jared Sullinger recorded his eighth double-double of the season with 15 points and 12 rebounds.
- Aaron Craft has had seven assists in four of his last five games coming off the bench.
- Ohio State is one of only five remaining unbeatens in the country, joining Duke (15-0), Kansas (15-0), Syracuse (16-0) and San Diego State (17-0).
- With the win, David Lighty earned his 111th victory as a Buckeye, making him the winningest player in Ohio State basketball history.

Who’s Next?

The Buckeyes travel to Ann Arbor to face the Michigan Wolverines (11-5) on Wednesday, January 12. The game will tip-off at 6:30 PM EST and will be carried by the Big Ten Network.