Duke's loss to unranked Florida State Wednesday night opened the door for Ohio State to earn its first No. 1 ranking since the 2006 season. The Buckeyes likely locked up the top spot with their 69-66 win over Penn State on Saturday night.

Ohio State (18-0) outlasted a feisty Nittany Lions team that gave the Buckeyes all they could handle. Although Penn State hasn't defeated the Buckeyes in 14 attempts, they nearly pulled off a stunning upset inside the confines of Value City Arena. It took consecutive "and 1" buckets from Jared Sullinger in the final minute to secure the victory:

With the game tied at 63, Ohio State had possession of the ball and momentum going against them. The Buckeyes forced the ball down low to Sullinger and he came up huge with a hook-shot jumper that went in despite being fouled. Moments later, Sullinger hit the free throw that put the Buckeyes up by three with 60 seconds left.

On Penn State's next possession, David Jackson converted a three point play of his own after being fouled on a put-back layup. With 44 seconds left on the clock and the game tied at 66, Ohio State went back to the freshman phenom. As the shot-clock ticked down, Sullinger made a clutch low post bucket, again while being fouled, and converted the second three point play that sealed the game.

Sullinger broke down the last two plays after the game, “They stopped double-teaming, which gave me the chance to go up the middle. [Aaron] Craft was hitting shots, and without the double-team I could take my time in the post.”

Ohio State head coach Thad Matta just wanted Sullinger to take care of the ball, "On the last one, I told him, 'Don't try to draw the contact, just make the shot,' " Matta said. "As only Jared can do, he did both."

Sullinger finished the game with 19 points, six rebounds, five assists and two blocks. Among a veteran group of players, it was Sullinger and another freshman who willed the Buckeyes to victory. Aaron Craft played his best game as a Buckeye by scoring 19 points while adding seven assists (to just one turnover). He connected on four 3-pointers, a career high, and played fantastic defense against one of the best guards in the Big Ten (Talor Battle). In fact, it was the way he defended Battle on the last play of the game that truly secured Ohio State’s eighteenth victory.

Battle was looking for a 3-pointer on Penn State’s last possession to send the game into overtime, but Craft was all over Battle and prevented him from getting a clean look at the basket. As the buzzer sounded, Battle threw up a desperation shot that had no chance of going in.

“Aaron was special tonight,” Matta said. “He was effective on both sides of the ball today and did not play like a freshman despite the big game.”

The first half went by quickly as both teams executed on offense. Sullinger paced the Buckeyes early as he scored the first two buckets for Ohio State. Coming off the bench, Craft connected on two consecutive 3-pointers, providing the Buckeyes with yet another weapon on the outside. Penn State coach Ed DeChellis was hoping Craft would miss those open shots because he focused his defense on many of Ohio State’s other weapons.

"You have to pick your poison and who are you going to leave open? I don't want to leave those other guys,” DeChellis said. "So we tried to leave [Craft] and he made some shots tonight. If he

misses some shots, then maybe it's a different story. Give the kid credit."

Through 20 minutes of play, Penn State shot 61% and outscored Ohio State 12-6 in the paint. The two teams went into the break tied at 32.

As was the case for Ohio State's last four games, the Buckeyes came out of the locker room and rushed out to a double digit lead. The Buckeyes started the second half on a 12-2 run, and it looked like they were once again on their way to a rout. But two seniors on Penn State's team would not allow that. Talor Battle and David Johnson helped the Lions slowly chip away at the lead, making it a three point game with just over three minutes to play. A series of turnovers actually gave Penn State the lead -- after a Talor Battle steal and easy lay-up at the other end, the Lions led the Buckeyes 61-60 with just under three to play. On the next play, Buford answered with a 3-pointer. From there, Sullinger and Craft carried the Buckeyes home.

After the game, coach Matta was asked about the possibility of being number one, "The thing that excites me the most is that it is the second time that we have been there in a couple years. It is great for the program. Not too many schools end up in the position that we are in and I am proud for OSU and the basketball program."

Who's Next?

The Buckeyes will host the Iowa Hawkeyes on Wednesday, January 19. The game will be carried by the Big Ten Network and will tip off at 6:30 PM EST.