It wasn't until the 14 minute mark of the first half against Jackson State Friday night that the Buckeyes shook the rust off after their big win over Florida. After trailing 11-10 early, Ohio State woke up and ran off a 36-6 run to close the half in a rally that led to an 85-41 victory.

Jared Sullinger recorded his first double-double of the season (and 19th of his career) after scoring 21 points and 11 rebounds in just 21 minutes of action against the Tigers. William Buford, Deshaun Thomas and Aaron Craft each added 11 points as the Buckeyes shot 48% (34-71) on the night.

"We got off to a little bit of a shaky start," Ohio State coach Thad Matta said. " I thought our guys had a pretty good way about it. I thought we did a pretty decent job at keeping the intensity and keeping the momentum going. "

The Buckeyes, now unbeaten at 3-0 this season, dominated every facet of the game. Ohio State held JSU to 35% shooting (17-49) while forcing 26 turnovers. 15 of the 26 turnovers Ohio State forced were steals, and Craft himself was responsible for five of those thefts.

Craft led the way for Ohio State's stingy defensive performance, which is a requirement for the success of his team. "My job is to set the tone on defense," Craft said. "If I'm slacking, the rest of the team has a tendency to not play as hard on that side of the ball. I have to be 100 percent focused on defense at all times."

The Buckeyes turned Jackson State's 26 turnovers into 41 points, matching the total output for the Tigers offense on the night. According to Thad Matta, that was the plan, "One of the things

we felt we could do tonight was score off of our defense. We were pretty successful at that once we got going. We wanted to get out and get the ball up the floor as quick as we can."

On the other end of the court, Ohio State continued its evolution on offense. Last year, the Buckeyes featured a more long-range attack, which is given when you have the Big Ten's best 3-point shooter on your roster. But with Jon Diebler graduated, along with the relatively dependable perimeter shooting of David Lighty, the Buckeyes have focused their attention on the painted area and getting to the foul line this year. Through three games the strategy has worked, especially on Friday night when they scored 50 points in the paint while getting to the charity stripe for 22 free-throw attempts.

It's also telling that when the Buckeyes took just 15 of their 71 shots from behind the arch -- they know where they can get their points this year. With a talent like Sullinger, it makes sense to get the ball where he's most comfortable. At least that's what Jackson State head coach Tevester Anderson thinks.

"[Sullinger] is strong and he jumps so quickly," Anderson said during the postgame conference. "He moves like Charles Barkley. I had the chance to coach Barkley at Auburn. Sullinger is something special."

With the blowout nature of the game, all the talented freshman from last year's recruiting class got a chance to play. J.D. Weatherspoon turned the most heads with his acrobatic moves, none of which were on display more than when he and Aaron Craft hooked up for a 20 foot alley-oop in the second half. Point guard Shannon Scott, the highest rated player of the class, had six assists in 23 minutes -- a number that was slightly diminished by his five turnovers. Both Sam Thompson and Amir Williams had the best games of their very brief careers Friday night and Boston College transfer Evan Ravenal, although not a freshman, continued his strong play with six points and three assists off the bench.

It was a solid all-around performance for a team that is looking to get better with each game. ""I don't think this team is anywhere near as good as they can be," Matta said. "We have a long way to go."

Who's Next?

The Buckeyes will host North Florida on Monday, November 21. The game will be televised by the Big Ten Network and will tip-off at 8:30 PM EST.

(Photo credit - Jim Davidson - TheOzone.net)

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