The Ohio State Buckeyes (4-0) used strong contributions from all five of its starters, highlighted by 27 points and 13 rebounds from Jared Sullinger, to beat the North Florida Ospreys 85-50 on Monday night.

Deshaun Thomas had 16 points and six rebounds while Buford added 13 points, five rebounds and four assists. With Sullinger, Thomas and Buford handling the offense, Lenzelle Smith Jr. and Aaron Craft wreaked havoc on the defensive end by notching three steals each, an effort that led to 23 North Florida turnovers throughout the game. The victory extended Ohio State's home winning streak to 26, a stretch that reaches back to February, 2010.

The Buckeyes started the game a bit sluggishly, a recurring trend that confounds head coach Thad Matta. Ohio State missed their first three shots and all four of its first free-throw attempts, allowing the Ospreys to hang around. Sullinger was also held scoreless midway through the first half as North Florida trailed just 14-17 through 10 minutes of play.

"We didn't come out with any juice, any energy or any intensity., " Sullinger said. "We came out expecting to win because we are Ohio State. We realized this team wasn't scared to play and obviously it showed in the first half."

At the 10 minute mark, the light flipped on for Sullinger. The preseason All-American big man for the Buckeyes rattled off 16 points to close the first half, fueling a 20-2 run that all but sealed the game for Ohio State. Deshaun Thomas was able to get going early as well, scoring 13 of his 16 points in the first half as Ohio State took a 45-26 lead into the locker room.

“Coach always said we get good looks when we shoot it inside,” Thomas said. “When we get it inside to [Jared] Sullinger and me, our percentages go up.”

Speaking of percentages, the Buckeyes matched their season average field goal percentage by connecting on 47% of their shots against North Florida. The outside shooting continued its dip from last year, which is expected with Jon Diebler’s departure, but the Buckeyes haven’t been able to find a groove from behind the arch so far this year. Ohio State was just 4-17 from the 3-point line against North Florida, and even worse, they shot just 25/40 (63%) from the free throw line.

The way this team progresses through the season and adjusts during the game is what’s most important to the coaching staff, “At this point on Nov. 21, I think our guys are continuing to adjust, “ Matta said. “Even in the Florida game our adjustments really worked to our advantage later in the game. And that’s something that has to continue to be a work in progress.”

The adjustments made by Ohio State at halftime paid off as the Buckeyes put together a 10-2 run to start the second half. The defense was swarming and creating transition buckets on the other end, helping build a big enough lead for Ohio State to try and get their freshman some valuable playing time. After a brief slump from the young guns, Matta reinserted the starting five to put the game away for good.

The Buckeyes get no time to rest as they look ahead to two more games in the next four days. This, in preparation of hosting the Duke Blue Devils in the Big Ten / ACC Challenge, is something the Buckeyes want to use to help them grow. “It is a mental toughness week,” Sullinger said. “With a game, practice, game, practice, game, we only have to get better.”

Who’s Next?

The Buckeyes will host the Virginia Military Keydets on Wednesday, November 23. The game will tip-off at 7:00 PM EST and will be televised by the Big Ten Network.

(Photo credit - Jim Davidson - TheOzone.net)

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