It was ugly -- and at times it was flat out painful to watch -- but the No. 2 Ohio State Buckeyes (11-1) were able to put away the Lamar Cardinals with a 70-50 victory in Columbus Tuesday night.

Jared Sullinger started against Lamar after bruising his left foot in Saturday's game against South Carolina, and the sophomore big man finished the game with 18 points and 11 rebounds. Sullinger made seven straight shots to close the game after missing three of his first four from the field, a performance that resulted in his sixth double-double of the season and 24th of his career.

The Buckeyes probably could have won the game without Sullinger, but after suffering back spasms that kept him out of two games earlier this month, he felt obligated to play, "I missed too much with the back spasms and now with the foot. I have to get back in a routine," Sullinger said. "I can't sit here and wait for it to heal. By that time I won't have my timing down defensively and offensively. I had to get back as soon as possible."

It didn't feel like a 20 point victory despite the fact that Lamar never really had a chance. That was mainly due to Ohio State's inconsistency on offense as the Buckeyes went through long stretches of the game without a basket. Despite shooting 45% on the night, the offense went through lapses and the effort we're used to seeing from the Buckeyes just wasn't there tonight.

"Honestly, we just need energy, period. We were kind of dead tonight," Sullinger said after the game.

It was a sloppy first half for both teams. Ohio State's most reliable player through December -- Deshaun Thomas -- started the game off with an Ohio State turnover followed by an air-ball, an offensive turnover and another missed 2-point jumper. It was a wild departure from last week where he connected on 17 straight 2-pointers over the course of two games, and his rough start

set the tone for Ohio State's offense. The Buckeyes started the game making just six of their first 21 shot attempts (28%), even with Sullinger on the court. The preseason All-American seemed to be running/playing tentatively with the injured foot and started the game just 1-4 from the floor.

Ohio State coach Thad Matta was asked about Ohio State's recent trend of starting games slowly, "I have to find the answer. I think it will come from the standpoint of the mentality of thinking outside the box to make sure we're ready. We need to get to the point where we can sustain our effort throughout the game."

On the other side, Lamar wasn't able to capitalize on Ohio State's slow start. The Cardinals were equally bad shooting the ball, making just six of their first 22 shots while going 0-7 from behind the arch. Lamar turned the ball over seven times in the first half, and a 9-2 run by the Buckeyes in the closing minutes helped Ohio State take a 34-21 into the locker room at halftime.

The second half started much differently than the first as Ohio State looked to get Sullinger going. That strategy paid off when the big man made four quick buckets in less than five minutes -- a stretch that blew the game wide open. Deshaun Thomas slowly but surely got going in the second, and the reigning Big Ten Player of the Week scored 16 points for the Buckeyes on 6-12 shooting (3-4 from behind the arch). But aside from those two, no other Ohio State player was able to reach double-digit points.

"We weren't as sharp as we needed to be [offensively], as I told the guys after the game," Matta said. "Shooting is a mindset and for some reason they weren't dropping early. We have got to get that down. Our standard has to be higher."

The Buckeyes will have a quick turn around as the host Miami (OH) on Thursday, December 22. The game will tip-off at 8:30 PM EST and will be televised by the Big Ten Network. *(Photo credit - Jim Davidson - TheOzone.net)*

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