Maybe it was too soon to stop worrying about Ohio State's struggles on the road.

After looking lackluster in their first three road games of the year, it appeared as though the Buckeyes had bucked their recent, slumping trend away from Columbus with a 29 point victory over Iowa in Iowa city Saturday afternoon.

Just days after creeping back into the top five in both polls, the Buckeyes suffered a 79-74 loss to the Illinois Fighting Illini Tuesday night. It took a legendary performance from Illinois' Brandon Paul, who scored a career high 43 points, to hand the Buckeyes their third loss of the season.

"Obviously, Brandon was special," Illinois coach Bruce Weber said after the game -- but "special" doesn't give nearly enough credit to Paul's incredible outing. The junior guard came into the night with a season average of just 12 points on 33% shooting overall and 28% from three. But against Ohio State, Paul connected on eight of his 10 3-pointers while hitting 13 of 15 from the charity stripe (despite coming into the game averaging 68% on free throw attempts this year). In short -- Paul's stat line was as amazing as it was uncharacteristic.

"I was laughing a couple times," Paul said. "After the first couple three's, I just said I was going to keep shooting."

Paul did keep shooting, and the Buckeyes seemed lost trying to keep up with him. Lenzelle Smith, Jr. and William Buford rotated in guarding him early, then Matta deployed Sam Thompson in an effort to disrupt him and then to close the game, it was Craft who drew the assignment. Seemingly everything Paul threw up, regardless of how well he was guarded, found nothing but net.

It has become uncommon for Ohio State to drop a conference game -- the Buckeyes have lost just four in the last two years -- but it isn't uncommon for an opposing player to have a career day when those rare losses occur. Last year it took 27 points from Jordan Taylor to rally

Wisconsin from a 15 point second half deficit and Purdue's E'Twaun Moore nailed seven 3-pointers while scoring a career high 38 points in contests against Ohio State, both of which ended in defeat for the Buckeyes.

"I've seen Jordan Taylor have one of those nights and I saw E'Twaun Moore have one of those nights," Ohio State coach Thad Matta said. "And then I saw this. You have to give [Brandon Paul] credit, he made plays."

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The first half started slowly as both teams missed five of their first seven shots, scoring just eight combined points through five minutes of play. In what became a common first half theme, Ohio State built a six point lead (10-4) before the Illini ripped off five straight point of their own. Sullinger later scored five consecutive points for the Buckeyes with a 15-foot jumper and a deep 3-pointer at the top of the key, putting Ohio State up 23-15. But as they did all half, Illinois answered right back with a 10-0 run of their own (with eight of those points coming during Sullinger's stretch on the bench). It was a surge that saw Illinois connect on 11 of 13 shots (after missing two of their first nine) with Paul leading the way with 15 in the first half.

William Buford continued to struggle with his jumper, but the senior swing-man made a concerted effort to drive the lane. Buford missed all three of his outside jumpers but converted each of the three times he attacked the basket. Ohio State was able to force 10 Illini turnovers, which turned into 15 points for the Buckeyes. If not for that, Ohio State would likely have dug themselves a hole with Illinois shooting 58% through 20 minutes. The Buckeye made four 3-pointers which helped them in taking a 39-34 lead into the locker room at half time.

Despite scoring the first six points in the second half and building an 11 point lead, the Buckeyes couldn't contain Paul down the stretch. The two teams went back and forth and traded the lead four times in the second half, but whenever the Buckeyes needed a stop, Paul delivered the dagger. He and his teammates played the best game of their season, connecting on 60% of their shots against an Ohio State defense that had limited their previous opponents to just 39% shooting on the year. Any chance the Buckeyes had of overcoming Illinois on the road was eliminated as Paul scored the Illini's final 15 points.

"I'm not sure what else I could have done," Craft said. "At that point in the game, everything he was throwing up was going in."

Sullinger seemed tired of the talk in his postgame remarks, "I just feel like everybody is telling everybody how good we are, and for Ohio State it's time to tell us how bad we are on the road," Sullinger said. "We need to find something to get the fuel going because we've lost three games on the road and that's not Ohio State basketball."

Sullinger and the Buckeyes will have to wait over a week and a half to redeem themselves on the road as they travel back home to play Indiana on Sunday before a road-trip to Lincoln, Nebraska next Saturday.

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