

Nothing But 'Net – Week #24 – 04/08/2013 – One Win From Glory!

It's Sunday morning, I'm in a hotel room in suburban Atlanta (Decatur), my throat is still raw, my hands are still stinging, and my ears are still ringing. I only slept about 5 hours, and my head is a little fuzzy. None of that matters, since Michigan won the game.

The (#10) University of Michigan men's basketball team is in the Final Four in the [NCAA Tournament](#), and they won their semifinal game last night (04/06/2013) against (#16) Syracuse, 61-56, in the Georgia Dome. Both teams are #4 seeds: UM in the South Region, and Syracuse in the East region. The win raises Michigan's record to 31-7.

The Syracuse game was frustrating. I know that sounds odd for an important victory in the Final Four, but it's true. The Syracuse 2-3 zone was everything it was billed to be. Syracuse has a lot of tall, quick, athletic players who know how to play that zone, and it just sucks the life out of their opponents. Every halfcourt possession on offense for Michigan was the same thing, over and over: swing the ball back and forth across the top of the zone, hoping one of the defenders would be a half-step slow responding, giving the slimest of gaps to try to exploit. Occasionally, try passing it to a big man at the free throw line, to see if the zone collapsed just a little too much, for a different slim gap to try to exploit. Run the shot clock down to under 5 seconds, and take a desperation shot. Maybe get the offensive rebound, maybe for a quick put-back, probably for a reset, and do it all over again. And again. And again. Over and over. It was very frustrating.

So, how do you beat a dedicated zone team, even a very good zone team? Outside shooting. Most teams (NOT Syracuse) will finally abandon their zone for man-to-man if you can hit enough outside shots to pull them out of the zone. How did Michigan beat Syracuse's zone? I have no idea. I saw it, and I'm looking at the stats, but I still don't know how they did it. They did hit eight 3-pointers (on 24 attempts = 33.3%), but they didn't shoot very well overall (21-for-52 = 39.6%). They shot free throws terribly (11-for-20 = 55.0%), and missed several clutch free throws at the end of the game, including the front ends of a couple one-and-ones. It almost cost them the game. They did win the rebounding battle (37-33), and they tied in the turnover battle (10-10).

Somehow, Michigan managed to build up a decent lead near the end of the 1st half, and lead by 11 (36-25) at halftime. Syracuse chipped away at the lead for the entire 2nd half, and got as close as 3 points (48-45) with 7:53 to go, then within 1 point (57-56) with 41 seconds left. Syracuse had the ball, down 3 points (59-56) with 15 seconds left, and took a 2-point shot (why?) with 9 seconds left. They missed, and Michigan got the rebound and a breakaway dunk for the final margin of victory.

If I had told you before the game that Syracuse would hold [Trey Burke](#) to 7 points on 1-for-8 shooting, you would have asked "how badly did Syracuse crush Michigan?" Trey did a nice job on defense (3 steals and a blocked shot), he had a few assists (4), and he was one of the few Michigan players to shoot free throws well (4-for-6), but he could not get his shot to fall. I think he was as frustrated by the Syracuse zone as I was.

If I had told you before the game that Syracuse would hold [Nik Stauskas](#) scoreless on 0-for-5 shooting, you would have asked "did Michigan get within 30 points of Syracuse?" Nik got his looks at the basket, and he tried four 3-pointers, but they all clanked. He was the key to this game. If he had gotten hot, like he did in the Florida game (6-for-6 from 3-point range), the game would have been much less frustrating.

So, that's 2 of Michigan's 5 starters. How did the other 3 do? Much better. [Tim Hardaway Jr.](#) was the leading scorer for Michigan, with 13 points (on 16 shots!), including 3 of Michigan's 8 triples (on 10 attempts!) [Glenn Robinson III](#) and [Mitch McGary](#) both had 10 points, and Mitch had 12 rebounds, for another double-double. Mitch was a force in there, and he continued his hot tournament play.

For the first time this season, the Michigan bench came through and won the game. With both Burke and Stauskas having terrible shooting nights, Michigan needed someone to come in and hit a couple 3-pointers to keep them in the game. Actually, they needed 2 someones, and they got them: [Spike Albrecht](#) and [Caris LeVert](#). Spike went 2-for-2 from long range, and Caris went 2-for-3. Spike only

got those 6 points, but Caris hit a 2-point basket as well, and ended up with 8 points. All 14 of those points were important points that we made a critical times in the game. But wait, there's more: Michigan also got some bench points from their 2 reserve big men. [Jon Horford](#) had 4 points and [Jordan Morgan](#) had 3, including that breakaway slam dunk to wrap up the game that I mentioned above. So, that's 21 points in a 61-point game. Way to go, bench players!

This Week

One last game: the National Championship, on Monday (04/08/2013) at 9:23 p.m. on CBS, against Louisville. Can Michigan beat them? Yes. They have the talent and the right mix of players to win. Will they? We'll just have to play the game and see.

Check back on Tuesday to see what happened, and why.

Go Blue!

P.S. Sorry about the lack of links in this story. New (to me) laptop, no Microsoft Word, using WordPad, ugh.