

Nothing But 'Net – Week #21 – 03/17/2014 – Close, But Not Quite

The (#8) University of Michigan men's basketball team played three games this week in the [Big Ten Tournament](#), in Indianapolis, and they won the first two and lost the last one. [On Friday \(03/14/2014\), they beat Illinois 64-63](#) in the quarterfinals, [on Saturday \(03/15/2014\), they beat \(#24\) Ohio State 72-69](#) in the semifinals, then [on Sunday \(03/16/2014\), they lost to \(#22\) Michigan State 69-55](#) in the championship game. Michigan's record is now 25-8.

After winning the Big Ten regular season championship outright by 3 games, Michigan was seeded #1 in the Big Ten Tournament, and they made it to the championship game, but they had a rough game in the final. As I've said several times this season, when Michigan isn't shooting well, especially from 3-point range, they look terrible. A lot of their success is based on making 3-pointers, and when they stop dropping, the rest of the system breaks down. Michigan doesn't have a particularly good inside game or defense, but their high-powered offense usually covers over those deficiencies. Not in the championship game.

The Illinois game was close and tense almost the whole way. Michigan led for most of the 1st half, except for an early 3-2 lead by Illinois. The score was tied at 12-12, 14-14, 21-21, 30-30, and 33-33, before UM went on a 5-0 run to end the half, up 38-33. In the 2nd half, Michigan quickly pushed their lead up to 13 points (49-36) with 16:13 left in the game, and it looked like they were going to run away with it, then they went stone cold. At the 8:00 mark, Illinois pulled within 1 point (55-54), and they finally went ahead by 1 (59-58) with 4:53 left. Michigan stayed with them, and it all came down to the last 19 seconds. Illinois was still up by 1 point (63-62), and Michigan had the ball with the shot clock off. [Jordan Morgan](#) hit a huge basket with 7 seconds left, and Illinois missed their last shot at the buzzer. While it wasn't an impressive win, Michigan played tough in "crunch time" and survived to move on. That's all you need to do in a single-elimination tournament. It's too late in the season to worry about "style points". A win is a win.

The Ohio State game was also close and tense, although it didn't start that way. Michigan came out on fire in the early going, and led by 16 points (32-16) with 7:39 to go in the 1st half. That was the high point of the game. From that point on, it was a dogfight. OSU cut the lead down to 4 points (41-37) at halftime, and things were looking grim. Michigan came out in the early going of the 2nd half and got the lead back up to "comfortable" again, up 12 points (56-44) with 14:57 to go. Once again, OSU went on a run, and got their first lead of the game (61-60) with 7:58 left in the game. The lead see-sawed back and forth, and the game was tied up (68-68) with 2:55 to go. Michigan went up by 3 (71-68), the teams traded free throws, and OSU missed a game-tying 3-pointer at the buzzer. Another narrow escape.

The Michigan State game wasn't close or tense. UM was never in it. MSU raced out to a double-digit lead early (24-14 with 9:16 left in the 1st half), and never looked back. They led by 9 (38-29) at halftime, and went on an 8-0 run to start the 2nd half. That made it a 17 point lead (46-29) with 16:52 to go, but the game was over at that point. MSU was happy to trade baskets the rest of the way, and run the clock out. UM got the deficit down to 10 point a few times, but never got any closer than that. It was a pathetic performance for Michigan.

Stats time!

First, the [Illinois game](#). Michigan didn't shoot very well overall (21-for-47 = 44.7%), they didn't shoot very well from 3-point range (10-for-30 = 33.3%), and they shot reasonably well from the free-throw line (12-for-15 = 80.0%). They lost the rebounding battle (26-33), but they won the turnover battle, barely (8-9). It was a close game because Michigan didn't shoot well.

Next, the [Ohio State game](#). Michigan shot very well overall (25-for-47 = 53.2%), they shot very well from 3-point range (12-for-23 = 52.2%), and they shot really poorly from the free-throw line (10-for-19 = 52.6%). They lost the rebounding battle (26-31), and they lost the turnover battle (12-11). There were 3 reasons why Michigan almost lost the game: free-throw shooting, rebounding, and turnovers. They shot well enough to win handily.

Finally, the [Michigan State game](#). Michigan shot terribly overall (17-for-54 = 31.5%), they shot terribly from 3-point range (6-for-23 = 26.1%), but they shot very well from the free-throw line (15-for-16 = 93.8%). They got hammered on the boards (38-28), but they did win the turnover battle, barely (9-10). Other than the free-throw shooting, that's a sure recipe for a lopsided loss.

Individually, only one Michigan player hit double figures in all three games: [Nik Stauskas](#). He had 19 points vs. Illinois, 18 vs. Ohio State, and 17 vs. Michigan State. He was the high scorer for UM in all 3 games.

2 Michigan players hit double figures in 2 of the 3 games:

- [Caris LeVert](#) - 13, 17, and 7 points. More than anyone else, Caris had a tough game against MSU, shooting 2-for-10 overall, and 0-for-4 from 3-point range.
- [Glenn Robinson III](#) - 15, 11, and 6 points. GR3 also had a tough game vs. MSU, shooting 2-for-8 overall, and 0-for-3 from 3-point range.

[Derrick Walton Jr.](#) hit double figures (11 points) in the MSU game, but only scored 5 points vs. Illinois and 8 vs. Ohio State.

5 other players scored in at least one game, just not in double figures:

- [Spike Albrecht](#) - 5, 4, and 0 points.
- [Zak Irvin](#) - 3, 6, and 6 points.
- [Jordan Morgan](#) - 4, 8, and 8 points.

[Jon Horford](#) played in all 3 games, but failed to score in any of them. That hurt. Horford and Morgan need to get at least 10 points between them each game.

[Max Bielfeldt](#) played in the Illinois and Michigan State games, and failed to score.

[Andrew Dakich](#) and [Sean Lonergan](#) both played in the MSU game, but didn't score.

This Week

Time to put the disappointing end to the Big Ten Tournament behind them, and move on. [This week, Michigan plays in the "Big Dance", the NCAA Tournament](#). They are the #2 seed in the Midwest Region, and they play the #15 seed, Wofford, in Milwaukee on Thursday (03/20/2014, 7:10 p.m. EDT, CBS). If they win that game, they'll play again on Saturday (03/22/2014, time TBA, TV TBA) against the winner of the #7/#10 game between Texas and Arizona State. If they win that game, they'll move on to the Sweet 16, and we'll talk about that next week. The complete bracket is [here](#).

While Michigan might have gotten a #1 seed if they had won the Big Ten Tournament, a #2 seed is nothing to sneeze at. They should certainly beat Wofford, and they should be able to beat either Texas or Arizona State. Once they get to the Sweet 16, things get a little trickier. The other top teams in the Midwest Region are (#1 seed) Wichita State, (#3) Duke, and (#4) Louisville. Michigan and Louisville played in the National Championship game last season, and Wichita State was also in the Final Four, so it's a pretty impressive region.

Check back next week to see what happened, and why.

Go Blue!