

Nothing But 'Net – Week #22 – 03/28/2016 – Season Wrap-Up, Final Grades, Looking Ahead

The University of Michigan men's basketball team finished their season last week with a loss in the 2nd round (after the "First Four") of the [NCAA Tournament](#). They finished the season with a final overall record of 23-13 (10-8 in the Big Ten), which is decent, but not as good as hoped for or expected.

Season Wrap-Up

For the second season in a row, UM was hampered by big injuries to key players. Last season, it was [Derrick Walton Jr.](#) and [Caris LeVert](#). This season it was LeVert again, and [Spike Albrecht](#), the only 2 seniors on the team. Albrecht played a total of 69 minutes in 8 games before [he finally retired on 12/11/2015](#), so he missed 28 games, including the entire Big Ten season and postseason play. LeVert played a little more (15 games, missing 21 games), but only played 48 minutes in Big Ten play, and none in the postseason. In both seasons, LeVert was leading the team in most offensive statistical categories when he went down. They were big injuries, and it took a while for the team to adjust and recover.

At the beginning of the season, I divided the games on the schedule up into 3 categories: "Should Win", "Should Lose", and "Toss Up". Here was my initial guess that those games:

- Should Win (14) – Northern Michigan, Elon, Houston Baptist, Delaware State, Northern Kentucky, Youngstown State, Bryant, Penn State (home), Minnesota (home), Rutgers, Penn State (neutral), Purdue (home), Northwestern (home), Iowa (home).
- Should Lose (3) – Ohio State, Maryland (away), Wisconsin.
- Toss Up (14) – Xavier, UConn, 2nd round Battle 4 Atlantis, 3rd round Battle 4 Atlantis, NC State, SMU, Illinois, Purdue (away), Maryland (home), Iowa (away), Nebraska, Indiana, Michigan State, Minnesota (away).

I was way off in listing Purdue and Iowa as "Should Win" games, even though UM did beat Purdue in Ann Arbor. So, of the 12 true "Should Win" games, Michigan won all 12 of them.

Michigan did indeed lose all 3 of the "Should Lose" games.

Moving the Purdue (home) and Iowa (home) games to the "Toss Up" category, UM did pretty well, beating the 2nd round opponent in the Battle 4 Atlantis tournament (Charlotte), the 3rd round Battle 4 Atlantis opponent (Texas), NC State, Illinois, Maryland (home), Nebraska, Purdue (home), and Minnesota (away). That's 8 out of 16.

In fact, Michigan beat every team they were expected to beat, and only lost to teams that they were expected to lose to. They beat a few of the teams that they weren't expected to beat: Texas, NC State, Maryland, Purdue, and Indiana (Big Ten Tournament). The only problem was that when they lost to a team they were expected to lose to, they often lost big, and looked bad doing it. In particular, the Xavier, UConn, SMU, Indiana (home), and Michigan State games were depressing.

Final Grades

Here are the final grades for the team, with mid-term grades in parentheses:

Freshman Eligibility

[Brent Hibbitts](#): Inc. (Inc.)

Brent was voluntarily redshirted. I expect him to be a practice squad player for his whole career.

[Moritz Wagner](#): B (B-)

Moe started strong early, especially in the Battle 4 Atlantis tournament, then disappeared for most of the rest of the regular season. He came alive again in the Big Ten Tournament and the NCAA Tournament. When he played with confidence, he looked great, but when he played tentatively, he looked lost. A summer in the weight room will do wonders for him.

[DJ Wilson](#): C (B-)

DJ showed some promise early in the season, then faded from view. He showed flashes of potential, but there were many times that he just seemed to run up and down the court without wanting to get involved. He can still find a role on this team going forward, but he needs to focus a little better.

Sophomore Eligibility

[Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman](#): A- (B-)

MAAR got better as the season went on. He was the best player at slashing to the rim, and he showed great athleticism against bigger players. He doesn't have the court vision of a point guard, and he doesn't have the 3-point touch of a shooting guard, but he is fast and fearless.

[Kameron Chatman](#): C- (C+)

Kam had a hard time getting into the games, but once he did, he either did very well or very poorly. After a horrible 3-point shooting slump to start the season, he hit some big shots down the stretch, including the dramatic game-winner against Indiana in the Big Ten Tournament. He has boatloads of potential, he just needs to get some consistency.

[Aubrey Dawkins](#): B- (B)

For a while, Aubrey looked like he was going to be "the best 6th man in the Big Ten". He is a great 3-point shooter, rebounder, and dunk artist, but he's a liability on the defensive end. He went into a shooting slump at the end of the season, and that limited his minutes and effectiveness. He can still be a great 6th man, and even a starter, but he needs to work on his defense, and get more consistent with his 3-point shot.

[Mark Donnal](#): B (B-)

Mark voluntarily redshirted his first season, so he had sophomore eligibility, even though he was listed as a junior on the official roster. He began the season as a starter, lost his spot to Doyle, and almost disappeared. When he got into the non-conference games, he didn't do much. Then the Big Ten season started, and he suddenly woke up. He had several 20+ point games in league play, and became the clear choice for the starting center. If he can start from that point next season, he could be a force in the Big Ten.

[Ricky Doyle](#): C (B)

Ricky began the season as the backup center, played his way into starting, then regressed back to the backup position, and below. It turns out he had undiagnosed sleep apnea and asthma issues. Maybe once his medical issues are addressed, he'll get back to his previous level of play.

[Duncan Robinson](#): B+ (A-)

Duncan started the season red hot from 3-point range, then cooled down as the wear-and-tear of the long Big Ten schedule ground him down. On the positive side, as his 3-point shooting cooled off, he got much better at other phases of his game, especially rebounding and driving to the basket. His defense could still use some work, and another summer of Camp Sanderson will certainly help. If he can build up his conditioning and endurance, he could be one of the elite shooters in the Big Ten (and the nation) next season.

Junior Eligibility

[Andrew Dakich](#): C (Inc.)

Andrew has voluntarily "burned his redshirt" the last two seasons, and has certainly helped the team when it needed him. He plays hard when he's in, but he's obviously a step slower and a lot less athletic than the scholarship players on the other teams. The opposing defenses

get to play 5-on-4 when he's on the floor, since he refuses to shoot, even when he's wide open. Still, he provides valuable rest for the main rotation guards when he's in, and he can "hold the fort" for a few minutes.

[Zak Irvin](#): B (B-)

Zak had a slow start to the season as he recovered from pre-season back surgery. When both seniors (Spike Albrecht and Caris LeVert) went down to injuries, he and Derrick Walton Jr. stepped up as on-floor leaders. Zak wasn't particularly efficient, but he managed to score a lot of points when his team needed them. He played hard, and he provided good leadership.

[Sean Lonergan](#): Inc. (Inc.)

Sean was voluntarily redshirted this season. I expect him to play sparingly next season as a redshirt junior.

[Derrick Walton Jr.](#): A- (A)

Derrick was the other on-court leader, once the seniors went down to injury. He played pretty well all season, but he was obviously running out of gas near the end. He was asked to carry a heavy load, due to the injuries, and it took a toll on him. He should have much better support next season (see "Looking Ahead", below).

Senior Eligibility

[Spike Albrecht](#): Inc. (Inc.)

Sure, Spike played in parts of 8 games, but usually only 8-10 minutes. He had double hip surgery in the off-season, and he never looked comfortable out there. [He finally "retired" on 12/11/2015](#), ending this season, and possibly his career. A medical redshirt season is still possible, so he might be back next season, but there's a problem – UM is out of scholarships for next season. So, maybe Spike will play a "grad transfer" year somewhere else. I hope he's back at UM, healthy and ready to play.

[Caris LeVert](#): A (A)

I saved the best for last. Caris only played half a season, but he played it well. He missed all but a few minutes of the Big Ten season, and all of the postseason, but he still contributed before his injury. He will be missed.

Looking Ahead

I'm an optimist, and I usually wrap up every season with all the reasons that next season will be better, but there are several reasons to be more excited about next season than usual:

- Once the team adjusted to "the new normal" (both senior captains out indefinitely), they played pretty well. They had a couple bad stretches, but they also beat some teams they weren't expected to beat. All those players are coming back.
- A couple of the first-year players (Duncan Robinson and Moe Wagner) stand an excellent chance of making the big leap forward that [Coach Beilein](#) often gets out of his players.
- MAAR was one of the most improved players I've seen in many seasons. If he can continue that trajectory, he'll be an NBA-level player next season.
- Coach Beilein has an [excellent recruiting class coming in next season](#).

Let's take a quick look at the incoming freshman for next season (courtesy of [UMHoops.com](#)):

- [Austin Davis](#) (6'10", 240 pounds, C/F) – Austin finished as runner-up for Mr. Basketball in Michigan. He's an old-fashioned, back-to-the-basket, physical center. He's a good scorer, rebounder, and defender. He could use some conditioning. Hello, Camp Sanderson.
- [Xavier Simpson](#) (6'0", 170 pounds, G) – Xavier was Mr. Basketball for Ohio, and he's the point guard of the future. He's not very tall, but he can run an offense, and he can score.

- [Jon Teske](#) (6'11", 210 pounds, C/F) – Jon is often listed as 7'0" or 7'1". He's a rim-protector, which Michigan hasn't had in years, and he can score. He's another player who could use some time in the weight room, in his case to bulk up a little.
- [Ibi Watson](#) (6'5", 180 pounds, F/W) – Ibi will remind us of Caris LeVert, once he gets the hang of the college game. He's got the same tools.

Be sure to check back in late October for the season preview.

Go Blue!