Nothing But 'Net – Week #09 – 12/26/2016 – End Of The Non-Conference Schedule & Mid-Term Grades

Quick Look

The University of Michigan men's basketball team played one game last week, and they won it. On Thursday (12/22/2016), Michigan beat Furman 68-62 in Crisler Arena. The win raises Michigan's record to 10-3.

What Happened

Michigan was supposed to win this game, and they did, but it wasn't as quick and easy as expected. Furman played hard, and gave Michigan all they could handle. Michigan played their "B-" game, which was just enough to escape with the win. It sure looked like they were just playing to get the game over with, so they could go home for Christmas break.

The lead went back and forth all game, with Michigan clawing their way to a hard-fought 6-point lead at halftime (31-25), only to see Furman go on an 11-0 run to start the 2ⁿᵈ half and take a 5-point lead (36-31). Michigan got the lead back (43-42) with 11:29 left in the game, and never trailed again, but Furman was still only 3 points down (63-60) with 2:34 left to go. Michigan played the end of the game smart and under control, and managed to hang on for the win. It was good practice for the close games that are sure to come in the Big Ten portion of the schedule.

The stats are not particularly impressive, except for free throw shooting. UM shot pretty poorly overall (24-for-55 = 43.6%), they shot terribly from 3-point range (4-for-20 = 20.0%), but they were perfect from the free throw line (16-for-16). They lost the rebounding battle (30-26), but they won the turnover battle (5-13). That's where they won the game. It's hard to believe they won shooting 20% from 3-point range, but they did.

Who Looked Good

Moritz Wagner was the leading scorer for Michigan, with 18 points. He didn't shoot as well as he has been lately (7-for-16 overall, 1-for-5 from 3-point range), but he got the job done. He had a little trouble guarding a quick shorter center for Furman, but he made up for it on the offensive end.

Zak Irvin had a good game (16 points), but he also shot pretty poorly (6-for-14 overall, 0-for-4 from 3-point range). He made a couple big shots in crunch time, but he also missed a couple. He was a little guilty of playing "hero ball".

Derrick Walton Jr. was the other Michigan player in double figures, with 13 points. He had half of Michigan's 3-pointers, shooting 2-for-5.

DJ Wilson had a quiet game, scoring 7 points and grabbing 3 rebounds. He did play pretty good defense.

Duncan Robinson provided some bench scoring (8 points), and even dished out 4 assists.

Mark Donnal also chipped in a few points (6) off the bench, and played some decent defense.

Who Looked Not-So-Good

Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman went scoreless (0-for-3).

Xavier Simpson didn't even attempt a shot in 6 minutes of "action".

Who Else Played

No one else played.

Who Didn't Play

Brent Hibbitts, Sean Lonergan, Jon Teske, Ibi Watson and Fred Wright-Jones didn't play.

The Big Picture

This game was good practice for the lower-division Big Ten teams, but if UM plays like this against "the big boys", they'll get trounced.

Mid-Term Grades

With 13 games down, and at least 19 more to go, it's close enough to mid-season for mid-term grades.

Freshman Eligibility

Austin Davis (Inc.) – Austin is being voluntarily redshirted this season, since UM has so much depth at center.

Brent Hibbitts (Inc.) - Brent has only played in "garbage time" so far: 18 minutes in 7 games. He's 1-for-1 (a 3-pointer), and has grabbed 4 rebounds.

Charles Matthews (Inc.) – Charles has to sit out this season after transferring to Michigan from Kentucky. He'll have sophomore eligibility next season.

Xavier Simpson (B-) – Xavier has played in all 13 games, averaging 9.7 minutes/game. He has scored 22 points, and dished out 16 assists. He's shooting OK, but he isn't really having much impact out there. He does give Derrick Walton a rest every now and then.

Jon Teske (C-) – Jon has played in 10 games, averaging 3.8 minutes/game. He has only scored 5 points (1 basket and 3 free throws), and grabbed 8 rebounds. He is still very tentative out there.

Ibi Watson (C-) – Ibi has played in 11 games, averaging 6.1 minutes/game. He has scored 20 points, but he has really struggled with his 3-point shooting: 1-for-15. He seems pretty confident out there, but he just isn't producing.

Fred Wright-Jones (Inc.) – Fred has only played in "garbage time" so far: 12 minutes in 8 games. He hit his only 3-point attempt, for his only 3 points.

Sophomore Eligibility

Moritz Wagner (A) – Moe is easily the most improved player on the team so far, and he has been the "go to" guy on offense in several games. He has started all 13 games, and he's 3rd on the team in scoring, averaging 11.5 points/game. He has cut way down on his fouls, and has only had one bad turnover game (4 vs. Mount St. Mary's). His defense still isn't as good as his offense, but he's gotten better as the season has gone along.

DJ Wilson (A-) – DJ is another vastly improved player. He has played in all 13 games, and started the last 11. He is averaging 8.5 points/game, and he leads the team in rebounding with 86, and blocked shots with 18.

Junior Eligibility

Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman (B-) – MAAR has regressed this season, after 2 strong showings his first 2 years. He has played in all 13 games, and is averaging 8.1 points/game, but he has had 4 lousy games (5 points vs. Mount St. Mary's, 0 vs. Kennesaw State, 3 vs.

Texas, and 0 vs. Furman), and couple other mediocre games. When he's "on", he's fine out there, but he has disappeared several times this season.

Mark Donnal (C+) – Mark has also regressed from his first 2 seasons, especially last season. It's hard to believe that this is the same player who put up 28 points vs. Illinois last season. He almost acts disinterested out there at times. He has played in all 13 games, and he's averaging 6.5 points/game, but he has had more bad games (7) than good (6).

Sean Lonergan (Inc.) – Sean has mostly played in "garbage time", but he has a few brief appearances in significant game situations. Still, he only has played 23 minutes in 9 games, and has scored only 7 points.

Duncan Robinson (B-) – Duncan is yet another player who has regressed from last season. He has played in all 13 games, and he even started the first 2, but he quickly lost his starting spot to DJ Wilson, and now he's coming off the bench to provide "instant offense". He is averaging 8.8 points/game, which isn't bad, but his 3-point shooting percentage is way down (24-for-60 = 40.0%). He still has a tough time staying in front of his man on defense, which is limiting his playing time. If he were still shooting 60% from 3-point range, it would be worth it to have him out there, weak defense and all, but at 40%, not so much.

Senior Eligibility

Andrew Dakich (Inc.) – Andrew is being voluntarily redshirted. It's odd to see a senior be redshirted, but Andrew voluntarily "burned his redshirt" the last 2 seasons to help the team when injuries sidelined point guards. I suspect he'll graduate on time, and play a "grad transfer" year somewhere smaller where he can start and contribute.

Zak Irvin (B) – Zak is the leading scorer on the team, at 14.1 points/game, and is 2nd on the team in rebounding, with 64. So, why a "B"? Leadership, or lack of it. This team has the talent to play with any team on their schedule, except maybe UCLA, but they've muddled through close games against teams they should handle easily, and Zak is one of the reasons. I don't see him out there keeping the team focused and organized, and I don't see him trying to get them fired up. Instead, I see him taking too many long 2-pointers, and playing "hero ball" in crunch time.

Derrick Walton Jr. (B+) – Derrick is 2nd on the team in scoring (12.4 points/game), and 3rd in rebounding (52), but he is also lacking in leadership. He needs to take charge out there, and keep the team focused. With some good leadership, this team can start to meet their expectations.

What's Next

This week Michigan only plays one game, their Big Ten opener. On Sunday (01/01/2017, 2:15 p.m. EST, BTN), Michigan plays at Iowa. Iowa finished their non-conference schedule at 8-5, with only one quality win (78-64 vs. Iowa State), a couple understandable losses (100-92 vs. Memphis and 92-78 vs. Notre Dame), and a few surprising losses (91-83 vs. Seton Hall, 74-41 vs. Virginia, and 98-89 vs. Omaha). The loss to Virginia is particularly embarrassing. This will be a tough road game for Michigan, and they'll have to play well to win. Iowa certainly isn't great, but they can certainly score (except for the Virginia game), and they're tough at home.

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

Go Blue!