

Nothing But 'Net – Week #13 – 01/23/2017 – Looking Better

Quick Look

The University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games last week, and they lost one and won the other. [On Tuesday \(01/17/2017\), Michigan lost at \(#17\) Wisconsin 68-64](#), then [on Saturday \(01/21/2017\), they beat Illinois 66-57](#) in Crisler Arena. The loss and the win leave Michigan with a record of 13-7 (3-4 in the Big Ten).

What Happened

This is the 4th week in a row where Michigan has won one game and lost the other, but this week felt different. For the first time since the 2K Classic in November, Michigan played both games, all 40 minutes in each game, with fire and passion. That's what's been missing for the last couple months: recently, the team has gone down quietly. It's one thing to show good sportsmanship and not react poorly to losses, but Michigan acted like they didn't care that they lost. This last week, they played like they wanted to win.

Sure, Michigan lost at Wisconsin, and a loss is a loss, but this loss was a moral victory. On paper, it looked like a game where Michigan would get crushed, with Wisconsin's rugged forecourt and Michigan's porous interior defense, but that's not how it played out. Michigan wasn't great on defense, but they were a LOT better, and they stayed with Wisconsin for the whole game. The 1st half was close and low-scoring, with Wisconsin leading by 3-5 points most of the time. They led by 5 (26-21) at halftime. Michigan opened the 2nd half with an 11-2 run, to take a 4 point lead (32-28). They extended the lead to 8 (38-30) with 12:40 left in the game, and still led by 6 (49-43) with 6:29 to go. That's where the roof fell in. Wisconsin went on a 15-0 run to go up by 9 (58-49) with 2:27 left, and Michigan couldn't catch back up. It was a shame to get so close to a huge upset, only to see it snatched away in the last few minutes, but that's the way the game goes sometimes.

The Illinois game was a revenge game, after the way Illinois embarrassed Michigan 10 days before in Champaign. Michigan returned the favor by leading for almost the entire game, except for 6-4 in the opening minutes, and pushing the lead as high as 21 points (60-39) with 5:57 to go. Michigan traded points for time the rest of the way, which let Illinois get the score looking more respectable, but the outcome was never in doubt. Michigan outplayed Illinois, especially on defense.

[The stats for the Wisconsin game](#) are actually pretty reasonable. Michigan didn't shoot very well overall (22-for-51 = 43.1%), but they shot 3-pointers very well (10-for-21 = 47.6%). They shot free throws very well also (10-for-11 = 90.9%), they tied in rebounds (32-32), but lost the turnover battle (10-8). The difference in the game was that Wisconsin got to the free throw line a lot more, even if they shot poorly there (14-for-24 = 58.3%). Those 4 extra made free throws were exactly the difference in a 4-point loss.

[The stats for the Illinois game](#) are not as good as the Wisconsin stats, even though Michigan beat Illinois and lost to Wisconsin. In the Illinois game, Michigan shot just OK overall (23-for-51 = 45.1%), they shot 3-pointers pretty poorly (6-for-21 = 28.6%), and they shot free throws pretty poorly (14-for-22 = 63.6%). They won the rebounding battle (30-27) and the turnover battle (14-17). They won the game by holding Illinois to 2-for-12 (16.7%) shooting from 3-point range.

Who Looked Good

This week, in both games, 3 of the 5 starters hit double figures.

[Derrick Walton Jr.](#) hit double figures in both games (15 and 13 points), and he pulled down 11 rebounds in the Illinois game for a double-double.

[Zak Irvin](#) also hit double figures in both games (20 and 15). He wasn't very efficient, but he did score some points.

[Moritz Wagner](#) almost had double figures in both games, with 10 and 8 points. He did a much better job on defense against Illinois this time than he did in the first Illinois game.

[DJ Wilson](#) was the star of the Illinois game, with 19 points (on 7-for-10 shooting) and 7 rebounds (6 offensive). Unfortunately, he had 0 points vs. Wisconsin. Coincidentally, he was the star of the first Illinois game, when he also scored 19 points.

[Duncan Robinson](#) isn't a starter, but he was the only other Michigan player to hit double figures in one game this week, with 11 vs. Wisconsin. He had 5 points vs. Illinois.

Who Looked Not-So-Good

[Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman](#) was the only starter to not hit double figures in either game this week, with 8 and 4 points.

[Mark Donnal](#) had a quiet week, with 0 and 2 points. He also had 4 fouls in only 9 minutes vs. Illinois.

[Xavier Simpson](#) played in both games, but failed to score.

Who Else Played

[Jon Teske](#) played in both games, but failed to score.

[Ibi Watson](#) played in the Illinois game, but failed to score.

[Fred Wright-Jones](#) played in the Wisconsin game, but failed to score.

Who Didn't Play

[Brent Hibbitts](#) and [Sean Lonergan](#) didn't play in either game this week.

The Big Picture

Michigan is still "on the bubble" for an NCAA Tournament bid. They need to win 7 of their remaining 11 Big Ten games to stand a decent chance. If they continue to play as hard as they did this week, they just might do it.

What's Next

This week Michigan plays two more games, one at home and one on the road. On Thursday (01/26/2017, 9:00 p.m., ESPN2), Michigan plays [Indiana](#) in Crisler Arena, then on Sunday (01/29/2017, 1:00 p.m., CBS), they play at [Michigan State](#). Both of these games are "toss up" games.

Indiana is currently 14-6 overall, 4-3 in the Big Ten. They have some impressive wins (#2 Kansas, #3 North Carolina, and Michigan State) and some embarrassing losses (Fort Wayne and Nebraska). They have an elite offense, but a mid-level defense. This will be a good test to see how much Michigan's defense has improved.

Michigan State has a worse overall record than Michigan (12-8), but a better Big Ten record (4-3). They have a few decent wins (Wichita State and Minnesota [twice]), and a few embarrassing losses (Northeastern, Penn State, and Ohio State). They lean heavily on a raw but talented freshman class, which makes them unpredictable. Expect this to be a real slugfest, especially in Breslin.

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

Go Blue!