

Nothing But 'Net – Week #18 – 02/27/2017 – Two Big Wins

Quick Look

The University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games last week, and they won both of them. [On Wednesday \(02/22/2017\), Michigan won at Rutgers 68-64](#), then [on Saturday \(02/25/2017\), they beat \(#14\) Purdue 82-70](#) in Crisler Arena. The wins raise Michigan's record to 19-10 (9-7 in the Big Ten).

What Happened

Obviously, the win over Purdue is bigger than the win over Rutgers, perhaps Michigan's biggest win of the season, but don't discount the value of a road win in the Big Ten, even over lowly Rutgers. They might have a poor record (13-16 overall, 2-14 in the Big Ten), but Rutgers has been in a lot of close games, even if they lose them. Regardless of the opponents, two wins in a week is a good week, and a road win and a win over a Top-15 opponent is a great week. This was a great week for Michigan.

The win at Rutgers was an ugly win, but it still counts as a win. Michigan led for most of the game (37 minutes, 13 seconds), but the game was very close at the end, with an exciting finish. UM jumped out to an early lead, 13-6, with 15:04 to go in the 1st half. They pushed it up to 9 points a couple times (18-9 and 20-11), but couldn't pull away from Rutgers. They led by 7 at halftime (35-28), and finally got the lead up to double digits (43-33) with 16:05 to go in the game. That's when it got scary. Rutgers went on a 19-8 run and got their first lead in a long time, 52-51 with 7:58 left. They increased it to 4 points (56-52) in the next minute, and it looked like the game was slipping away from Michigan, when they woke up, regained the lead (57-56 with 5:50 to go), and never trailed again. They built the lead back up to 6 points (62-56) with 3:48 left, and managed to make just enough baskets and free throws in "crunch time" to hang on for the win. It was scary, but a road win is a big win.

The Purdue game was much more pleasing. Michigan led the entire way, by as many as 22 points, and controlled the tempo of the game. They didn't completely control Purdue's star player (Caleb Swanigan), but they did manage to slow him down enough to win the game. The score was close for the first 10 minutes, with Michigan leading by 2 points (15-13). Over the next 5 and a half minutes, UM outscored Purdue 21-7 to lead by 16 (36-20) with 4:40 to go in the half. Purdue got back within 12 in the closing seconds of the half, but UM hit a 3-pointer with 1 second left, to go to halftime up 15, 45-30. Michigan kept Purdue at bay for most of the 2nd half, never letting them get any closer than 11 points until the last 2 minutes. With 11:08 left in the game, Purdue pulled within 11 points (53-42), and Michigan responded with a gorgeous 13-2 run, to put the game almost out of reach, 66-44 with 8:15 to go. Purdue fought back, and got within 6 points (73-67) with 2:14 to go, but Michigan hit some key baskets, made their free throws, and got their stops, and earned the big victory.

The [stats for the Rutgers game](#) are pretty unimpressive. Michigan shot poorly overall (22-for-54 = 40.7%), they shot 3-pointers reasonably well (10-for-31 = 32.3%), but they shot free throws poorly again (14-for-23 = 60.9%). Surprisingly, Michigan won the rebounding battle (40-33), but lost the turnover battle (11-7). Michigan won the game shooting 3-pointers better than Rutgers, and controlling the boards.

The [stats for the Purdue game](#) are much better. Michigan shot the ball well overall (30-for-55 = 54.5%), they shot 3-pointers well (11-for-26 = 42.3%), and they were perfect shooting free throws (11-for-11 = 100.0%). They lost the rebounding battle (31-24), but they won the turnover battle (9-11). Once again, Michigan won the game shooting 3-pointers better than their opponent.

Who Looked Good

[Derrick Walton Jr.](#) hit double figures in both games this week (13 and 17 points), and he also had 5 rebounds vs. Rutgers, and 11 vs. Purdue, for a double-double on Senior Night.

[Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman](#) also hit double figures in both games (14 and 10). Once again, he connected on several fearless drives to the hoop in heavy traffic.

[Moritz Wagner](#) had a decent game at Rutgers, with 8 points, but he had a monster 1st half vs. Purdue, with 22 points at halftime. He only scored 2 more points in the 2nd half, but his huge 1st half staked Michigan to the comfortable lead that they kept for most of the 2nd half.

[Zak Irvin](#) had a pretty good game at Rutgers, with 16 points, but he had a lousy Senior Night vs. Purdue, with only 4 points. He did play some good defense in both games.

[DJ Wilson](#) almost hit double figures in both games, with 10 and 9 points. He played some great defense against Purdue, which really helped.

[Duncan Robinson](#) only had 3 points vs. Rutgers, but he had 11 big points in the Purdue win. His defense is improving.

[Xavier Simpson](#) was scoreless in the Rutgers game, but he had 7 big points vs. Purdue.

Who Looked Not-So-Good

[Mark Donnal](#) had a very quiet week, with 4 and 0 points.

Who Else Played

[Sean Lonergan](#) played in the last minute of the Purdue game, since he's a senior. He didn't score.

Who Didn't Play

[Brent Hibbitts](#), [Jon Teske](#), [Ibi Watson](#), and [Fred Wright-Jones](#) didn't play this week.

The Big Picture

With 19 wins, and a couple marquee victories recently (Wisconsin and Purdue), Michigan is all but certain to make it to the NCAA Tournament. They can make it a certainty if they can win either of their last two regular season games, or their first round game in the Big Ten Tournament. Even if they lose all 3 of those games, they're probably in the Big Dance.

What's Next

This week is the final week of the regular season, and Michigan plays two games again, both on the road. On Wednesday (03/01/2017, 7:00 p.m. EST, BTN), they play at [Northwestern](#), then on Sunday (03/05/2017, 8:00 p.m. EST, BTN), they play at [Nebraska](#).

Michigan only plays Northwestern once this season, and it's on the road. Northwestern is having their best season ever, and it looks like they are finally going to make it to the NCAA Tournament. They are the only "power conference" team to have never been to the Big Dance, but it looks like they'll make it this year, finally. They are 20-9 overall, 9-7 in the Big Ten, tied with Michigan for 6th place in the league. They have some quality wins (Texas, Wake Forest, Indiana, and Wisconsin), and a couple unimpressive losses (Illinois, twice). This is a definite "toss up" game, but Michigan needs it more.

Michigan played Nebraska in Crisler Arena way back on 01/14/2017, when UM won 91-85. Since then, Nebraska has gone 3-7, with a win over Purdue, and losses to Ohio State and Rutgers. They are currently 12-15 overall, 6-9 in the Big Ten. This is also a "toss up" game.

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

Go Blue!