

Nothing But 'Net – Week #21 – 03/20/2017 – On To The Sweet Sixteen!

Quick Look

The (#23) University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games last week in [the NCAA Tournament](#) in Indianapolis, and they won both of them. They're the #7 seed in the Midwest Region. [On Friday \(03/17/2017\), Michigan beat the #10 seed, Oklahoma State, 92-91](#), then [on Sunday \(03/19/2017\), they beat the #2 seed, \(#10\) Louisville, 73-69](#). The two wins raise Michigan's record to 26-11 (10-8 in the Big Ten), and put them into the Sweet Sixteen!

What Happened

Both games were tight, tense, and exciting, and in both games Michigan had to hang onto a slim lead in the closing minutes to win the game. We knew that Oklahoma State (OSU from now on, but not THAT OSU) had a great offense, but it was kind of a surprise how well they defended Michigan in the early going. It was also kind of surprising how poorly Michigan defended them in the early going. For a game that got into the 90s, it was low scoring for much of the first half. With 12:10 left in the half, it was tied up 11-11. OSU went on a quick 9-2 run, and Michigan was down 7 (20-13) with 9:52 to go. It was still a 7-point OSU lead (27-20) with 7:22 left in the half, when Michigan finally woke up and went on an 8-0 run, to lead 28-27 with 5:03 to go. The teams traded baskets and free throws for the rest of the half, with neither team ever leading by more than 2 points. Michigan led at the half, 41-40.

OSU was hot to start the 2nd half, and they quickly pulled out to a 6-point lead (52-46) with 15:51 to go in the game. Michigan fought back, and tied it 59-59 at the 13:04 mark. It was still tied (64-64) with 10:52 left, when Michigan pulled away for good. They got the lead up to 8 points (76-68) with 6:47 to go, but let the lead shrink to 2 points (79-77) with 4:12 left. They pushed it back to 7 points (88-81) with 0:23 left, and that should have been enough, and it was, but just barely. OSU put on a frantic comeback, including a long 3-pointer at the buzzer to finish within 1, but Michigan made just enough baskets and free throws down the stretch to win. Still, a win is a win, especially in the NCAA Tournament, where the only rule is "survive and advance". You don't get any "style points" for winning big.

Louisville is exactly the wrong kind of team for Michigan to beat. They play "bully ball", like the vintage Michigan State teams of the last 20 years, and they have 4 solid front line players that Michigan had to contain, somehow. Louisville manhandled Michigan for most of the game, and they led for most of the game. They scored much more easily than Michigan did, and they bottled Michigan up with their interior defense. There were several times when it looked like UL was going to run away with the game, but Michigan hung around. Louisville pulled out to a quick 6 point lead (12-6) with 15:17 to go in the 1st half. They pushed it up to 7 points (21-14) with 9:59 left. Michigan scrapped and worked really hard to finally get it tied (28-28) with 1:40 left in the half, when UL went wild. They hit 2 quick 3-pointers, along with a couple free throws, and held Michigan scoreless, so they led by 8 (36-28) at halftime. Things did not look very promising.

The 2nd half was even for the first 6 minutes, and UL still led by 7 (47-40) with 13:49 to go in the game. Michigan finally got their game in gear, and pulled to within 1 point (50-49) with 10:33 to go, tied it (51-51) with 9:16 left, and went ahead by 2 (53-51) at the 8:54 mark. It was still tied (55-55) with 7:12 to go, when Michigan pulled ahead for good. They got the lead up to 6 points (67-61) with 1:18 left, and hung on for the big win. The last minute was very tense, but Michigan played with confidence and poise, and deserved to win.

Stats

[The stats for the OSU game](#) are pretty impressive. Michigan shot very well overall (29-for-56 = 51.8%), they shot 3-pointers very well (16-for-29 = 55.2%), and they shot free throws very well (18-for-22 = 81.8%). They got crushed on the boards (40-21), but they won the turnover battle (4-10). OSU had 16 offensive rebounds, which was almost enough to win the

game, but Michigan's 3-point shooting made just enough of a difference. Michigan's 16 made 3-pointers tied the Big Ten record for NCAA Tournament games.

[The stats for the UL game](#) are not nearly as impressive. Michigan shot pretty well overall (28-for-57 = 49.1%), they shot 3-pointers pretty poorly (6-for-17 = 35.3%), and they shot free throws well enough (11-for-14 = 78.6%). They lost the rebounding battle (37-30), but they won the turnover battle (6-11). The turnovers and poor 3-point shooting (5-for-20) cost UL the game.

Who Looked Good

In both games, 4 of Michigan's 5 starters hit double figures. This scoring balance is crucial.

[Derrick Walton Jr.](#) was the hero of the OSU game, with 26 points and 11 assists, for a huge double-double. He hit 6-for-9 from 3-point range. He also had 10 points (on terrible shooting: 3-for-13) vs. UL.

[DJ Wilson](#) had a great week. He scored 19 points vs. OSU, including a couple clutch free throws in the closing seconds. He also had 4 big blocked shots. He had 17 points vs. UL, including 4 clutch free throws in the closing seconds, and 3 blocked shots. He played great defense against the monster UL front line.

[Zak Irvin](#) quietly had a great week. He scored 16 and 11 points, and hit some big shots in both games. He was efficient on offense, and did a nice job on defense.

[Moritz Wagner](#) had one very good game (career-high 26 points) vs. UL and one quiet game (6 points, in only 14 minutes) vs. OSU. He sat for most of the 2nd half vs. OSU, in favor of a shorter, faster lineup with DJ Wilson at center, but he carried Michigan on his back in the 2nd half of the UL game. He shot an amazing 11-for-14 vs. UL, with only one 3-point attempt (which he made).

[Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman](#) also had one good game (16 points vs. OSU) and one quiet game (6 points vs. UL). He was a key contributor in the OSU game.

Who Looked Not-So-Good

Michigan got very little bench scoring this week.

[Duncan Robinson](#) scored 8 points vs. OSU, and 0 vs. UL.

[Mark Donnal](#) scored 1 and 3 points.

[Xavier Simpson](#) played 2 minutes vs. OSU and 4 minutes vs. UL, and failed to score in either game.

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 this week.

The Big Picture

Unless they have a lousy/cold game, Michigan has proven that they can play with the big boys. There isn't a team left in the tournament that they can't beat, but they will need a

combination of luck and skill to keep advancing. That's the nature of a "lose and go home" tournament: you're only as good as your last game. One "off" game, and you're done.

Still, Michigan has already way overachieved for this season. Everything from here on is gravy.

What's Next

On to the Sweet Sixteen! The next round of games is in Kansas City (MO) for the Midwest Region, with the winner going on to the Final Four. On Thursday (03/23/2017, 7:09 p.m. EDT, CBS), Michigan plays (#9) [Oregon](#), the #3 seed. If they win, they will face the winner of the (#1 seed) Kansas vs. (#4 seed) Purdue game, on Saturday (03/25/2017, Time TBA, CBS).

Oregon will be another tough game. They're 31-5, with several impressive wins along the way (UCLA, USC, and Arizona) and a couple less-than-impressive losses (Georgetown and Colorado). They've got 6 players who are 6'9" or taller. They are beatable, but Michigan will have to play another great game to get by them.

Here's [the complete bracket](#).

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

Go Blue!