

Nothing But 'Net – Week #23 – 04/03/2017 – Season Wrap-Up, Final Grades, Looking Ahead

Season Wrap-Up

Well, we won a ring. We survived a plane crash. We played to the best of our ability in a couple games. We put the world on notice. It was special.

- Moritz Wagner

The University of Michigan Men's Basketball team's 2016-2017 season is over, and it was an unexpected success. Michigan finished with a final record of 26-12 (10-8 in the Big Ten), which was good enough for a tie for 5th place in the Big Ten, but that's not the whole story. UM caught fire in the 2nd half of the Big Ten season, and strung together 7 wins in a row to win [the Big Ten Tournament](#), and make it to the Sweet Sixteen in [the NCAA Tournament](#). This was more than all but the most optimistic fans and "experts" predicted for Michigan. One of the biggest factors, and something I never mentioned during the season for superstitious reasons, was that no Michigan player missed a single game due to injury. This is a remarkable departure from the last few seasons, which have seen far too many significant injuries.

Before the season, I divided the games up into 3 categories ("Should Win", "Should Lose", and "Toss Up"):

- Should Win (13) – Howard, UIPUI, Mount St. Mary's, Kennesaw State, Central Arkansas, Maryland Eastern Shore, Furman, Penn State, Nebraska (both), Minnesota, Rutgers, Northwestern.
- Should Lose (6) – UCLA, Iowa, Wisconsin (away), Michigan State (both), Indiana (away).
- Toss Up (12) – Marquette, 2nd round 2K Classic, South Carolina, Virginia Tech, Texas, Maryland, Illinois (both), Indiana (home), Ohio State, Wisconsin (home), Purdue.

I predicted:

If UM can win all 13 of the "Should Win" games, and half of the 12 "Toss Up" games, that would give them a record of 19-12 (9-9 in the Big Ten). That might be good enough to get UM into the NCAA Tournament, depending on how they do in the Big Ten Tournament.

So, how did they do?

- Should Win (11-2) – Minnesota and Northwestern were surprisingly good this season.
- Should Lose (2-4) – UM beat MSU at home and Indiana on the road.
- Toss-Up (7-5) – UM beat Marquette, SMU (2nd round 2K Classic), Texas, Illinois (home), Indiana (home), Wisconsin (home), and Purdue.

That worked out to 20-9 (10-8 in the Big Ten), which was slightly better than I predicted. They did it by winning 2 "Should Lose" games to make up for the 2 "Should Win" games that they lost, and doing one game better than half of the "Toss Up" games.

There were quite a few significant games along the way:

[Marquette](#) (11/17/2016) and [SMU](#) (11/18/2016) in the [2K Classic](#) – Michigan won the 2K Classic, and they did it in convincing fashion against a couple strong opponents. Hopes soared.

[South Carolina](#) (11/23/2016) – As good as Michigan looked in the 2K Classic, they looked that bad in their very next game, a thorough butt-whipping in their 1st true road game. Of course, South Carolina made it to the Final Four, so the loss doesn't look quite as bad.

[Virginia Tech](#) (11/30/2016) in [the ACC/Big Ten Challenge](#) – Michigan had this game won, and gave it away in the last minute. Hopes started flagging.

[Texas](#) (12/06/2016) – A big win for Michigan, in an ugly home game. It was close and tense, but “a win is a win”.

[UCLA](#) (12/10/2016) – Another road loss, but a spectacular one. UCLA was ranked #2 in the nation at the time, and UM hung with them for the entire 1st half, which was a 50-50 track meet. UCLA pulled away in the 2nd half, but UM looked pretty good in an 18-point loss.

[Iowa](#) (01/01/2017) – Yet another road loss, in Michigan’s Big Ten opener. This was a close game, and Michigan had a chance to win it in regulation, but they let it slip away, then lost in overtime. Not a very good way to start league play.

[Illinois](#) (01/11/2017) – This game was the turning point of the season. It was yet another road loss, dropping Michigan to 1-3 in the Big Ten. The game was tied until Illinois went on a 17-2 run in the last 4:04 of the half, and that was the game. The game was a depressing loss, but there was a “silver lining”. [The Illinois center, Maverick Morgan \(great name!\) called Michigan a “white collar” team in a postgame interview](#), and that woke them up. From that point on, Michigan went 15-6.

[Wisconsin](#) (01/17/2017) – Yet another road loss, but a close one. Since Wisconsin was ranked #17 at the time, this was a minor “moral victory”.

[Illinois](#) (01/21/2017) – [Michigan wore their blue \(away\) uniforms for a home game, to show Maverick Morgan that they could be “blue collar”, and they kicked Illinois’ butts](#). The “revenge tour” was on!

[Indiana](#) (01/26/2017) – Michigan crushed IU 90-60 in Crisler, and fans were starting to get excited about the team.

[Michigan State](#) (01/29/2017) – Another close road loss. The game was close and tight until the final minutes. The final score (70-62) is deceptive. Not quite a “moral victory”, but it was encouraging.

[Ohio State](#) (02/04/2017) – This was the low point of the season. Just when it looked like UM was finally getting things figured out, they came out flat at home vs. OSU, and lost an ugly game to a mediocre team. They allowed 16 offensive rebounds, and that cost them the game. At this point, most fans, including me, jumped off the bandwagon. I wrote the team off as “no chance for the NCAA Tournament, think NIT instead”. Wrong.

[Michigan State](#) (02/07/2017) – This was the high point of the season, at least for me. A win over MSU is worth any 2 other wins. This win was another good old-fashioned butt kicking. UM led from start to finish, and got the lead up as high as 30, before putting in the scrubs and winning by “only” 29 points. Another “revenge” win.

[Indiana](#) (02/12/2017) – Michigan FINALLY won a true road game, in one of the toughest places to win: Assembly Hall. They didn’t just win, they won convincingly, and swept IU.

[Wisconsin](#) (02/16/2017) – Another big win, over a ranked (#11) team. Another “revenge” win. The fans were back, and thinking NCAA Tournament.

[Minnesota](#) (02/19/2017) – Another road game, another loss. This one was also close and tense, and went to overtime. The officiating was terrible, and Michigan shot free throws terribly, for the only time this season. Ugh.

[Purdue](#) (02/25/2017) – This game was Senior Night, and Michigan played their best game of the regular season, beating the Big Ten regular season champs. They were ranked #16 at the time.

[Northwestern](#) (03/01/2017) – Another road game, another loss. Northwestern probably had to win this game to guarantee their first ever NCAA Tournament bid, and it was a good, close, tense game. It was tied with 1.7 seconds left, and it looked like it was going to overtime, but NW threw a perfect full-court pass for a buzzer-beater layup. It could have been a crushing defeat for Michigan, but they shook it off nicely, winning their next 7 games.

[Nebraska](#) (03/05/2017) – Michigan bounced back from the heartbreaking loss at Northwestern with one of their best games of the season. They thrashed Nebraska on their Senior Night, winning by 36 points. Another (rare) road win!

[Illinois](#) (03/09/2017) – Illinois, again. This time, Michigan played them in the Big Ten Tournament, in Washington (DC). Any tournament game is a big deal, but this one was even bigger, since [Michigan's charter plane had a "rejected takeoff" during the 63-mph windstorm, and ended up sliding off the runway, through a security fence, across an access road, and into a field just short of a ravine.](#) Everyone on board was basically safe, but there were some cuts and bruises, and everyone was shaken up. If the plane had slid into the ravine, there could have been serious injuries and even deaths. The team flew to DC the next morning, and got to the arena at 10:40 for a noon tipoff. Their game uniforms were trapped on board the crashed charter plane, so they played in their practice uniforms, with very little warmup. It didn't matter: they crushed Maverick Morgan and his merry band again, 75-55. More revenge.

[Purdue](#) (03/10/2017) – Michigan was the #8 seed in the Big Ten Tournament, so they had to play the #1 seed, Purdue, if they won their 1st game. Purdue was the regular season Big Ten champions, ranked #13, playing their 1st game of the tournament, since they had a double bye. Didn't matter. Michigan beat them again, this time in overtime. At least they finally had their game uniforms.

[Minnesota](#) (03/11/2017) – Michigan played their 3rd game in 3 days, and they played well. They continued their "revenge tour" with a win over Minnesota. This time, they shot their free throws well.

[Wisconsin](#) (03/12/2017) – Wisconsin was the #2 seed in the tournament, and they were ranked (#24). Didn't matter. Michigan finished up their "revenge tour" with a very convincing 15-point win (71-56), for the Big Ten Tournament championship and the automatic berth in the NCAA Tournament.

[Oklahoma State](#) (03/17/2017) – These two teams had the two best offenses in the country, and they matched each other shot for shot the whole game. Michigan managed to pull ahead in the final minutes, then hung on to win by one, 92-91. Whew!

[Louisville](#) (03/19/2017) – This was probably Michigan's most impressive win of the season, although I'm partial to the 29-point win over Michigan State. Louisville was the #2 seed in the Midwest Region, and they were ranked #10. It was a close, hard-fought game, with Louisville ahead most of the time, but UM grabbed a small lead in the closing minutes, and hung on for the huge win. On to the Sweet Sixteen!

[Oregon](#) (03/23/2017) – This was another nailbiter, against another high seed (#3) team that was ranked in the Top 10 (#9). It all came down to the final shot, at the buzzer, with Michigan down one point. It didn't drop, and Michigan's fairy tale run in the Big Dance was over.

Final Grades

Freshman Eligibility

[Austin Davis](#) (Inc.) – Austin was voluntarily redshirted this season, since UM had so much depth at center.

[Brent Hibbitts](#) (Inc.) - Brent only played in "garbage time" this season: 22 minutes in 10 games. He scored 3 points (on a 3-pointer), and he grabbed 4 rebounds.

[Xavier Simpson](#) (B-) - Xavier played in all 38 games, averaging 8.7 minutes/game. He scored 59 points, and dished out 37 assists. He didn't shoot very often, or very well, but he did give Derrick Walton a rest every now and then. He did play pretty good defense.

[Jon Teske](#) (C-) - Jon played in 20 games, averaging 3.1 minutes/game. He only scored 5 points (1 basket and 3 free throws), and grabbed 12 rebounds. He was very tentative out there. Whenever he entered the game, the opposing center went right at him, backed him down, and scored over him easily. He just wasn't ready this season.

[Ibi Watson](#) (C-) - Ibi played in 19 games, averaging 4.4 minutes/game. He scored 24 points, but he really struggled with his 3-point shooting: 1-for-18. He seemed pretty confident out there, but he just couldn't buy a basket.

[Fred Wright-Jones](#) (Inc.) - Fred only played in "garbage time" this season: 18 minutes (lowest on the team) in 13 games. He scored 5 points, on a 3-pointer and 2 free throws.

Sophomore Eligibility

[Charles Matthews](#) (Inc.) - Charles had to sit out this season after transferring to Michigan from Kentucky. He'll have sophomore eligibility next season.

[Moritz Wagner](#) (A) - Moe was easily the most improved player on the team this season. He started all 38 games, and he was 3rd on the team in scoring, averaging 12.1 points/game. He cut way down on his fouls and turnovers from last season. His defense still wasn't as good as his offense, but he got better as the season went along.

[DJ Wilson](#) (A) - DJ is another vastly improved player. He played in all 38 games, and started all but the first 2. He averaged 11.0 points/game, and he led the team in rebounding with 203, and blocked shots with 57 (more than the rest of the team combined).

Junior Eligibility

[Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman](#) (B) - MAAR had an up-and-down season. He played in all 38 games, and started 37 of them. He averaged 9.1 points/game, but he had several mediocre games scattered among his normal productive games. When he's "on", he's fine out there, but he disappeared several times this season.

[Mark Donnal](#) (C) - Mark 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 acted disinterested out there at times. He played in all 38 games, and he averaged 3.9 points/game, but he also disappeared several times this season.

[Sean Lonergan](#) (Inc.) - Sean mostly played in "garbage time", but he had a few brief appearances in significant game situations. Still, he only played 36 minutes in 17 games, and only scored 11 points.

[Duncan Robinson](#) (B-) - Duncan is another player who regressed from last season. He played in all 38 games, and he even started 3 of them, but he quickly lost his starting spot to DJ Wilson, and the rest of the season he came off the bench to provide "instant offense". He averaged 7.7 points/game, which isn't bad, but his 3-point shooting percentage was way down from last season. He also had a tough time staying in front of his man on defense, which limited his playing time.

Senior Eligibility

[Andrew Dakich](#) (Inc.) – Andrew was 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. He'll graduate on time, and play a "grad transfer" year somewhere smaller where he can start and contribute.

[Zak Irvin](#) (B+) – Zak was the 2nd leading scorer on the team (13.0 points/game), 2nd in assists (113), and 3rd on the team in rebounding (172). He had a terrible shooting slump in the middle of the Big Ten season, but he broke out of it, and played some of his best basketball down the stretch. He still had a habit of taking too many long 2-pointers, and playing "hero ball" in crunch time, but overall he helped the team more than he hurt it.

[Derrick Walton Jr.](#) (A) – Derrick led the team in scoring (15.5 points/game), led the team in assists (189), and was 2nd in rebounding (182). He had a mediocre start to the season, but from the "white collar" game on, he was the best player on the team, and one of the best in the Big Ten. He carried Michigan on his back for the last 10 games or so.

Looking Ahead

Michigan is losing at least 4 players from this season's team:

- Andrew Dakich – Andrew is going to use the "grad transfer" rule to play somewhere else for his 5th year. If he can find the right situation, he can start and star somewhere else.
- Mark Donnal – Mark is also going to play his "grad transfer" year somewhere else. He also stands a good chance for finding a team where he can shine. He's a talented player, he's just behind a few even more talented players on Michigan's roster.
- Zak Irvin – Zak is graduating, and he will be missed. He hasn't been the most consistent player, and he's taken (and missed) more than his share of "hero ball" shots over the years, but on the whole he's helped Michigan a lot more than he's hurt them.
- Derrick Walton Jr. – Derrick is also graduating, and he will also be missed. He was certainly the most valuable player on this season's team, and good point guards are hard to find.

There is also a chance that Sean Lonergan will use the "grad transfer" rule to play elsewhere next season. If so, I'm sure he can find a team that will let him play and contribute a lot.

Irvin and Walton will definitely be missed, and the other 3 guys played important roles either as backups or practice players, but [Michigan has another good recruiting class coming in](#):

- [Eli Brooks](#) – 6'1", 175 pounds, G – Eli is a shooting point guard, with a good 3-point stroke.
- [Isaiah Livers](#) – 6'7", 195 pounds, W – Isaiah was voted Mr. Basketball for the state of Michigan this season. He's a smooth wing with a nice 3-point shot.
- [Jordan Poole](#) – 6'3", 175 pounds, G – Jordan is a combo guard, with an emphasis on shooting guard.

I hate to say too much about incoming freshmen until I've seen them play in an actual game or two. It's easy to get excited about high school seniors, but they are usually a lot less exciting as college freshmen. Ibi Watson and Jon Teske are this season's prime examples.

In addition to the 3 incoming freshmen, there will be 2 more new players on next season's roster:

- Austin Davis – As mentioned above, Austin was voluntarily redshirted this season, since UM had so much depth at center. Jon Teske played (sparingly) instead, and

didn't show us much. Coach Beilein second guessed his decision later in the season. Apparently, Austin has done very well in practice this season.

- Charles Matthews – Charles has played on the scout team all this season, so he knows the Beilein offense. Reports from practice say that he's done very well. We'll see next season in real games.

In summary, the future looks very promising for Michigan for next season and beyond.

Be sure to look for the first article for next season on the Monday before the first game.

Go Blue!