

Nothing But 'Net – Week #04 – 11/20/2017 – Underwhelming

Quick Look

The University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games last week, and they won both of them. [On Monday \(11/13/2017\), UM beat Central Michigan 72-65](#), then [on Thursday \(11/16/2017\), they beat Southern Mississippi 61-47](#). Both games were in Crisler Arena. Michigan's record is now 3-0.

What Happened

Two wins in 4 days. Undefeated. Looks pretty good, huh? Well, looks can be deceiving. These were both ugly wins against overmatched opponents, and Michigan looked pretty bad in both games. Sure, they had short streaks of inspired play to finish out both games, but the first 30 minutes of each game were almost unwatchable. Actually, that's all 3 games this season that have followed the same pattern: a seesaw battle in the 1st half, a close game with 10 minutes left, and a strong finish by UM to (finally) put away a "guarantee game".

In the CMU game, CMU jumped out to an 8-point lead early (11-3), and still had it with 3:49 left in the 1st half (30-22). Michigan went on a 12-1 run to close the half up 32-31. Early in the 2nd half, Michigan built their own 8-point lead (42-34), and it looked like they were finally going to take control of the game. Nope. They went cold, and CMU went back on top, 47-46, with 11:53 to go. That was their last lead, as UM pushed their lead back up to 9 points (62-53) with 4:11 left, and kept it around there for the rest of the game.

In the USM game, Michigan came out hot, and had a comfortable lead (20-6) at the 10:00 mark. Then they threw the lead away in the next 7:40, as USM tied it up 25-25 with 2:20 left in the half. USM outscored UM 8-7 in the last 2:20, to lead 33-32 at halftime. In the 2nd half, USM extended their lead to 4 points (40-36) with 14:30 left. Michigan finally started playing some defense, and held USM scoreless until the 6:21 mark, while they scored 15 points, to lead 51-40. USM scored one point until the 5:30 mark, when it was 56-41. At that point, the game was over. The teams traded points, but Michigan's lead never got below 13 points, and they won by 14.

Stats

[The statistics for the CMU game](#) aren't very impressive. Michigan didn't shoot very well overall (26-for-59 = 44.1%), they didn't shoot 3-pointers very well (10-for-34 = 29.4%), but they did shoot free throws pretty well (10-for-12 = 83.3%). Michigan got out-rebounded by a MAC team (34-27), but they crushed CMU in the turnover department (14-6).

[The statistics for the USM game](#) aren't much better. Michigan shot a little better overall (23-for-47 = 48.9%), they shot 3-pointers a little better (8-for-23 = 34.8%), and they shot free throws about as well (7-for-9 = 77.8%). They won the rebounding battle solidly (32-23), but lost the turnover battle (11-10).

Who Looked Good

The starters were [Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman](#), [Charles Matthews](#), [Duncan Robinson](#), [Zavier Simpson](#), and [Moritz Wagner](#). All 5 of them scored in double figures in the CMU game, and 3 of them hit double figures in the USM game.

MAAR was the high scorer in both games, with 17 and 14 points. He also had 4 assists in each game. He had a rough time shooting 3-pointers: 3-for-9 vs. CMU and 2-for-7 vs. USM.

Wagner also had double figures in both games (10 and 12 points), along with 11 rebounds vs. CMU, for another double-double. His 3-point shooting was also a bit off: 1-for-5 vs. CMU, and 0-for-2 vs. USM. He needs that part of his game back.

The other starter with double figures in both games was Robinson (10 and 12). His 3-point shooting was off in the CMU game (2-for-8), but better vs. USM (4-for-8).

Matthews hit double figures in the CMU game (13), but had a quiet night vs. USM (6 points). His 3-point shooting was terrible: 1-for-6 and 1-for-3.

Simpson had a nice game vs. CMU (13 points), but was held scoreless (on only 1 shot) vs. USM. He ran the offense OK, and played some decent defense.

[Jon Teske](#) had a decent game vs. CMU (4 points, all free throws), but he had a very good game vs. USM (10 points and 11 rebounds, for his first career double-double). He was the star of the USM game, even though he wasn't the high scorer. Besides the 11 rebounds, he also played some good post defense. It was very encouraging to see him play with confidence out there.

[Ibi Watson](#) was held scoreless in the CMU game, but he scored 5 points (including a nice 3-pointer) vs. USM. He's looking more comfortable out there.

[Jaaron Simmons](#) scored 5 points vs. CMU, and 2 more vs. USM, but his biggest contribution was on defense, especially in the USM game. He also had 5 assists vs. USM.

Who Looked Not-So-Good

[Eli Brooks](#) only played 3 minutes in each game, and failed to score.

[Isaiah Livers](#) played 6 minutes vs. CMU and 8 minutes vs. USM, and failed to score.

Who Else Played

[Austin Davis](#) got in during the last minute of the USM game, but didn't score.

Who Didn't Play

[Jordan Poole](#) was the only "mainstream" player who didn't play in either game.

The scout team players, [C.J. Baird](#), [Brent Hibbitts](#), [Naji Ozeir](#) and [Luke Wilson](#), didn't get to play.

The Big Picture

The 2 games this past week were supposed to be tune-up games before Michigan headed to Maui for the Maui Invitational. They were supposed to be easy 25-30 blowout victories where everyone got to play, and Michigan got to try out some new lineup combinations. Instead, they were both hard-fought games with the outcome in doubt midway through the 2nd half. They were supposed to give UM some self-confidence before a tough tournament. Instead, they gave Michigan a lot to worry about.

Disappointment in sports generally comes from unmet expectations. All the "experts" (including me) expected Michigan to easily steamroll all 3 of the overmatched opponents so far this season, but that hasn't been the case. Yes, Michigan did dig in and play tough down the stretch in all 3 games, but they played pretty poorly for the first 30 minutes of all 3 games.

So, what's the problem? Look at the "Who Looked Good" and "Who Looked Not-So-Good" lists. Almost everyone looked good. Huh? The individual performances were fine, but the team chemistry is terrible. Too much indecision and poor decision-making. Overpassing. It's all correctable, and it should get better with time, practice, and game experience, but in the meantime, expect some ugly games when the competition gets tougher, starting this week.

Predicted Win Total

I'm afraid I have to adjust the Predicted Win Total down a few games, based on what I've seen so far in the first 3 games. A few of the "Should Win" games (Ohio State [away], Detroit, Illinois, and Nebraska) have slipped into the "Toss Up" category, and a few of the "Toss Up" games (Purdue [home], Northwestern [away], and Minnesota) have slipped into the "Should Lose" category.

This week's Predicted Win Total is: **16**

Here's a chart of the Predicted Win Totals for each week:

Week	Date	Predicted Win Total
1	10/30/2017	19
3	11/13/2017	19
4	11/20/2017	16

Note that 16 wins is the minimum for making the NIT. It certainly won't get Michigan into the NCAA Tournament.

What's Next

This week Michigan plays three games, all in Lahaina, Hawaii, in the [Maui Jim Maui Invitational](#). Since Hawaii is 6 hours ahead of Eastern time, the games could be on TV at very late times here in Michigan. The tournament requires each team to play 3 games in 3 days (Monday – Wednesday), so there isn't much time for rest, practice, and scouting.

Michigan's first round opponent is [LSU](#), on Monday (11/20/2017, 12:30 a.m. EST, ESPNU). Technically, this game is on Tuesday, just after midnight. If Michigan wins, they play the winner of the [Notre Dame/Chaminade](#) game on Tuesday (11/21/2017, 11:30 p.m. EST, ESPN). If they lose the first round game, they play the loser of the ND/Chaminade game at 9:00 p.m. EST, on ESPN2. There are 4 possibilities for the games on Wednesday (11/22/2017):

- Lose 1st round, Lose 2nd round (7th/8th place game): 3:30 p.m. EST, ESPNU
- Lose 1st round, Win 2nd round (5th/6th place game): 6:00 p.m. EST, ESPN2
- Win 1st round, Lose 2nd round (3rd/4th place game): 9:00 p.m. EST, ESPN2
- Win 1st round, Win 2nd round (1st/2nd place game): 11:30 p.m. EST, ESPN2

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

LSU has an imposing roster, with lots of height and experience. This will be a challenging game.

The other teams in the tournament are: [Cal](#), [Marquette](#), [VCU](#), and [Wichita State](#). It's a pretty good field.

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

Go Blue!