Nothing But 'Net – Week #06 – 12/04/2017 – A Predictable Loss And An Encouraging Win

Quick Look

The University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games last week, and they lost one and won one. On Wednesday (11/29/2017), they lost at (#13) North Carolina 86-71, then on Saturday (12/02/2017), they beat Indiana 69-55 in Crisler Arena. Michigan's record is now 7-2 (1-0 in the Big Ten).

What Happened

It's not too surprising that Michigan lost at North Carolina. UNC is the defending national champs, and they were playing at home in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge after getting crushed by (gulp) Michigan State in the PK80 Invitational. They were out for blood, and eager to prove that they were still a national contender. They proved it. The game was fast and furious in the first 8 minutes, and the score was tied 29-29. UM made their first 8 shots, including four 3-pointers, and it looked like Michigan was going to be able to keep up with UNC. That's when the roof fell in: UNC went on a 16-3 run, and suddenly it was 45-32, with 3:27 left in the half. Michigan got within 10 points a few times before halftime, but UNC pushed the lead back up to 14 points (51-37) at halftime. UNC put the game away in the first 7 minutes of the 2nd half with a 17-2 run, which pushed their lead up to 29 points (68-39). The rest of the game was academic. Michigan got to play a lot of their younger players in extended action, and UNC scored enough points to always keep the game out of reach. The final margin of victory is deceptive: Michigan deserved to lose by more than 15 points. It was no contest.

Michigan really needed a fast start against IU, and they got it. They hit 3 of their first 4 3-point attempts, and held IU without a field goal for the first 7:32 of the game. With 12:30 left in the 1st half, it was 16-2. Even though IU finally started scoring, UM kept the lead in the 13-15 point range for the rest of the half, and led by 13 at the break, 34-21. Things were still looking good (38-26) with 16:48 left in the game, when IU went on its only significant run. Over the next 2 minutes, IU outscored UM 8-1 to cut the lead down to 5 points (39-34) with 14:51 to go. Michigan responded nicely, with a quick 8-0 run to push the lead back up to 13 points (47-34) with 13:35 left. Michigan kept the lead in double digits the rest of the way, except for a brief 9-point lead (54-45) with 7:56 to go. UM quickly pushed the lead back up to 16 points, and kept it in the 14-16 point range the rest of the way, finally winning by 14 points. It was a solid, convincing win.

By the way: Why is UM playing a Big Ten game in early December? Greed in the Big Ten offices. They wanted this year's Big Ten Tournament in Madison Square Garden, and MSG was only available a week earlier than the usual time for the Big Ten Tournament, so the Big Ten decided to squeeze in all the games a week faster than usual, which means 2 games in early December, and no bye weeks. Thanks, Big Ten!

Stats

The statistics for the UNC game are not pretty. Michigan shot poorly overall (28-for-66 = 42.4%), they shot 3-pointers poorly (10-for-34 = 29.4%), and they shot free throws poorly (5-for-11 = 45.5%). They got out-rebounded (37-31), but they did win the turnover battle (10-12). When UM isn't hitting their 3-pointers, they can look pretty weak.

The statistics for the IU game aren't as impressive as you'd expect. Michigan shot decently overall (26-for-55 = 47.3%), they shot 3-pointers fairly well (11-for-31 = 35.5%), but they shot free throws pretty poorly (6-for-10 = 60.0%). They did win the rebounding battle (34-32) and the turnover battle (10-11). Those don't look like the stats for a 14-point win.

Who Looked Good

The starters for both games were Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman, Eli Brooks, Charles Matthews, Duncan Robinson, and Moritz Wagner.

Of the 5 starters, only one hit double figures in both games: Wagner had 20 and 13 points. He almost had a double-double vs. UNC (9 rebounds).

Jordan Poole was the undisputed star of the IU game. He was the leading scorer (19 points), including 5-for-10 shooting from 3-point range. He only had 4 points in the UNC game, but he was a force vs. IU.

The only other starter to hit double figures in at least one game was Matthews, with 12 and 8 points. He had quick foul trouble in the 1st half of the IU game, and only played 19 minutes.

MAAR didn't hit double figures in either of the games (2 and 8 points), but he did have 11 rebounds vs. IU.

Brooks didn't score many points this week (4 and 5 points), but he did have 6 assists (and no turnovers) vs. IU.

Jon Teske also didn't score many points this week (2 and 6 points), but he did a very good job backing up Wagner. He played good defense, grabbed a few rebounds, and played with poise and confidence again.

Isaiah Livers is looking more confident out there every game. He scored some points (9 and 4), he played some decent defense, and grabbed a few rebounds.

Ibi Watson scored 7 points vs. UNC, and 0 points vs. IU.

Who Looked Not-So-Good

Zavier Simpson didn't do much when he was in. He scored 3 points vs. UNC, and 0 points vs. IU.

Jaaron Simmons is also struggling. He scored 3 points vs. UNC, and didn't play vs. IU.

Who Else Played

Austin Davis played in the UNC game, but failed to score. He didn't play vs. IU.

Brent Hibbitts scored 2 points vs. UNC, but didn't play in the IU game.

Who Didn't Play

The bench players (C.J. Baird, Naji Ozeir, and Luke Wilson) didn't play in either game.

The Big Picture

There was a low probability that Michigan was going to win at UNC, so that loss isn't very concerning. The convincing win vs. IU was encouraging. Now that we're into a cluster of competitive games, it was good to see Michigan play a solid 40-minute game.

Predicted Win Total

The loss to UNC was in the "Should Lose" category, and the win over IU was in the "Toss Up" category, and neither does anything to change my feelings about the Predicted Win Total.

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
5	11/27/2017	16
6	12/04/2017	16

What's Next

This week Michigan plays two games, and they're two more tough ones. On Monday (12/04/2017, 6:30 p.m., FS1), Michigan plays at Ohio State, then on Saturday (12/09/2017, 12:00 p.m., CBS), UM plays UCLA in Crisler Arena.

The preseason predictions for OSU were: 14th place in the Big Ten, behind even Rutgers, but OSU has started out much better than that. They're currently 6-3 (1-0 in the Big Ten), with no embarrassing losses, and a surprising 25-point win over Wisconsin in Madison. This game will be a lot tougher than it looked a month ago.

UCLA is ranked just outside the Top-25, with a 6-1 record. Their only loss was to Creighton (another bottom-of-the-Top-25 team) on a neutral floor. They also beat Wisconsin, by 2 points, on the same neutral floor. This will be another tough game.

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

Go Blue!