

## Nothing But 'Net – Week #19 – 03/05/2018 – Back-To-Back Big Ten Tournament Championships!

### Quick Look

The (#15) University of Michigan men's basketball team played four games last week in the [Big Ten Tournament](#), and they won all four of them. [On Thursday \(03/01/2018\), they beat the #12 seed, Iowa, 77-71](#) (in overtime), [on Friday \(03/02/2018\), they beat the #4 seed, Nebraska, 77-58](#), [on Saturday \(03/03/2018\), they beat the #1 seed, \(#2\) Michigan State, 75-64](#), and [on Sunday \(03/04/2018\), they beat the #3 seed, \(#8\) Purdue, 75-66](#). All four games were in [Madison Square Garden](#) in New York City. The four wins raise Michigan's record to 28-7 (13-5 in the Big Ten). More importantly, Michigan won the Big Ten Tournament, and the automatic berth in the [NCAA Tournament](#).

### What Happened

This is a very big deal. For the second year in a row, Michigan won four games in four days to win the Big Ten Tournament, and they looked great doing it. They almost let the first game, on Thursday vs. Iowa, get away in the last minute of regulation, but they played well in the overtime period to win that one, and they looked great in the other three games. They dominated the #1, #3, and #4 seeds. Talk about offensive consistency, look at those scores: Michigan scored 77, 77, 75, and 75 points. Talk about defensive pressure, Michigan allowed 71, 58, 64, and 66 points. Other than a shaky end to regulation vs. Iowa, Michigan played great basketball.

Besides the obvious story (winning the Big Ten Tournament), there were a few other sub-plots:

1. Could Michigan beat the same team (Iowa) three times in one season? Yes, but just barely. It's hard to beat the same team three times in one season, but Michigan did it.
2. Could Michigan beat Nebraska, the only team to soundly defeat Michigan (72-52) during the Big Ten regular season? Yes, and they did it definitively, by 19 points. Revenge was sweet!
3. Could Michigan beat their arch-rivals, Michigan State, who came into the game as the #1 seed in the tournament, ranked #2 in the country, and riding a 13-game winning streak, dating back to the last time they played (and lost to) Michigan in January? Yes, and they did it with defense and toughness, both things that MSU prides themselves on. Michigan was better and tougher than MSU in both games this season, which is why they swept them. MSU wanted a rematch after Michigan beat them at home in January, and they got it. The results were the same: a solid Michigan victory. Be careful what you wish for.
4. Could Michigan beat Purdue, the only team to beat them at home this season, and the only team to beat them twice? Yes, and they did it by winning the battle in the paint, and by playing tough defense. With that win, and the win over Nebraska, Michigan had at least one win over every other Big Ten team this season.

The Iowa game was close for most of the game. Michigan led by 6 (30-24) with 5:11 to go in the 1<sup>st</sup> half, when Iowa went on a 16-5 run to end the half, leading 40-35. Michigan came out of the locker room hot, and went on a quick 11-0 run to get the lead back, 46-40, with 17:43 to go in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half. They held the lead for the rest of the half, but they could never really pull away. The lead got as high as 8 points (59-51, with 7:46 left), but was usually in the 4-6 point range. Michigan led by 6 (67-61) with 2:09 to go, and let Iowa go on a 6-0 run to tie the game, and send it into overtime. Iowa led for the first half of the overtime period, with a 1-point lead (70-69) at the 2:33 mark. From that point on, Michigan outscored them 8-1 to win the game. It wasn't a very encouraging performance by Michigan, but the motto was "survive and advance". This was another Big Ten game ruined by a lousy Big Ten officiating crew. They called 46 fouls (24 against Michigan, 22 against Iowa), and three players fouled

out, including [Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman](#) and [Moritz Wagner](#) for Michigan. Fortunately, the other three games that Michigan played had decent officiating.

The Nebraska game started out tight, with Nebraska leading 9-8 with 15:03 left in the 1<sup>st</sup> half. Michigan hit a 3-pointer to go ahead, and they never trailed again. They got the lead up to double digits (23-12, with 7:33 to go), and kept it there the rest of the half, leading by 10 at halftime (34-24). The teams traded baskets to start the 2<sup>nd</sup> half, and the lead was still 10 points (45-35) with 12:57 to go. That's when Michigan went on a nice 16-7 run to put the game away. That pushed the lead up to 19 points (61-42) with 6:02 left. Nebraska managed to get the lead back down to 12 points a couple times (61-49 and 63-51), but it was too little, too late. Michigan pushed the lead back up to 19 points, and cruised to an easy win.

The MSU game was very tense, and very emotional. Both teams really wanted it. In fact, MSU's Nick Ward got a little too emotional, and picked up an early technical foul that cost his team. Michigan jumped out to a quick early lead, 14-3 with 16:30 to go in the 1<sup>st</sup> half. MSU battled back, and tied it up (14-14) with 12:46 left. The teams traded baskets, and it was still tied (20-20) at the 9:50 mark, when Michigan went ahead. Michigan led for most of the rest of the 1<sup>st</sup> half, but MSU closed out the half with a 5-0 run to lead at halftime, 29-26. Michigan opened the 2<sup>nd</sup> half with a gorgeous 10-2 run to take the lead for good, 36-31, with 15:42 to go. MSU kept it close, and they were only down 3 points (50-47) with 8:28 to go. That's as close as they would get. Michigan pushed the lead up to the 7-9 point range, and kept it there, winning by 11. It was a gutty, hard-fought victory. This should have been the championship game, but that's not how the bracket was laid out.

The championship game vs. Purdue was almost an anti-climax, after the big, emotional win over MSU. Michigan played two of their best games of the regular season against Purdue, but they still lost them both, one on a ridiculous out-of-bounds call by the incompetent Big Ten refs. Still, it looked like Purdue had the advantage over Michigan, with two centers well over 7 feet tall (7'2" and 7'3") and the best 3-point shooting offense in the nation. The game was very tense and close, especially at the beginning. It was all tied up (7-7) with 16:38 to go in the 1<sup>st</sup> half, when Michigan went on a 9-2 run to get a little breathing room (16-9) with 13:52 left in the half. Michigan never trailed again. The lead was around 5-7 for most of the 1<sup>st</sup> half, and Michigan led by 5 (38-33) at halftime. Once again, Michigan opened the 2<sup>nd</sup> half with a nice run (10-4) to get the lead up to double digits (48-37) with 15:52 left in the game. They kept the lead in double digits for most of the rest of the game, getting it as high as 18 points (66-48) with 6:02 to go. At that point, Michigan started "playing to not lose", as opposed to "playing to win", and Purdue snuck back into the game. They closed to within 7 points (73-66) with 0:50 left, but Michigan made their free throws to win by 9 points. It was a very impressive win over a very good team.

## Stats

[The stats for the Iowa game](#) are pretty shaky. Michigan shot decently overall (28-for-62 = 45.2%), but they shot 3-pointers terribly (3-for-19 = 15.8%), and they shot free throws terribly (18-for-32 = 56.3%). They lost the rebounding battle (44-42), but they did win the turnover battle (9-14). Even though they shot a lousy percentage, they won this game at the free throw line, where they outscored Iowa 18-10.

[The stats for the Nebraska game](#) are much better. Michigan shot decently again overall (27-for-61 = 44.2%), but they shot 3-pointers very well (11-for-23 = 47.8%), and they shot free throws very well (12-for-15 = 80.0%). They won the rebounding battle convincingly (41-34), and they (barely) won the turnover battle (9-10). As I've said many times this season, when Michigan is hitting their 3-pointers, they look awesome.

[The stats for the MSU game](#) are pretty good. Once again, Michigan shot decently overall (21-for-47 = 44.7%), they shot 3-pointers fairly well (9-for-25 = 36.0%), and they shot free throws pretty well (24-for-33 = 72.7%). Very surprisingly, they won the rebounding battle (36-33), but they (barely) lost the turnover battle (9-8). Once again, Michigan won this game at the free throw line, where they outscored MSU 24-9. This is very surprising, since MSU

usually plays "bully ball" and gets to the line a lot, with their coach, Tom Izzo, crying and whining about every call.

Finally, [the stats for the Purdue game](#) are just OK. Michigan shot pretty well overall (26-for-52 = 50.0%), they shot 3-pointers decently (8-for-23 = 34.8%), and they shot free throws pretty poorly (15-for-25 = 60.0%). They got hammered on the boards (38-26), but they won the turnover battle handily, 5-11. Michigan won this game with 3-point defense, holding Purdue to just 4-for-17 (23.5%) shooting from long range. Remember, Purdue came into this game as the #1 3-point shooting team in America.

### **Who Looked Good**

The starters were [Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman](#), [Isaiah Livers](#), [Charles Matthews](#), [Zavier Simpson](#), and [Moritz Wagner](#) for all four games.

Wagner was the undisputed star of this tournament, and he was named Most Outstanding Player. He hit double figures in all four games: 11, 20, 15, and 17. He also pulled down a lot of rebounds: 3, 13, 8, and 2, which means he had a double-double in the Nebraska game. He was the emotional leader of the team, getting them (and the large pro-Michigan crowd) fired up repeatedly. He was dominant.

As much as Wagner was the star of the tournament, MAAR was the "glue" that kept Michigan together when the going got tough. He scored a lot of points (9, 21, 15, and 15), he grabbed some rebounds (5, 4, 3, and 2), and he hit his free throws, especially in "crunch time". He was Michigan's leading scorer in the Nebraska game, where he was 5-for-5 shooting 3-pointers. He's not as loud and emotional as Wagner (few players are), but he is a great "quiet leader". He lends calm and stability to this team, and he showed it again in this tournament.

Only two Michigan players hit double figures in all four games: Wagner and Simpson. Simpson had 12, 12, 15, and 10 points, along with 5, 2, 7, and 5 rebounds, and 3, 6, 2, and 5 assists. Even more importantly, he shut down everyone he guarded on defense, including a 6'7" dude. He had a great tournament.

[Duncan Robinson](#) did a great job off the bench, scoring in double figures in three of the four games (11, 16, 13, and 6). He hit his 3-pointers pretty well: 3-for-6, 4-for-7, 1-for-3, and 0-for-4, which works out to 8-for-20 (40.0%). He also played very good defense when he was in.

Matthews is officially out of his slump. He hit double figures in two of the four games (16, 4, 12, and 8 points), he pulled down lots of rebounds (8, 5, 6, and 3), and he played great defense.

[Jon Teske](#) had a very good tournament. He was the surprise star of the championship game against Purdue, with 14 points and a lot of great defense against those two 7+footers. He was also instrumental in Michigan's all-important win vs. Iowa, when Wagner was limited to just 16 minutes with foul trouble. Teske didn't score much in that game (3 points), but he played awesome defense for 28 minutes. He had quiet games offensively against Nebraska (1 point) and MSU (0 points), but he did a great job giving Wagner a break, keeping him well-rested.

### **Who Looked Not-So-Good**

Livers showed flashes of brilliance, with long stretches of decent defense and no offense. He did score 9 points vs. Iowa, but he had 0, 3, and 2 points the rest of the way. He injured his foot/ankle early in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the Purdue game, and only played 8 minutes. We'll see if this injury costs him any playing time.

[Jordan Poole](#) wanted desperately to help this team. He played hard, and he played fast, but he just couldn't hit a shot to save his life. He scored 6, 2, 2, and 3 points, but he took a lot of

shots to get there: 3-for-7 (0-for-4 from 3-point range), 1-for-9 (0-for-3 from 3-point range), 1-for-2 (0-for-1), and 0-for-1 (0-for-1). That all adds up to 5-for-19 (26.3%), 0-for-9 from 3-point range. Most of those 3-point attempts were wide open. He usually hits them. It was sad.

### **Who Else Played**

[Eli Brooks](#) played for one minute in the Nebraska game, but failed to score.

[Austin Davis](#) played for one minute in the Nebraska game, and two minutes in the Purdue game, but failed to score.

[Jaaron Simmons](#) played in all four games, but failed to score.

[Ibi Watson](#) played in the Nebraska game, and scored one point.

### **Who Didn't Play**

The practice squad players ([C.J. Baird](#), [Brent Hibbitts](#), [Naji Ozeir](#), [Rico Ozuna-Harrison](#), and [Luke Wilson](#)) didn't get into any of the games.

### **The Big Picture**

Since Michigan won the Big Ten Tournament, they get the automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament, but they were going to go as an "at large" team anyway. Just three weeks ago, most bracket predictions had Michigan as a solid pick for the Big Dance, but as an 8 or 9 seed. Since then, Michigan has ripped off nine straight wins, including a couple over highly-regarded teams (MSU and Purdue), and they are now being predicted as a 5, 4, or even a 3 seed. We'll have to wait a week until Selection Sunday (03/11/2018) to see what seed Michigan is awarded, and who, where, and when they will play.

On the one hand, it was great having the Big Ten Tournament in Madison Square Garden. The games were exciting, the crowds were big and loud, and everyone seemed to have a great time. On the other hand, the price for having the tournament in MSG was having to play it a week earlier than usual, since the Big East already had the arena reserved for this upcoming week, when the Big Ten would normally have their tournament. That meant a "compressed" schedule, with those two weird league games in early December, and no true "bye" weeks. Next year, the Big Ten Tournament returns to the United Center in Chicago, in its regular time slot, but for this year, there are 11-13 days off for the four Big Ten teams expected to be in the NCAA Tournament (Michigan, Michigan State, Ohio State, and Purdue). We'll see if the long layoff is a good or bad thing.

### **What's Next**

As mentioned above, Michigan has 11-12 days off before they play in the NCAA Tournament, either on Thursday (03/15/2018) or Friday (03/16/2018). We'll find out on Selection Sunday (03/11/2018) when, where, and who Michigan will play next.

Check back next week for all the details.

Go Blue!