

## Nothing But 'Net – Week #22 – 03/26/2018 – Final Four!

### Quick Look

The (#7) University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games last week as the #3 seed in the West Region of the [NCAA Tournament](#), and they won both of them. [On Thursday \(03/22/2018\), they beat the #7 seed, Texas A&M, 99-72](#), then [on Saturday \(03/24/2018\), they beat the #9 seed, Florida State, 58-54](#). Both games were in Los Angeles, California. The two wins raise Michigan's record to 32-7 (13-5 in the Big Ten). More importantly, Michigan now advances to the Final Four!

### What Happened

What a contrast: the TAMU game was fun and easy. All the shots were dropping, and the game was never in doubt after halftime. Then came the FSU game: none of the shots were falling, and the game was in doubt until the last 10 seconds. Still, in a single-elimination tournament, all that matters is "survive and advance", and that's what Michigan has done. They've done it well enough that they're going to the Final Four in San Antonio, Texas this week.

The TAMU game was gorgeous. Michigan came out hot, built an early lead, and just kept expanding it. As I've said many times, when the 3-pointers fall for Michigan, they look great. All the other aspects of the game seem to fall into place, and they can beat anyone in the country. When the 3-pointers won't go in, it gets trickier. See the description of the FSU game, below, and the stats.

In the TAMU game, Michigan jumped out to a quick 7-point lead (9-2) at the 16:44 mark, and built it up to 13 points (19-6) at the 12:16 mark. They got it up to 21 points (33-12) with 8:29 left in the 1<sup>st</sup> half, and got it as high as 29 points (52-23) with 2:16 to go. TAMU went on a 5-0 run to end the half, but they were still down 24 points at halftime, 52-28. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> half, Michigan was just playing to run the clock out, and they kept the lead in the 23-25 point range for most of the half. TAMU did get as close as 18 points (79-61) with 6:01 left in the game, but Michigan quickly pushed the lead back up to 25 points, and never let it back under 21 points the rest of the way. It was a dominating performance.

The FSU game was the exact opposite of the TAMU game: the 3-pointers wouldn't go in, and Michigan struggled the whole game. Michigan led for the first 10 minutes of the game, but never by very much, usually 3-4 points. At the 10:32 mark, FSU went ahead, 16-15, then the teams traded baskets and the lead for the rest of the half, with Michigan leading by 1 point (27-26) at halftime. Michigan opened the 2<sup>nd</sup> half strong, and quickly built up a 10-point lead (38-28) with 14:30 left in the game. They kept the lead in the 5-6 point range for most of the 2<sup>nd</sup> half, but they couldn't pull away from FSU. They finally built the lead back up to 10 points again (54-44) with 2:25 to go, and it looked like they would be able to close out the game. That's when FSU went into "desperation mode", and got within 2 points (56-54) with 0:24 left. Michigan made 2 crucial free throws, FSU missed a wild 3-point attempt, Michigan got the rebound, and that was the game. Surprisingly, FSU didn't foul in the last 11 seconds to extend the game, even though they were only down 4 points. They just let Michigan dribble it out. Fine by me.

### Stats

[The stats for the TAMU game](#) are amazing, a thing of beauty. Michigan shot very well overall (39-for-63 = 61.9%), they shot 3-pointers very well (14-for-24 = 58.3%), and they shot free throws very well (7-for-8 = 87.5%). They did lose the rebounding battle (33-28), but they won the turnover battle (7-14). Those 14 3-pointers won the game easily. Michigan set an NCAA tournament record when 8 different players made 3-pointers.

[The stats for the FSU game](#) are ugly. Michigan shot very poorly overall (19-for-49 = 38.8%), they shot 3-pointers terribly (4-for-22 = 18.2%), and they shot free throws poorly (16-for-24

= 66.7%). They lost the rebounding battle (36-34), but they did win the turnover battle (11-15). They won the game with defense, holding FSU to 31.4% shooting (16-for-51).

### **Who Looked Good**

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

Matthews and Wagner were the only two Michigan players to hit double figures in both games. Matthews was the undisputed star of the FSU game, with 17 points and 8 rebounds, and he scored 18 points vs. TAMU. Without Matthews, Michigan would have lost the FSU game. He was named the Most Outstanding Player of the Regional tournament.

Wagner had a great game vs. TAMU, with 21 points, including 3-for-3 shooting from 3-point range. He had 12 points vs. FSU, but on very inefficient shooting: 3-for-11 (0-for-7 from 3-point range).

MAAR was the star of the TAMU game, with a team-high 24 points and 7 assists. He almost hit double figures in the FSU game, with 9 points.

Simpson also had double figures in the TAMU game (11 points), and almost hit double figures in the FSU game (9 points). He did a great job of running the offense and played excellent defense.

The only other Michigan player to hit double figures in one game was [Duncan Robinson](#), with 10 points off the bench vs. TAMU. He only had 7 points vs. FSU, but he hit a crucial 3-pointer late in the game, and sunk the 2 free throws that iced the win in the closing seconds.

[Jon Teske](#) also didn't score many points (0 and 2), but he was instrumental in both wins. He came in for Wagner when he needed a rest or had foul trouble, and he played good defense, especially against the massive FSU front line.

[Jordan Poole](#) played in both games, scoring 5 and 0 points, including a 3-pointer vs. TAMU.

[Ibi Watson](#) hit a 3-pointer vs. TAMU. He didn't play in the FSU game.

[Austin Davis](#) had a very nice dunk in the closing seconds of the TAMU game. He didn't play in the FSU game.

[C.J. Baird](#) was the feel-good story of the TAMU game. He came in with 0:41 left in the game, and swished a long 3-pointer 10 seconds later. It was awesome. He was so happy! He didn't play in the FSU game.

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

Livers played in both games, and scored 2 points in each game. He is a starter in name only. He plays good defense, but he is so limited offensively, Robinson plays most of the minutes.

### **Who Else Played**

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

[Eli Brooks](#) played for 1 minute in the TAMU game, but failed to score.

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

Some of the practice squad players ([Brent Hibbitts](#), [Naji Ozeir](#), [Rico Ozuna-Harrison](#), and [Luke Wilson](#)) didn't get into either of the games. It's too bad, since UM had an insurmountable lead over TAMU with 2-3 minutes to go.

## **The Big Picture**

Making it to the Final Four is a Really Big Deal. Win or lose, they can be proud of being one of the top four teams in the country, and the last Big Ten team standing. If they play the way they did in the last 3 games of the Big Ten Tournament or the TAMU game, they'll do fine. If they play the way they did in the other 3 NCAA Tournament games, it will be a grind.

## **What's Next**

This week, Michigan will play in the Final Four in San Antonio, Texas. In the semifinal game, they will play the #11 seed from the South Region, [Loyola-Chicago](#), on Saturday (03/31/2018, 6:09 p.m. EDT, TBS) in the Alamodome. If they win that, they'll face the winner of the other semifinal game between the #1 seed from the East Region, Villanova, and the #1 seed from the Midwest Region, Kansas, on Monday (04/02/2018).

I'll confess: I had never even heard of Loyola-Chicago before they made the NCAA Tournament field this year, and I've only watched about 5 minutes of their games in the tournament. They must be good to have made it to the Final Four and beaten some good teams along the way: (#6 seed) Miami (FL), (#3 seed) Tennessee, (#7 seed) Nevada, and (#9 seed) Kansas State. They are currently 32-5, which is impressive, they didn't really play anybody impressive in their regular season. They did beat Florida on the road, but they also lost to Boise State, Milwaukee, Missouri State, Indiana State, and Bradley, so they are beatable. They only have one truly big guy on their roster, and he's 7' 0", but he's only played 30 minutes and scored 10 points all season, so Michigan should have a distinct size advantage.

Let's just say that the Championship Game will be challenging, if they get that far. Kansas and Villanova both look very tough.

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

Go Blue!