

Nothing But 'Net – Week #23 – 04/02/2018 – Championship Game!

Quick Look

The (#7) University of Michigan men's basketball team played one game last week as the West Region team in the Final Four of the [NCAA Tournament](#), and they won it. [On Saturday \(03/31/2018\), they beat the South Region team, Loyola-Chicago, 69-57](#), in San Antonio, Texas. The win raises Michigan's record to 33-7 (13-5 in the Big Ten). More importantly, Michigan now advances to the Championship Game tonight!

What Happened

This game was 75% nightmare, 25% sweet dream. Fortunately, the good part came at the end, when it counts. Michigan jumped out to an 8-point lead (12-4) at the 12:42 mark, including a couple 3-pointers, and it looked like they were going to run away with the game. The Michigan defense was baffling Loyola, but the Michigan offense wasn't taking advantage of all the stops. After hitting two of their first three 3-point attempts, Michigan missed 12 in a row. Once Loyola started making some shots, they put together a 15-3 run, and led 19-15 with 5:29 to go in the half. They led the rest of the half, and pushed the lead up to 7 points (29-22) at halftime. It was one of the worst halves Michigan has played this season.

Things didn't get much better in the first 10+ minutes of the 2nd half. Loyola pushed the lead up as high as 10 points (41-31) with 14:08 to go, and still led by 5 (47-42) at the 9:19 mark. That's when the game turned around. Michigan went on a nice 12-0 run to take the lead back, 54-47, with 4:59 left. They pushed it up to 10 points (61-51) with 2:13 left, and kept it at least 8 points the rest of the way, including hitting 6 out of the last 8 free throws when Loyola was fouling to extend the game. It was an ugly win, but it was a win nonetheless.

Stats

[The stats for the game](#) are pretty unimpressive. Michigan shot decently overall (25-for-59 = 42.4%), they shot 3-pointers horribly (7-for-28 = 25.0%), and they shot free throws just well enough (12-for-18 = 66.7%). They won the rebounding battle (36-32), and they won the turnover battle (11-17). Even though they shot 3-pointers very poorly, they held Loyola to 10% 3-point shooting (1-for-10). That's where they won the game.

Who Looked Good

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

Wagner was the star of the game, with a remarkable performance. He kept Michigan in the game when no one else could buy a basket. Without him, Michigan would have lost the game for sure. He had 24 points and 15 rebounds (6 offensive!). Only two other players in NCAA Final Four history have had 20+ points and 15+ rebounds: Hakeem Olajuwon and Larry Bird. That's pretty exclusive company. He shot well (10-for-16 overall, 3-for-7 from 3-point range), he was a beast on the boards, and he played great defense.

Matthews also had a good game. He was the only other Michigan player in double figures, with 17 points. He also grabbed 5 rebounds, and played good defense.

MAAR was the only other starter to score, with 7 points. He had a miserable time shooting (2-for-11 overall, 0-for-5 from 3-point range), but he had 5 rebounds, and played good defense.

[Duncan Robinson](#) didn't quite hit double figures (9 points), but he hit two of Michigan's seven 3-pointers, along with three crucial free throws in the last minute.

[Jordan Poole](#) chipped in 7 points off the bench, along with 2 rebounds.

[Jaaron Simmons](#) played 11 important minutes, and hit a big 3-pointer.

Who Looked Not-So-Good

Livers played 12 minutes, but didn't even attempt a shot. He is a starter in name only. He plays good defense, but he is so limited offensively, Robinson plays most of the minutes.

Simpson played 26 minutes, and failed to score. He was 0-for-6 overall, 0-for-3 from 3-point range. He did run the offense pretty well (3 assists), but he also had 4 bad turnovers. As usual, his defense was great.

[Jon Teske](#) had a rough game. He did score 2 points, but he was whistled for 3 fouls in 3 minutes, and sat for the rest of the game.

Who Else Played

[C.J. Baird](#), [Eli Brooks](#), [Austin Davis](#), and [Ibi Watson](#) all played, but none of them attempted a shot.

Who Didn't Play

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

The Big Picture

This is it: the National Championship game. There is no more "tomorrow", there is only "today". At the beginning of the season, very few people were thinking that this season's Michigan team was a Final Four team. It looked like a rebuilding year. Things have gone much better than expected, especially in the last 14 games, all wins.

What's Next

The other Final Four semifinal game was a blowout win for the East Region team (and #1 seed) Villanova over the Midwest Region team (and #1 seed) Kansas, 95-79. So, Michigan will play [Villanova](#) at 9:20 p.m. (EDT) tonight (04/02/2018) on TBS, for the National Championship.

Villanova is very good. Their record is 35-4. They have many impressive wins (Tennessee, Gonzaga, Xavier [twice], West Virginia, Texas Tech, and Kansas), but their 4 losses have all been to unimpressive teams (Butler, St. John's, Providence, and Creighton), so they are beatable. They don't have a lot of height, with four guys at 6' 9", but no one taller, so they might have trouble handling Wagner and Teske on defense. Other than that, they have no apparent weaknesses, and they can score inside and outside. They are an excellent 3-point shooting team. This will be Michigan's toughest test of the year on both offense and defense. If Michigan plays the way they did in their games against Michigan State (twice), Purdue (all 3 times, including 2 losses), and Texas A&M, they'll be able to keep the game close, and maybe steal the win in the closing moments. If they have a slow start, or a long scoring drought, it could prove fatal, since it's very hard to come from behind against Villanova.

Normally, I publish these articles once a week, on Monday mornings, but I'll have a special article tomorrow morning (Tuesday, 04/03/2018) describing the National Championship Game. Check back tomorrow to see what happened, and why.

Go Blue!