

Nothing But 'Net – Week #08 – 12/17/2018 – An Ugly Win

The (#5) University of Michigan men's basketball team played one game last week, and they won it. [On Saturday \(12/15/2018\), they beat Western Michigan 70-62](#) in Crisler Arena. The win raises Michigan's record to 11-0 (2-0 in the Big Ten).

Time for more Questions & Answers:

Q: What was ugly about this win?

A: WMU is a team that Michigan should have thrashed by 30 points, but it was still a 5-point game in the last two minutes. WMU led or was tied for virtually the entire 1st half, with UM getting their first lead of the game at the halftime buzzer (30-28). Michigan used a 10-0 run in the closing minutes of the half to erase an 8-point deficit (28-20), then used a 14-4 run coming out of halftime to open up a decent lead (44-32, with 14:46 left in the game), but they let it slip back to 5 points (45-40) in the next two minutes. They made WMU look better than North Carolina, Purdue, and Villanova. Maybe WMU played one of their better games, although the stats don't bear that out, but certainly UM played one of their least inspired games. It was sloppy and choppy, but at least it was a win, even if it was an ugly win.

Q: Any ideas why Michigan played so poorly?

A: I suspect that the biggest problem was a letdown, after so many challenging games in a row. I don't think they exactly "looked past" WMU, but they may have taken them too lightly. I also suspect that the UM players were thinking more about the end of classes, study days, finals, and the holiday break than they were about serious basketball. They didn't appear focused. WMU won most of the 50-50 balls, and the Michigan players often seemed one step behind them. They couldn't slow down WMU's high scorer, who lit them up for 31 points, including several amazing circus shots. It was scary to see how poorly Michigan can play when they don't have their hearts in it.

Q: How were the team stats?

A: Not very impressive. Michigan shot pretty poorly overall (24-for-54 = 44.4%), they shot 3-pointers fairly well (7-for-18 = 38.9%), and they shot free throws pretty poorly (15-for-25 = 60.0%). They tied (32-32) in the rebounding battle, but won the turnover battle handily (8-16). Those eight extra possessions were the difference in the game.

Complete stats [here](#).

Q: Who looked good for Michigan?

A: A few players had a good game:

- [Charles Matthews](#) was the star of the game, with 25 points and 10 rebounds, for a nice "double-double". He had the buzzer-beater layup that gave Michigan its first lead of the game at halftime, and he had a nice corner 3-pointer with 1:13 to go in the game that gave UM the breathing room they needed to close out the game. He even hit his free throws (11-for-16)!
- [Zavier Simpson](#) scored 15 points, including 3-for-4 from 3-point range. This was very encouraging, since he had missed his previous 10 3-point attempts, dating back a month. He wasn't perfect, with more turnovers (4) than assists (3), but he ran the offense pretty well.
- [Jordan Poole](#) was the only other Michigan player in double figures, with 14 points. He shot pretty well (5-for-9 overall, 2-for-3 from 3-point range).
- [Austin Davis](#) only had 4 points, but he played better than he has in a while. He had to play more minutes (9) than usual, since Jon Teske got in early foul trouble. He did a very nice job defensively on WMU's 7-footer.

Q: Who looked not-so-good for Michigan?

A: Everyone else:

- [Ignas Brazdeikis](#) had his worst game as a Wolverine, with 4 points on a pair of late baskets. He finally looked like a freshman, and not even a good freshman. He forced his way into the lane several times with no hope of making a basket. He was just hoping someone from WMU would bail him out by fouling him. Even when he did get fouled, he missed his free throws (0-for-3).
- [Jon Teske](#) had an "off" game as well, with 3 points. He got 2 quick fouls in the 1st half, and sat for long stretches. He only played 25 minutes. Fortunately, he and Austin Davis and Isaiah Livers forced WMU's star big man into a sub-par game (7 points), so Teske's weak offensive play didn't hurt the team much.
- [Isaiah Livers](#) has been in a slump for most of December. He only had 3 points in this game, on 1-for-6 shooting (0-for-4 from 3-point range). The team needs him for "instant offense" off the bench. On the positive side, he did help contain WMU's big man.
- [Eli Brooks](#) also had an "off" game, with 2 points on 1-for-3 shooting (0-for-2 from deep). He's another player who is counted on for instant offense, and he didn't provide it in this game.

Q: Who else played?

A: No one else played. [Coach Beilein](#) has shortened up his bench considerably, with only three subs.

Q: What did we learn this week?

A: We learned that Michigan can "gum a team to death" when they can't win with style points. We learned that UM is still capable of "playing down" to inferior competition. And, we learned that Iggy is human.

Q: What's next for Michigan?

A: For the rest of the month, Michigan only has one game each week, all at home, and all on weekends. This week, Michigan plays [Air Force](#) on Saturday (12/22/2018, 4:00 p.m., BTN) in Crisler Arena.

Air Force is currently 4-6, with no impressive wins, and losses to Texas State, UMBC, High Point, Colorado, Pacific, and Army. Since they're a service academy, with strict limits on height for admission, they don't have much height: a 6'9" freshman, and a 6'8" sophomore. This is another game that Michigan should win easily, but so was Western Michigan. UM will have to play with a lot more focus and determination than they did vs. WMU if they want to beat Air Force.

That's it for this week. Come on down to Crisler for the Air Force game.

Go Blue!