Nothing But 'Net – Week #17 – 02/18/2019 – Bad News, Good News

The (#6) University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games last week, and they lost one and won the other. On Tuesday (02/12/2019), they lost at Penn State 75-69, then on Saturday (02/16/2019), they beat (#24) Maryland 65-52 in Crisler. The loss and the win leave Michigan with a record of 23-3 (12-3 in the Big Ten). Michigan is tied for 1st place in the Big Ten with Michigan State. Purdue also has 3 losses, but they haven't played as many games as Michigan and Michigan State.

Time for more Questions & Answers:

Q: Bad news, good news?

A: It's not just that Michigan lost a game (bad news) and won a game (good news), it's who they lost to (cellar-dwelling Penn State) and beat (ranked Maryland). The loss to PSU is one of the more shocking and demoralizing losses in the last 20 years, but Michigan bounced back nicely with a solid win against a good Maryland team. The win vs. Maryland makes it 14 times in a row that Michigan has won the next game after a loss. That's impressive, especially compared to some other nearby Big Ten school that lost three games in a row just a couple weeks ago.

Q: So, what happened?

A: The PSU game started out OK, but went bad quickly. The score was tied 7-7 with 16:29 left in the half when PSU went on a 10-2 run, and never trailed again. Michigan got as close as two points (20-18 with 10:38 left in the 1st half), but let the game get away. PSU led by 13 at halftime (40-27), and 16 before the 2nd half started, due to 3 free throws on two technical fouls on Coach Beilein at the end of the 1st half. Michigan did manage to get the lead back down to four points (55-51 with 8:21 left), but PSU pushed it back up to double digits, and held off UM down the stretch.   Michigan was cold and flat, and PSU was hot and fired-up. PSU had their traditional meager crowd, generously listed at 9120, so Michigan can't blame their performance on a rowdy, sold-out arena. They just had a terrible night.

The Maryland game went much better. Michigan opened up a quick 10-point lead (12-2) by the 15:10 mark, and never trailed. They kept the lead in the 9-11 point range for the entire 1st half, and led by 9 (27-18) at halftime. Maryland played better in the 2nd half, and kept within 6-8 points most of the time, getting as close as 3 points (42-29) with 10:21 left in the game. Michigan pushed the lead back up to the 9-11 point range, and kept it there for a convincing win.

Q: Any problems with the officiating?

A: No comment.

Well, I guess I do have a few comments, but most of them are unprintable. Let's just say that the officiating in the PSU game was bad, even by Big Ten standards. How bad? Coach Beilein has only been ejected from two games in his career, and this was one of them. The other time was in 1981. He has to be pretty upset to get ejected.

I'm sure it's just a coincidence, but looking at the officiating crews for Michigan's three losses, a couple names pop out:

At Wisconsin (01/19) - Lewis Garrison, DJ Carstensen, Donnie Eppley
At Iowa (02/01) - Lewis Garrison, DJ Carstensen, Terry Wymer
At PSU (02/12) - Lewis Garrison, Paul Szelc, Rob Riley

I'm sure Lewis Garrison is a fine official, and it's just a coincidence. Same with DJ Carstensen.

Q: How were the game stats?

A: Confusing. The stats for the loss (PSU) are much better than the stats for the win (Maryland).

In the PSU game, Michigan shot well overall (25-for-49 = 51.0%), they shot 3-pointers decently (7-for-20 = 35.0%), and they shot free throws pretty well (12-for-16 = 75.0%). They lost the rebounding battle badly (35-25), and they tied in the turnover battle (12-12). The rebounding edge was the difference.

In the Maryland game, Michigan shot decently overall (25-for-59 = 42.4%), they shot 3-pointers terribly (7-for-26 = 26.9%), and they shot free throws very well (8-for-10 = 80.0%). Once again, they got hammered on the boards (39-30), but they won the turnover battle handily (6-16). Those extra 10 possessions were the difference in the game.

Q: Who looked good for Michigan?

A: A few players had a good week:

- Charles Matthews was the high scorer for Michigan in both games, with 24 points vs. PSU and 14 points vs. Maryland. He also had 6 rebounds in each game.
- Jordan Poole only hit double figures in one game (17 and 8 points). He had an awful week shooting 3-pointers: 1-for-8 vs. PSU, and 0-for-3 vs. Maryland.
- Ignas Brazdeikis also only hit double figures in one game (6 and 13 points). He was limited to 17 minutes in the PSU game by foul trouble.
- Jon Teske didn't hit double figures in either game (5 and 9 points), but he played a key role defensively in the Maryland game, holding Maryland's big gun (Bruno Fernando) scoreless in the 1st half, and limiting him to 12 points total. On the downside, he shot terribly in the Maryland game: 4-for-13 (1-for-7 from deep).
- Isaiah Livers also didn't hit double figures in either game (7 and 7 points), but he was a key contributor on both ends of the court. He helped out a lot on Fernando in the Maryland game.

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

A: A few players had an "off" week:

- Zavier Simpson had a terrible game vs. PSU, but a good game vs. Maryland. However, his performance vs. PSU probably cost Michigan the game. He did score 8 points in the PSU game, but he shot terribly: 2-for-9 (2-for-6 from deep). He also had more turnovers (6) than assists (4). He had 12 points in the Maryland game.
- Eli Brooks played in both games, and finally scored some points: 2 points vs. PSU, 0 points vs. Maryland.
- Brandon Johns, Jr. played in both games, but didn't score in either game.

Q: Who else played this week?

A: David DeJulius played 6 minutes in the Maryland game, when Simpson picked up his 2nd foul in the 1st half. He did OK, with 2 points, and no assists or turnovers.

Q: What did we learn this week?

A: We learned that Michigan can lose to anybody on the road. Michigan is much better than PSU, but with the wrong combination of cold shooting, a hot opponent, and terrible officiating, the big upset is always possible. We also learned that Michigan is very good at ending their losing streaks at one game.

Q: What's next for Michigan?

A: Michigan plays two games again this week, one away and one at home. On Thursday (02/21/2019, 7:00 p.m. EST, ESPN), they play at Minnesota, then on Sunday (02/24/2019, 3:45 p.m., CBS), they play (#11) Michigan State in Crisler.

Minnesota is currently 17-9 (7-8 in Big Ten), with Big Ten wins over Wisconsin and Iowa, and Big Ten losses to Ohio State, Illinois, and Nebraska. Michigan has already played and beaten them (59-57) back on 01/22/2019 (the Charles Matthews buzzer-beater). They were tough in that game in Ann Arbor, and they're likely to be much tougher in "The Barn". Michigan has not played very well on the road in the Big Ten this season (4-3), so this game is very much in doubt.

Ah, my own personal nemesis, Michigan State. I hate Michigan State more than all the other schools Michigan competes against put together. The home basketball game vs. MSU is THE game I want Michigan to win the most of any contest in any sport the whole year, every year.

Michigan State is currently 21-5 (12-3 in Big Ten), with Big Ten wins over Iowa (twice), Purdue, Maryland, and Wisconsin, and three consecutive losses to Purdue, Indiana (at home), and Illinois. Their losses correspond roughly to Michigan's three losses: Purdue == Wisconsin, Indiana == Iowa, Illinois == Penn State. They have some height (a couple 6'11" guys), and two "marquee" players: Nick Ward and Cassius Winston. Ward is another bruiser underneath, so Teske is in for a battle. Moe Wagner routinely embarrassed Ward, but he's in the NBA now, so it's Teske's job to control him. Winston is a lock for 1st team All Big Ten. He's a great player, but he hasn't played against a player like Zavier Simpson this season. It should be quite a matchup. Michigan should win this game, but they'll have to play as well as they have all season to do it.

That's it for this week. Check back next week to see how Michigan did.

Go Blue!