

Nothing But 'Net – Week #24 – 04/08/2019 – Season Wrap-Up, Final Grades, and Looking Ahead

The University of Michigan men's basketball team finished their season last week when [they lost to Texas Tech](#) in the 3rd round (Sweet Sixteen) of the [NCAA Tournament](#). Michigan finished the season with a record of 30-7 (15-5 in Big Ten). They finished 3rd in the Big Ten.

Time for more Questions & Answers:

Q: Did this season pan out the way you expected?

A: Strangely, yes. Here's what I said in my Season Preview, way back in late October:

Q: How good is the 2018-2019 team going to be?

A: Not quite as good as last season's team, but close.

And that's about the way it played out. On the one hand, Michigan had a better record in the Big Ten than last season (15-5 vs. 13-5), and they earned a higher seed in the Big Dance (#3 last season, #2 this season), but on the other hand, UM won more games last season (33 vs. 30), and made it to the National Championship game last season, but only to the Sweet Sixteen this season. So, almost as good as last season.

On the other hand, I closed my Season Preview with this:

Q: Any final thoughts?

A: After their amazing finish last season, it's important to be patient with this young team this season. They may not look very polished early in the year, but once they've got some games under their belt, and [Coach Beilein](#) has had some time to work with them, watch out. I expect them to be much better in March than they are in November.

That didn't play out the way I expected. Michigan was better in November than March this season.

Q: Was there a season-long pattern for this team?

A: There sure was: great defense, erratic offense. The defense finished #2 in the nation, but the offense went from great to lousy and back again, sometimes during a single game. It was bad offense that knocked UM out of the NCAA Tournament.

Q: How did the season go?

A: Last season, Michigan finished strong, winning 14 games in a row before losing in the National Championship game. This season, Michigan started strong, winning their first 17 games, a new program record. Along the way, they won some big games impressively: [at \(#8\) Villanova 73-46, vs. Providence 66-47 on a neutral court, at home vs. \(#11\) North Carolina 84-67, at home vs. \(#19\) Purdue 76-57, and at home vs. \(#21\) Indiana 74-63](#). Villanova, UNC, and Purdue all went on to have good seasons, so these wins held up as impressive.

On the surface, the hot start looks like a big accomplishment, but when you dig a little deeper, you can see that it cost UM dearly in the long run. Instead of building up Michigan's confidence, the 17-game winning streak really messed with their heads. The pressure got to them, and they started playing "not to lose", instead of "playing to win". It all came crashing down when [they went into Madison and looked terrible against a so-so Wisconsin team, losing 64-54](#). They were still shaken the next game, barely [beating an even less talented Minnesota squad 59-57 in Ann Arbor](#). They looked a little better the next two games, [beating Indiana on](#)

[the road 69-46](#), and [Ohio State in Ann Arbor 65-49](#), but that was their last 3-game winning streak. The rest of the season they went L-W-W, five times:

- [Lost at Iowa 74-59, won at Rutgers 77-65, won at home vs. \(#19\) Wisconsin 61-52.](#)
- [Lost at Penn State 75-69, won at home vs. \(#24\) Maryland 65-52, won at Minnesota 69-60.](#)
- [Lost at home to \(#10\) Michigan State 77-70, won at home vs. Nebraska 82-53, won at \(#17\) Maryland 69-62.](#)
- [Lost at \(#9\) Michigan State 75-63, beat Iowa on a neutral court 74-53, beat Minnesota on a neutral court 76-49.](#)
- [Lost to \(#6\) Michigan State on a neutral court 65-60, beat Montana on a neutral court 74-55, beat Florida on a neutral court 64-49.](#)

That takes us to the Sweet Sixteen loss vs. Texas Tech. Michigan just couldn't get any momentum going after the loss at Wisconsin. The win in Ann Arbor over Wisconsin was satisfying, and the wins over Maryland (twice) and Iowa were impressive, but the loss at Penn State was devastating, and the three losses in three weeks to MSU were very deflating.

Q: What was the problem?

A: There were two main problems this season: 3-point shooting, and the mental part of the game.

- 3-point shooting: For the season, Michigan shot 34.2% from 3-point range (287-for-839), which isn't bad. However, in their 7 losses, they shot much worse (44-for-163 = 27.0%), and in their 30 wins, they shot much better (243-for-676 = 35.9%). They had a much better record (16-2) in games where they shot above than average than in games where they shot below average (14-5). It was that simple. Sure, bad Big Ten officiating cost Michigan a game or two, but they could have won those games with decent 3-point shooting. They could have won the Big Ten regular season and tournament titles with decent 3-point shooting. They would be playing in the Final Four with decent 3-point shooting. Complete stats are [here](#).
- Mental aspect: Michigan led by double digits in the 2nd half of several of the games they ended up losing. Once the opposing team started coming back, Michigan often folded. This was often accompanied by scoring droughts of 4-5 minutes or more.

Q: You said something about Final Grades?

A: Here are the final grades, with the mid-term grades listed first.

Freshman Eligibility

[Ignas Brazdeikis](#) (A/A) – Iggy was sensational all season, with only a few “off” games (George Washington, Western Michigan, Wisconsin [twice], at Penn State, and Florida). He led the team in scoring (14.8 points/game), and shot with pretty good accuracy (46.2% overall, 39.2% from deep).

[Colin Castleton](#) (Incomplete/C) – Colin played in 19 games, and scored 21 points. He hit double figures once (11 points vs. Nebraska), and missed all 3 of his 3-point shots. He looked like he was starting to “get it”, then he regressed back to “lost freshman” mode.

[David DeJulius](#) (Incomplete/C-) – David played in 25 games, and scored 14 points. He only scored more than 2 points once (4 points vs. Villanova), and shot 1-for-15 from 3-point range. He looked fairly comfortable out there, but he never did anything impressive, he just filled up space.

[Brandon Johns, Jr.](#) (Incomplete/C-) – Brandon played in 28 games, and scored 22 points. He had one good game (8 points vs. Indiana), and shot 1-for-3 from 3-point range. Like

Castleton, he looked like he was starting to "get it", then he regressed back to "lost freshman" mode. He was supposed to be the second most "college-ready" of the freshmen, after Iggy.

[Adrien Nuñez](#) (Incomplete/D) – Adrien played in 20 games, and scored 3 points. His only points were vs. Indiana, on a 3-pointer. He was supposed to be the best 3-point shooter in the freshman class, but he shot 1-for-13 from deep.

Sophomore Eligibility

[C.J. Baird](#) (Incomplete/Incomplete) – C.J. played in 13 games, and scored 9 points, all on 3-pointers. He shot 3-for-8 from deep. He's on the scout team, and only plays in "garbage time".

[Eli Brooks](#) (B/C) – Eli started the season as the most pleasant surprise of the season, but he really tailed off once the Big Ten season started. He had a very quiet freshman season, but he was more confident and productive this season. He played in all 37 games, and scored 91 points (2.5 points/game). He shot pretty well (37.8% overall, 29.2% from 3-point range), but he had way too many 0-point games.

[Austin Davis](#) (C/D) – Austin started the season slow, and went downhill from there. He played in 25 games, and scored 25 points, with a high game of 6 points vs. Chattanooga. He did shoot a nice percentage for the season (12-for-19 = 63.2%), but he had problems with committing silly fouls, and seemed a step slow out there. He was supposed to be a solid backup for Teske at center, but he was passed by a pair of true freshmen (Castleton and Johns) on the depth chart.

[Isaiah Livers](#) (B+/B+) – Isaiah definitely improved this season over last. While he was nominally a starter last season, he didn't play much, and didn't do much when he did play. This season, he was a big contributor to Michigan's success. He played in 35 games, and started 3 of them, but he was really Michigan's sixth man, and he usually sparked the team when he came in. Last season, he played forward, but this season he played center much of the time. He's a different kind of center than Jon Teske, and he allowed Michigan to play "small ball" and push the tempo a little more. He scored 278 points (7.9 points/game), and had the best 3-point shooting percentage on the team (52-for-122 = 42.6%).

[Rico Ozuna-Harrison](#) (None/Incomplete) – Rico didn't play in the 2018 portion of the season, so he has no midterm grade. He only played in 2 games, took 1 shot, and missed it. He's on the scout team, and only plays in "garbage time".

[Jordan Poole](#) (B+/B+) – Jordan definitely improved from last season, but not as much as expected. Still, he was the 2nd leading scorer on the team (12.8 points/game), and the 3rd best 3-point shooter (75-for-203 = 36.9%). When he's hot from 3-point range, he's one of the best in the country, but when he's cold, it can be painful.

[Luke Wilson](#) (Incomplete/Incomplete) – Luke only played in 10 games, took 3 shots, and missed them all. He's on the scout team, and only plays in "garbage time".

Junior Eligibility

[Charles Matthews](#) (B+/B+) – Charles can take over a game and be unstoppable, or he can go invisible out there. When he's "on" and into the game, he looks like a future NBA player, but he occasionally loses focus, and just drifts around. He was the 3rd leading scorer on the team (12.2 points/game), but his shooting percentages weren't very good: 43.1% overall, 29.9% from deep. He did improve his free throw shooting from last season, to 64.5%, which is respectable. He played excellent defense, and provided good leadership.

[Zavier Simpson](#) (B/A-) – It's hard to grade Zavier out there, since many of the things he does don't show up in the box score. He didn't score much (8.8 points/game), and his shooting percentages weren't very good (43.4% overall, 30.8% from deep), but he did have the most

assists (244) and steals (53) on the team by far. He does a great job running the offense, and he is tenacious on defense.

[Jon Teske](#) (B/B) – Jon did a good job taking over as the starting center, and he does some things very well, but he's not a complete player. He was the 4th leading scorer on the team (9.5 points/game), and he shot very well overall (52.1%) and pretty well from 3-point range (29.9%). He led the team in rebounds (259) and blocks (75). On the other hand, he's not as quick or nimble as Isaiah Livers, and he had trouble defending smaller, more agile "stretch 5s". Still, it's nice to have a 7'1" guy out there protecting the rim.

Q: Looking ahead?

A: As you can see in the grades above, there are no players on the team this season with senior eligibility. In theory, that would mean that everyone could be back next season. In practice, however, Michigan will be losing one of their most valuable players, Charles Matthews. Since Charles transferred to Michigan after his freshman season at Kentucky, he had to sit for a year before he was eligible to play last season with sophomore eligibility. Charles is an actual student-athlete, and he was serious about his studies, so he'll be graduating at the end of this term. Instead of enrolling in grad school at Michigan, or taking a grad-year transfer to another school, he is going to try his luck with the NBA draft. Based on how he played this season, I'm not expecting him to get drafted in the first two rounds, so he'll probably sign with someone as an undrafted free agent. Maybe he'll make it with an NBA team, maybe not. He's a borderline case.

Besides Matthews, everyone else should be back next season. At various times during this season, the "experts" talked about Iggy leaving for the NBA after his freshman year, but that doesn't seem likely now. Iggy is older than most freshmen (he turned 20 in January) and mature enough to play professionally, but he needs to show the NBA scouts more consistency before they'll take a chance on him with one of their two precious draft picks.

The only other Michigan player with NBA aspirations is Jordan Poole, but he also had enough "off" games to keep him in school for at least another season, again to prove that he can be more consistent.

None of the scholarship players seem dissatisfied enough to transfer out, so almost all of the team should be back next season, with a solid core of upperclassmen and a promising class of rising sophomores. But, what about new players? Well, at this point, Michigan only has two commitments for next season:

- Cole Bajema (6'7", 176 pounds, F) – Cole is a 4-star forward from Lynden, WA. He's got a sweet 3-point shot, and he can score in bunches. At 176 pounds, he needs some time in the weight room to play in the Big Ten.
- Jalen Wilson (6'8", 215 pounds, F) – Jalen is a 4-star forward from Denton, TX. He is also a good 3-point shooter, with the size and moves to drive to the basket and finish.

However, there is one more player who will be on the roster next season:

- [Jaron Faulds](#) (6'10", 225 pounds, F) – Jaron had to sit this season after transferring from Columbia. He will have sophomore eligibility next season. He had decent stats at Columbia as a freshman, but the level of competition will be a little different at Michigan.

That's it for this season. Check back in October for the new season.

Go Blue!