

Nothing But 'Net – Week #06 – 12/02/2019 – Battle 4 Atlantis Champions!

The University of Michigan men's basketball team played three games this week in the [Battle 4 Atlantis](#) tournament in the Bahamas, and they won all three of them, and the championship! [On Wednesday \(11/27/2019\), they beat Iowa State 83-76, on Thursday \(11/28/2019\), they beat \(#6\) North Carolina 73-64, and on Friday \(11/29/2019\), they beat \(#8\) Gonzaga 82-64.](#) Michigan's record is now 7-0.

The Tournament And The Resort

Wow! What a tournament! I took my wife (Cindy), my son (Eric), and Eric's best friend (Nathen) to Atlantis for the tournament, and we had a great time. Paradise Island is beautiful, the Atlantis resort is awesome, and the basketball games were fabulous. I don't think many "experts" expected Michigan to beat any of the four ranked teams ([#6] North Carolina, [#8] Gonzaga, [#11] Oregon, and [#13] Seton Hall), much less beat two of them and win the tournament, but that's exactly what they did. Not only did they win all three games, they won them all decisively. In fact, Michigan led at halftime in all three games, and never trailed in the 2nd half of any of them. They led by as many as 15 points in the 2nd half against Iowa State, as many as 24 points in the 2nd half against North Carolina, and as many as 21 points in the 2nd half against Gonzaga. There was no doubt that Michigan was the best team in the tournament, and it wasn't even close.

Before we talk about the games, we need to talk about the fans. There were fans at the games for all 8 teams, but there were way more fans there rooting for North Carolina than the other 7 teams combined. They brought an incredible number of fans, and they were loud and rowdy and very confident, that is, until the 2nd half of their game against Michigan. That quieted them down. Michigan had a respectable number of fans at the tournament, but we were outnumbered in all 3 games. Iowa State probably had the 2nd most fans there, after UNC, and they were also loud and rowdy and confident, until the 2nd half of their game against Michigan. Gonzaga brought more fans than Michigan, and they were pretty loud, but the Michigan fan group kept up with them. Michigan didn't play Seton Hall, Oregon, Alabama, or Southern Mississippi, so I didn't get to see their fans during a game. There were quite a few Seton Hall fans around the pool, although Oregon, Alabama, and Southern Mississippi didn't have as many fans. I was proud of the great job the small-but-mighty Michigan fan group did of cheering on the team. We were the best of all the fan groups on a per-person basis.

This was a fun, laid-back, mellow, intimate tournament. The arena is a converted ballroom, with seating for 3500 fans. Our seats were right behind the basket, near the end of the UM bench. We could hear the players on the court, and they could hear us, especially the opponents when they were shooting free throws (nice job, Eric). The stands were never full; here are the attendance numbers for UM's games:

- ISU – 1531
- UNC – 1828
- Gonzaga – 1503

One of the best aspects of this tournament was being able to mingle with the players. They stayed at the same hotels we did, they ate at the same restaurants, and they used the same pools. We saw them often, and the UM players were very friendly, polite, and cooperative. We talked with them, and took photos with them. It was great.

What Happened?

The way the tournament bracket was set up, the most important game was the first game. If a team won that game, they were in the winner's bracket, and the worst they could do was 4th place. However, if they lost the first game, they were in the loser's bracket, and the best they could do was 5th place. Both Michigan and Iowa State realized this, and their first-round game was fierce. ISU jumped out to a 9-point lead (16-7) with 13:46 to go in the 1st half, but Michigan went ahead 2 minutes later, 17-16, with 11:37 left. ISU pulled back ahead (33-32)

with 5:06 left, but that was their last lead of the game. Michigan finished the half on a 9-4 run, to lead by 4 at halftime (41-37), then came out in the 2nd half and pushed the lead up to 13 (52-39) with 16:30 to go. ISU got as close as 9 points a few times, but Michigan still led by 12 points (77-65) with 3:01 left. ISU gave it one last push, and got as close as 5 points (81-76) with 7 seconds left, but Michigan made 2 free throws to ice the game. It was a hard-fought game, but Michigan was clearly the better team.

No one was surprised that North Carolina won their opening-round game against overmatched Alabama, but it was a little surprising that they only won by 9 points (76-67), and they only led by 3 at one point in the 2nd half. Still, no one really expected Michigan to be able to stay with UNC for 40 minutes. The game started out poorly for Michigan, with UNC jumping out to a 9 point lead (13-4) with 14:39 to go in the 1st half. UM finally went ahead 21-20 at the 9:00 mark, and the lead went back and forth for the next 5 minutes. UM was still ahead by 1 point (30-29) with 4:03 to go, when they went on a 9-5 run to close out the half, leading 39-34. The lead was still 5 points (41-36) with 17:16 to go when Michigan went on a glorious 19-0 run to put the game almost out of reach, 60-36, with 11:21 to go. It was a good thing Michigan had a 24-point lead to work with, because UNC came storming back, and got as close as 8 points (69-61) with 2:46 left, but UM pushed the lead back up to 11 points and won by 9. Once again, there was no doubt that Michigan was the better team.

In the championship game against Gonzaga, Michigan fell behind early again, this time 12-7 with 13:43 to go in the 1st half. Michigan went ahead 14-12 at the 12:16 mark, and never trailed again. Michigan led by 8 (28-20) with 7:12 left in the half, and pushed the lead up to 11 points (36-25) at halftime. The Zags came back early in the 2nd half, and got within 2 points (38-36) with 16:00 left in the game. Michigan pushed the lead back into double digits (50-38) with 13:35 to go, then to 19 points (62-43) with 10:08 left, and never let Gonzaga get closer than 11 points the rest of the way, winning by 18. It was a dominant win.

Stats

[The stats for the Iowa State game](#) are pretty impressive. Michigan shot very well overall (30-for-52 = 57.7%), they shot 3-pointers very well (10-for-21 = 47.6%), and they shot free throws well enough (13-for-18 = 72.2%). They won the rebounding battle handily (39-28), but lost the turnover battle badly (22-9). The 3-point shooting and the rebounding were the difference in this one.

[The stats for the North Carolina game](#) aren't quite as impressive as the ISU stats, but they're still pretty good. Michigan shot well overall (28-for-56 = 50.0%), they shot 3-pointers well (11-for-26 = 42.3%), and they shot free throws decently (6-for-10 = 60.0%). They lost the rebounding battle, barely (36-34), and they lost the turnover battle (16-11). They won this game with defense, holding UNC to 15.4% shooting from 3-point range (2-for-13).

[The stats for the Gonzaga game](#) are also impressive. Michigan shot very well overall (34-for-63 = 54.0%), they shot 3-pointers very well (12-for-23 = 52.2%), and they barely shot free throws (2-for-5 = 40.0%). They won the rebounding battle (38-37) and the turnover battle (11-13). Once again, the 3-point shooting was the difference. Michigan made 12 3-pointers, Gonzaga made 6. That's the exact 18-point margin of victory right there.

Who Started?

The starters were [Eli Brooks](#), [Isaiah Livers](#), [Zavier Simpson](#), [Jon Teske](#), and [Franz Wagner](#).

Wait, what? Franz Wagner? I thought he was out until at least the first week of December. Well, he must have healed quickly, because he started and played and contributed in all three games. It was a very pleasant surprise.

Who Looked Good?

Teske! Jon Teske was a beast in this tournament. He hit double figures in all 3 games (11, 10, and 19), and he had 6, 8, and (career-high) 15 rebounds to go with those points. He also had 9 blocked shots over the 3 games, and altered a couple dozen other shots. He played hard, he played strong, and he was easily the best player in the tournament. Easily. He won the tournament MVP, and he deserved it. He even hit some 3-pointers: 1-for-2 vs. ISU, 2-for-4 vs. UNC, and 1-for-3 vs. Gonzaga. The other teams couldn't guard him, and they couldn't score on him. It was awesome to watch.

Livers actually scored more points than Teske (17, 12, and 21), and he played good defense, but he wasn't the game-altering factor that Teske was. Still, he joined Teske on the All Tournament team. He hit a career-high 5 3-pointers (on 8 shots) in the Gonzaga game.

Simpson only hit double figures in 2 of the 3 games (10, 7, and 13), but he hit double figures for assists in 2 of the 3 games (13, 6, and 13). He was limited to 17 minutes in the UNC game, due to foul trouble.

Brooks almost hit double figures in all 3 games (8, 24, and 8), and his 24 points against UNC were crucial. He played well in all 3 games, especially filling in for Simpson when he had foul trouble vs. UNC.

Wagner only hit double figures in 1 of the 3 games (6, 3, and 10), but he played pretty well for someone who had only been practicing with both hands for 2 days. He looked a little rusty out there, with some careless turnovers vs. UNC, but once he started playing instead of thinking, he looked much better. He's going to hit a bunch of 3-pointers this season, and he hit his first attempt of the season, but he didn't have a particularly good tournament shooting 3-pointers: 2-for-3, 1-for-5, 0-for-1.

[David DeJulius](#) came off the bench as "instant offense", and he delivered, with double figures in 2 of the 3 games (14, 11, and 9). He shot 3-pointers pretty well: 2-for-3, 1-for-3, and 3-for-5. He and Brooks shared point guard duty when Simpson was on the bench, and they both did well. DeJulius wasn't at all intimidated going up against a lottery pick guard (Cole Anthony from UNC).

[Colin Castleton](#) went in for Teske in each game to give Big Jon a breather, and he held his own while he was in there. He did score in double figures in 1 of the 3 games (10, 4, and 0), and he played good defense. He's not as big/strong/tough as Teske, he's more of a finesse player, but he played tough down low on defense.

[Austin Davis](#) played 7 strong, important minutes in the ISU game, when Teske had some foul trouble, and he did very well. He only had 2 points and 2 rebounds, but he didn't get pushed around in the paint, and he played solid defense. He also played in the last minute of the Gonzaga game.

[Brandon Johns, Jr.](#) played in all 3 games, and scored a few points (2, 2, and 0), and grabbed a few rebounds (5, 3, and 0). He also played good interior defense.

Who Looked Not-So-Good?

[Adrien Nuñez](#) went from a starter to an afterthought in one game. Once Wagner was cleared to play, he slid way down the bench. He did hit a 3-pointer in the ISU game, for his only points of the tournament. He didn't play in the UNC game.

Who Else Played?

[Cole Bajema](#) played in the last minute of the Gonzaga game, and he hit his only 2-point basket.

Who Didn't Play?

Even though Michigan opened up impressive leads in all 3 games, they were all close in the final minutes, so [Coach Howard](#) couldn't put in the practice squad ([C.J. Baird](#), [Jaron Faulds](#), [Rico Ozuna-Harrison](#), and [Luke Wilson](#)).

What Does It Mean?

After only playing against one team with a pulse (Creighton) in the first 4 games, Michigan finally got a chance to play against some solid competition, and they responded the way we had hoped they would. They looked VERY solid against 2 teams in the Top 10. There were a few chinks in the armor: too many turnovers, and a tendency to start slowly and let the opponent chip away at a big lead in the last 10 minutes of the game, but they looked VERY good building up those big leads against quality competition. VERY good.

What's Next?

This week, Michigan plays two games, one on the road and one at home. On Tuesday (12/03/2019, 7:30 p.m., ESPN), they play at (#2) [Louisville](#), then on Friday (12/06/2019, 6:30 p.m., FS1), they play [Iowa](#) in Crisler Arena. The Louisville game is part of the [ACC/Big Ten Challenge](#).

Louisville is currently 7-0, with no significant wins or losses. They've got some height (one 6'11" player and two 6'10" players), and tons of senior leadership. They are very tough on their home court, and this would be a major upset if Michigan could sneak by them. This is Michigan's first true road game, and Louisville will probably be ranked #1 when the polls come out this afternoon.

Iowa is currently 5-2, with a win over (#12) Texas Tech and losses to DePaul and San Diego State. They've got some height (two 6'11" players and one 6'10" player), and a nice collection of upperclassmen. They're picked to come in 8th in the Big Ten, so this is a "toss up" game.

Check back next week to see how Michigan did.

Go Blue!