

Nothing But 'Net – Week #07 – 12/09/2019 – First Loss, First B1G Win

The (#4) University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games this week, and they lost one and won one. [On Tuesday \(12/03/2019\), they lost at \(#1\) Louisville 58-43](#), then [on Friday \(12/06/2019\), they beat Iowa 103-91](#) in Crisler Arena. The Louisville game was part of the [ACC/Big Ten Challenge](#). Michigan's record is now 8-1 (1-0 in the Big Ten).

What Happened?

We've got a lot to talk about! First of all, there's that "(#4)" in the first line of this article. It wasn't there the first six articles, because Michigan wasn't ranked before this week. That's right: Michigan went from unranked to #4 in the polls in one week, which tied a record for the biggest jump ever. They certainly deserved to be in the Top 25 after the way they played in the Battle 4 Atlantis tournament, although #4 seemed a little higher than necessary. I was thinking #9 or #10. We'll see how the loss to #1 affects their ranking.

A word about the ranking numbers I use in these articles: I always use the AP Poll, not the Coaches Poll, and it comes out on Monday afternoons, which means that I need to use the "stale" rankings from the previous week in my articles. Sorry.

On to the games. After looking so good in the Bahamas, Michigan looked terrible in the game at Louisville. Just terrible. They were slow and they were sloppy. Louisville didn't look that good, especially in the first 10 minutes of the game, and Michigan could have won this game with an effort like they gave in the Bahamas, but they didn't have it in them. [Coach Howard](#) wouldn't use it as an excuse after the game, but they sure looked like they were worn down after playing three games in three days, then traveling all day to get back to Ann Arbor, then going to classes on Monday. Even if they weren't that physically tired, they appeared mentally and emotionally spent. It was not a good time to go into a hostile arena for their first true road game, against a team that had just moved up to the #1 ranking.

The "game flow" for the Louisville game is ugly. Both teams were shooting bricks, and it was still 0-0 after 2:00. It was tied (2-2) with 17:10 left in the half, and that was the last time it was tied. Louisville (very) slowly pulled away, up 7-2 with 13:39 left to go. Michigan finally scored again at the 13:22 mark to make it 7-4, and got a free throw at the 10:01 mark. That's 5 points in 10 minutes of "action". At that point it was 12-5, and it got worse: 18-5 with 7:46 to go. Michigan finally scored again at the 6:49 mark, to make it 18-7, but Louisville promptly pushed their lead even higher, to 22-7 with 5:16 to go. Michigan managed to finally score a few more points before halftime, and closed the gap to 10 points (28-18).

Let's pause here to consider that score. 18 points in 20 minutes is unacceptable. My bare minimum for acceptability is at least 20 points each half, 40 points total. It's hard to believe that the same UM team that scored 83, 73, and 82 points in three games last week could fumble their way to 18 points at halftime in this game. They shot 20% overall in that half (6-for-30) and 16.7% from 3-point range (1-for-6). Out of those 30 shots, at least half of them were slightly-to-completely open, including a few point-blank puppies. It was very frustrating.

The 2nd half started with some encouraging play. Michigan continued their slight run from the end of the 1st half, and actually got within 4 points (30-26) at the 16:59 mark, but that was the high-water mark for the game. Louisville quickly pushed the lead back to 14 points (40-26), and Michigan never got closer than 10 points the rest of the way. Sad.

The "game flow" for the Iowa game is the exact opposite of the Louisville game. As they have done so often this season, and even against Top-10 teams, Michigan took the lead for good early in the 1st half, and kept it the rest of the way. In this case, the lead seesawed back and forth in the early going, and the score was tied 12-12 with 14:54 to go in the 1st half. Michigan went ahead 14-12, and never trailed again. They built the lead up to 8 points (21-13) with 12:39 to go, 9 points (38-29) with 5:30 to go, and 10 points (43-33) with 3:51 left in the half. It was down to 5 points (43-38) with 2:53 to go, when UM went on a great 7-0 run

to end the half up 12 points (50-38). Note that Michigan scored more points (50) in the 1st half vs. Iowa than they did the whole game against Louisville (43).

In the 2nd half, Michigan kept the lead in the 10-13 point range, although Iowa did creep as close as 7 points once (78-71, with 7:38 to go). The last couple minutes were painful to watch, as Iowa kept fouling, hoping that Michigan would miss enough free throws to cut into the lead, but it didn't work. It just made for slow, ugly basketball. In the last 4:03 of the game, Iowa committed 9 fouls, all intentional, and Michigan shot 18 free throws, making 15 of them. The Michigan lead went up, not down, from 10 points to as high as 16 points, before ending up at 12 points. That's crummy basketball and crummy coaching by Fran McCaffery, Iowa's coach.

If you look back over my articles for the last 20 years, you'll see that I seldom mention opposing players by name, but I have to give a shout-out to Luka Garza of Iowa. He played one of the best games I've ever seen in person, scoring 44 points on 17-for-32 shooting, along with 10-for-13 from the free-throw line. His only weakness was 3-point shooting (0-for-3). He scored inside and mid-range, with great moves and a dead-eye shot. He was unstoppable. Three different Michigan players tried to contain him, and they all failed, although they did slow him down a little in the 2nd half. Maybe his shooting arm got tired? Anyway, he deserves credit for keeping Iowa in this game. If he had had a "normal" game, Michigan would have won by 25 points or more.

Stats

[The stats for the Louisville game](#) are dreadful. Michigan shot absolutely terribly overall (15-for-58 = 25.9%), they shot absolutely terribly from 3-point range (3-for-19 = 15.8%), but they did shoot free throws decently (10-for-15 = 66.7%). It seemed like much more, but they only had 10 turnovers; they still lost the turnover battle (10-8), and the rebounding battle (41-48). You aren't going to win many games shooting 15.8% from 3-point range.

[The stats for the Iowa game](#) are much better. Michigan shot very well overall (32-for-58 = 55.2%), they shot 3-pointers very well (10-for-24 = 41.7%), and they shot free throws very well (29-for-34 = 85.3%). They still managed to lose the turnover battle (9-7), but they won the rebounding battle (38-30).

Who Started?

The starters were [Eli Brooks](#), [Isaiah Livers](#), [Zavier Simpson](#), [Jon Teske](#), and [Franz Wagner](#). This appears to be the permanent starting lineup, now that Wagner is healthy.

Who Looked Good?

Well, since Teske was the only Michigan player who played well against Louisville, this is going to be a short list this week. He was the only UM player to hit double figures against Louisville (18 points), along with 10 rebounds, for a nice double-double. He scored 16 points against Iowa, and was the only Michigan player to hit double figures in both games. On the negative side, he had a tough time containing Garza of Iowa.

[Austin Davis](#) didn't have a bad game vs. Louisville because he didn't play in that game. He did have a good game vs. Iowa (8 points on 4-for-6 shooting), and he probably did the best at slowing down Garza of Iowa. He's been playing much better lately.

There's your list of who looked good.

Who Looked Not-So-Good?

Simpson almost made the "who looked good" list, with 9 points vs. Louisville and 16 points vs. Iowa. The biggest problems were that he shot a lousy percentage vs. Louisville (4-for-11),

and he had more turnovers (4) than assists (3) in that game. He played much better vs. Iowa.

Wagner was another player who almost made the "who looked good" list. He had a very poor game vs. Louisville (5 points and 3 turnovers), but he was the star of the Iowa game, with a game-high 18 points, including 9-for-10 shooting free throws.

Livers probably had the worst game of all the Michigan players vs. Louisville. He only scored 3 points, on 1-for-9 shooting (1-for-4 from 3-point range). He had a solid game vs. Iowa, with 14 points, but his showing vs. Louisville moved him to the "who looked not-so-good" list.

Brooks also had a very poor game vs. Louisville, with 2 points (on free throws), shooting 0-for-6. He also bounced back in the Iowa game, with 13 points, but his disappearance in the Louisville game hurt.

[David DeJulius](#) had a great tournament in the Bahamas, but he couldn't get going this week. He had 2 points in each game, on mediocre shooting.

[Colin Castleton](#) also played well in the Bahamas, but couldn't keep it going this week. He had 2 points vs. Louisville and 4 points vs. Iowa. He took an elbow to his lip in the Iowa game, but went back in after getting stitches. He also was ineffective at containing Garza of Iowa.

[Brandon Johns, Jr.](#) had a lousy game vs. Louisville (2 points), but a very good game vs. Iowa (12 points, on 4-for-6 shooting, 2-for-3 from 3-point range). He also had 8 rebounds vs. Iowa, 5 of them offensive rebounds. Hopefully, he'll use the Iowa game as a springboard for the rest of the season.

Who Else Played?

[Cole Bajema](#), [Adrien Nuñez](#), and [Luke Wilson](#) all got in during the last minute of the Louisville game, but none of them scored.

Who Didn't Play?

[C.J. Baird](#), [Jaron Faulds](#), and [Rico Ozuna-Harrison](#) didn't get in either game.

What Does It Mean?

Well, it wasn't very likely that Michigan was going to go undefeated this season, and if they had to lose a game, losing on the road to the #1 team in the nation wasn't too embarrassing. What was embarrassing was how poorly they played. Fortunately, they bounced back nicely vs. Iowa. Hopefully, they won't get as worn down as they looked vs. Louisville for the rest of the season.

What's Next?

This week, Michigan plays two games, one on the road and one at home. On Wednesday (12/11/2019, 9:00 p.m. EST, BTN), they play at [Illinois](#), then on Saturday (12/14/2019, 12:00 p.m., CBS), they play (#13) [Oregon](#) in Crisler Arena.

Illinois is currently 6-3 (0-1 in the Big Ten), with no impressive wins, and losses to (#21) Arizona, Miami (FL), and (#3) Maryland. They got crushed by Arizona, but they almost beat Miami and Maryland. They've got a hot freshman 7-footer (Kofi Cockburn) who's averaging a double-double (15.4 points/game, 10.7 rebounds/game), so that's going to be a challenge. It's always tough to win on the road, and it's even tougher in the Big Ten.

Oregon is currently 7-2, with wins over (#13) Memphis and (#13) Seton Hall. Their two losses were in the Battle 4 Atlantis tournament to (#8) Gonzaga (by 1 point in overtime) and to (#6) North Carolina (by 4 points). Even though they didn't play Michigan in the Bahamas, I

did see them play down there, and they're tough. They've got decent height, and they never give up. This is the best non-conference opponent Michigan will play at home this season. Michigan will have to play like they did in the Bahamas to win this game.

Check back next week to see how Michigan did.

Go Blue!