Nothing But 'Net – Week #13 – 01/20/2020 – The Season Is Slipping Away

The (#19) University of Michigan men's basketball team played one game this week, and they lost it. On Friday (01/17/2020), they lost at Iowa 90-83. The loss drops Michigan's record to 11-6 (2-4 in the Big Ten). Michigan is now 0-5 in true road games this season.

What Happened?

The season is slipping away. It started with such promise, and peaked on 11/29/2019, when Michigan beat (#8) Gonzaga soundly in the Bahamas to claim the Battle 4 Atlantis championship. Since then, Michigan is 4-6, with only 2 of those wins against teams with a pulse (Iowa and Purdue). They have completely lost all the swagger and momentum they had in the Bahamas, and are now utterly helpless in road games.

The Iowa game was a game of runs, and Iowa had the decisive run in the last 3:25 of the game to win it. Both teams had decent leads at one time or another: Michigan lead by 7 points (16-9) with 13:13 left in the 1st half, then Iowa led by 11 points (33-22) with 7:48 to go in the half. Michigan whittled away at that lead, and got it down to 4 points (47-43) at halftime. Iowa kept the lead in the 3-5 point range for most of the early part of the 2nd half, but Michigan made a move, and took the lead back at the 12:46 mark. They pushed it up to 7 points (72-65) with 9:42 to go, and still led by 6 points (74-68) with 7:44 to go. Iowa went back in front at the 5:26 mark, but it was still a 1-point Iowa lead (80-79) with 3:25 to go. Michigan went stone cold, and didn't score again until the 0:21 mark. By then, the game was out of reach.

Stats

The stats for the game are decent. Michigan shot well overall (34-for-68 = 50.0%), they shot 3-pointers fairly well (11-for-34 = 32.4%), and they shot free throws well (4-for-5 = 80.0%). They were crushed on the boards (38-25), but they won the turnover battle (8-15). How did they lose by 7 points with that kind of shooting? Free throws. But, wait, they shot 80% from the free throw line, right? Yeah, but Iowa shot 30 free throws! 30! And, they made 27 of them (90%). That's a 23-point difference. They earned most of the free throws, but some of them were "homer" calls by the refs. Still, Iowa had a plan to drive the ball at Michigan in the paint, and it worked. They either got the basket or got to shoot free throws, and they made them count.

Oh yeah, remember Luka Garza, who I mentioned last week? He had 44 points the first time Iowa played Michigan (in Ann Arbor), and he had another big game this time, with 33 points, 11 of them on free throws (11-for-13). He also hit 2-for-3 from 3-point range. He was the difference in the game.

Who Started?

The starters were Eli Brooks, Brandon Johns, Jr., Zavier Simpson, Jon Teske, and Franz Wagner for both games. Johns started in place of Isaiah Livers, who is still out with a groin injury. He has now missed 5 games with his injury, and UM is 1-4 in those games. Michigan needs him back, now.

Who Looked Good?

Brooks had a monster game, with (career-high) 25 points on 9-for-17 shooting, including 5-for-11 from 3-point range. He single-handedly kept Michigan in the game, but it wasn't enough.

Wagner had a good game, with 18 points. Unfortunately, he was only 2-for-8 from 3-point range.

Teske had a good game offensively, with 14 points, including 2-for-4 from 3-point range, but he couldn't stop, or even slow down, Garza.

Simpson only had 7 points, but he did have 6 assists.

David DeJulius had a decent game, with 10 points. Unfortunately, he shot poorly: 5-for-12 overall, 0-for-3 from 3-point range.

Austin Davis didn't score much (4 points), but he played good defense while giving Teske a rest. He actually did better guarding Garza than Teske did.

Adrien Nuñez did hit a 3-pointer.

Who Looked Not-So-Good?

Johns had 2 points and 5 fouls.

Colin Castleton had 0 points.

Who Else Played?

No one else played.

Who Didn't Play?

As mentioned above, Livers was injured and didn't play.

The practice squad (C.J. Baird, Cole Bajema, Jaron Faulds, Rico Ozuna-Harrison, and Luke Wilson) didn't play.

What Does It Mean?

Michigan is in free fall. They are almost certainly out of contention for the Big Ten title, they are almost certainly out of the Top 25, and they are in serious danger of missing the NCAA Tournament. They now have a solid mental block about winning on the road, and they stand a very real chance of going 0-10 on the road in the league this season. They might be able to sneak past Northwestern in Evanston on 02/12/2020, but that's their only hope for a road victory.

What's Next?

This week, Michigan plays two games, both in Crisler Arena. On Wednesday (01/22/2020, 7:00 p.m., BTN), they play Penn State, then on Saturday (01/25/2020, 12:00 p.m., FS1), they play Illinois.

Penn State? They're never good, and Michigan always beats them, right? Not so fast. They're actually good-ish this season. They have a better record than Michigan (13-5, 3-4 in the Big Ten), and they've beaten some good teams this season: Georgetown, Syracuse, Wake Forest, (#4) Maryland, Alabama, (#23) Iowa, and (#21) Ohio State. They don't have much height (no one over 6'9"), but they do have a star: Lamar Stevens. Michigan should win this game, especially since it's in Ann Arbor, but they'll have to play very well to do it.

Michigan has already played Illinois this season, back in December (12/11/2019) on the road. This was the first of a couple road games that Michigan could have won, but didn't. Since then, Illinois has done very well. They're currently 13-5 (5-2 in the Big Ten), and in 2nd place in the league. Does the name Kofi Cockburn ring a bell? It should. He had 19 points, 10 rebounds, and 4 blocked shots in the first game against Michigan, and I expect him to have another monster game this time around. With all the trouble Michigan has had guarding big men, Illinois would be crazy to not go to Cockburn all game long.

Check back next week to see how Michigan did.

Go Blue!