

Nothing But 'Net – Week #14 – 01/27/2020 – Voyage To The Bottom Of The League

The University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games this week, both at home, and they lost both of them. [On Wednesday \(01/22/2020\), they lost to Penn State 72-63](#), then [on Saturday \(01/25/2020\), they lost to \(#21\) Illinois 64-62](#). The losses drop Michigan's record to 11-8 (2-6 in the Big Ten).

Michigan has gone from 1st place (1-0 on 12/06/201) to a tie for 11th place in the Big Ten. They have now lost 4 games in a row, and 5 out of the last 6. It is a stunning turnaround from the team that started the season 7-0, won the Battle 4 Atlantis tournament, and was ranked #4 for one week.

What Happened?

Michigan played fairly well for parts of both games, but they allowed their opponents to go on devastating runs, and they just couldn't hit the key baskets (or free throws) to win either game. They were behind almost the whole time in both games, and made some runs to get back in the game, but they always came up short. They led early in both games (21-16 with 10:31 left in the 1st half vs. PSU, and 9-4 with 16:42 left in the 1st half vs. Illinois), but frittered away both those leads. They trailed at halftime in both games (37-28 vs. PSU, and 34-30 vs. Illinois). PSU never trailed in the 2nd half, although UM did get within 5 points (62-57) with 3:50 left in the game. That was as close as they got, though. Michigan actually led a couple times in the 2nd half vs. Illinois, as late as the 0:51 mark, but they badly misplayed the final minute, and let Illinois take (and make) their last shot with 0:00.5 left. Michigan missed their last 5 free throws, and it cost them the game. It was very sad.

Stats

[The stats for the PSU game](#) are terrible. Michigan shot terribly overall (24-for-68 = 35.3%), they shot 3-pointers horribly (5-for-28 = 17.9%), and they shot free throws decently (10-for-14 = 71.4%). They won the rebounding battle (38-35), and they tied in the turnover battle (13-13). PSU won this game with their own 3-point shooting: 8-for-19 = 42.1%.

[The stats for the Illinois game](#) are even worse. Michigan shot a little better overall (23-for-59 = 39.0%), they shot a better percentage from 3-point range (4-for-17 = 23.5%), but they shot terribly from the free throw line (12-for-21 = 57.1%). Again, they won the rebounding battle (37-34), and they had a remarkable 2 turnovers (vs. 8 by Illinois). They lost the game at the free throw line, and by only making four 3-pointers.

Who Started?

The starters for the PSU game were [Eli Brooks](#), [Brandon Johns, Jr.](#), [Zavier Simpson](#), [Jon Teske](#), and [Franz Wagner](#). Johns started in place of [Isaiah Livers](#), who missed 6 games with his injury, but returned to the starting lineup for the Illinois game in place of Johns.

Who Looked Good?

Simpson was the leading scorer in both games, with 18 points vs. PSU and 17 points vs. Illinois. However he shot a terrible percentage in the PSU game: 8-for-23 = 34.8%. He also missed 2 of the 5 crucial free throws at the end of the Illinois game.

Johns had a good game vs. PSU (14 points), and a terrible game vs. Illinois (0 points).

Brooks also had a good game vs. PSU (12 points), and a mediocre game vs. Illinois (4 points).

Teske almost had double figures in both games (9 and 12 points). He had 11 rebounds in the PSU game.

Livers only played in the Illinois game, and he had 7 points before he left the game in the 2nd half with a possible recurrence of his groin injury.

[David DeJulius](#) chipped in a few points (2 and 7).

[Austin Davis](#) did a nice job on defense, and scored 2 points in each game. He did miss the front end of a one-and-one at the end of the Illinois game.

Who Looked Not-So-Good?

Wagner was the main reason Michigan lost both games. Sure, he had 6 and 12 points, but he shot terribly: 1-for-9 vs. PSU, 4-for-11 vs. Illinois. His 3-point shooting was even worse: 1-for-8 vs. PSU, and 1-for-6 vs. Illinois. He had plenty of open, uncontested 3-point shots, and he bricked most of them. Still, he had a chance to help Michigan beat Illinois in the closing minutes, but he missed 2 free throws. Not a good week for him.

[Colin Castleton](#) only played for 3 minutes in the Illinois game, and he had 1 point. Another missed key free throw.

Who Else Played?

No one else played.

Who Didn't Play?

As mentioned above, Livers was injured and didn't play in the PSU game.

[Adrien Nuñez](#) and the practice squad ([C.J. Baird](#), [Cole Bajema](#), [Jaron Faulds](#), [Rico Ozuna-Harrison](#), and [Luke Wilson](#)) didn't play in either game.

What Does It Mean?

Michigan needed to win both of the games this week to stay in Big Ten title contention, and to keep a solid seed for the NCAA Tournament. With these losses, Michigan now stands no chance of contending for the Big Ten title, and a very small chance of even making the Big Dance. At the rate they are falling, they may not even finish above 0.500, which would eliminate them from the NIT Tournament. A very promising season has gone off the rails. It's not too late for Michigan to salvage the season, but they need to start immediately. They can't afford to lose many more games. There are 12 games left in the regular season, and they need to win at least 9 of them to make the NCAA Tournament, or 5 of them to make the NIT Tournament.

What's Next?

This week, Michigan plays two games, both on the road. On Tuesday (01/28/2020, 7:00 p.m. EST, ESPNU), they play at [Nebraska](#), then on Saturday (02/01/2020, 4:30 p.m., BTN), they play (#24) [Rutgers](#) in Madison Square Garden in New York.

Nebraska is currently 7-13 (2-7 in the Big Ten). They are 0.5 game behind Michigan in the Big Ten standings. They have beaten Purdue and Iowa, but lost to lowly Northwestern. They don't have much height (one 6'9" player), and no one even close to a star player. This might be a team that Michigan can beat on the road. Maybe.

Wait a minute, what's that "(#24)" thing before Rutgers' name above? They're ranked? Yup, for the first time in several decades, Rutgers is ranked. They're currently 15-5 (6-3 in the Big Ten). They're tied with Maryland for 3rd place in the Big Ten. They've beaten (#22) Seton Hall, (#20) Penn State, and Minnesota, but they've lost to Illinois and Iowa. They've got some height (a couple 6'11" players), and a couple stars (Geo Brown and Myles Johnson). Even though this game is being played in Madison Square Garden, Michigan is technically the home

team for the game. Yes, Michigan only gets 9 Big Ten games in Crisler Arena this season, while every other Big Ten team gets 10 true home games. Even worse, this will be like a home game for Rutgers, since their campus is within easy driving distance of Madison Square Garden, so it's not even a neutral site game. The combination makes it very unlikely that Michigan will win this game.

Check back next week to see how Michigan did.

Go Blue!