

Nothing But 'Net – Week #22 – 03/23/2020 – Season Wrap-Up, Final Grades, Looking Ahead

The University of Michigan men's basketball team finished their season last week, when all NCAA sports were shut down due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They didn't get to play in the [Big Ten Tournament](#) or the NCAA Tournament, so their final record is the same as their regular season record: 19-12 (10-10 in the Big Ten), 9th place in the Big Ten.

Season Wrap-Up

The 2019-2020 season was a rollercoaster for Michigan. The ride to the top of the biggest hill started with wins over three "cupcakes", along with an impressive win over a team that finished the season ranked #7 ([Creighton](#)), for a 4-0 start. The top of the biggest hill was the [Battle 4 Atlantis tournament](#) in the Bahamas. Michigan wasn't picked to do much in the tournament, but they won three games in three days, beating a good [Iowa State](#) team and two Top-10 teams [[\(#6\) North Carolina](#) and [\(#8\) Gonzaga](#)], winning the championship, and moving to 7-0 and a #4 ranking in the AP poll. The championship game was on 11/29/2019, and that was the top of the hill, the high water mark, the best moment of the whole season. It didn't last long. From that point on, Michigan was a 0.500 team: 12-12 (10-10 in the Big Ten).

The very next game was four days later, [at \(#1\) Louisville](#), and it didn't go well. In fact, Michigan lost three of the next four games after the Battle 4 Atlantis tournament: the loss to Louisville, [a home win over Iowa](#), [a loss at Illinois](#), and [a home loss to \(#10\) Oregon](#). None of these losses were particularly surprising, but none of these teams were any better than Creighton, North Carolina, or Gonzaga.

Michigan finished up their non-conference schedule with a couple more "cupcakes", then they resumed Big Ten play, and it was a disaster: [a lopsided loss at \(#14\) Michigan State](#), [a home win over Purdue](#), [an embarrassing loss at Minnesota](#), [a so-so loss at Iowa](#), [a home loss to Penn State](#), and [a home loss to \(#21\) Illinois](#). That's a 1-5 stretch, and it knocked Michigan out of any chance of contending for the Big Ten title. This was the bottom of the biggest hill, the lowest point, the worst moment of the season. A closer look at the season at this point will show a couple disturbing trends:

- An 0-5 record at this point in true road games (Louisville, Illinois, MSU, Minnesota, and Iowa). Sure, it's tough to win on the road, but Michigan probably should have won two or three of those games (Illinois, Minnesota, and Iowa).
- Three home losses at this point (Oregon, Penn State, and Illinois). Michigan went 17-1 at home in the 2018-2019 season and 15-1 in the 2017-2018 season. Having three home losses at this point in the season was not a good sign.

Michigan finally won a true road game in their next game, [at Nebraska](#), and they followed it up with a very impressive win on a (not so) neutral court (Madison Square Garden) [over \(#25\) Rutgers](#). They were robbed by the officials in the next game, another home loss, this time [to Ohio State](#), but they bounced back with five wins in a row: [home vs. \(#16\) Michigan State](#), [at Northwestern](#), [home vs. Indiana](#), [at Rutgers](#), and [at Purdue](#). Things were looking better, but this was just the top of another hill on the rollercoaster.

The last four games of the season were another disaster. [Michigan lost badly at home vs. Wisconsin](#), [lost badly at \(#23\) Ohio State](#), [beat lowly Nebraska at home](#) for Senior Night, and [lost badly at \(#9\) Maryland](#). This was the bottom of the final hill on the rollercoaster, and that's where we get off.

Looking back on the season, there were some high points and some low points:

High Points

- The Battle 4 Atlantis championship was definitely the highest point of the season. At the time, the win over (#6) North Carolina looked huge, although UNC ended up with their worst season in years. The win over (#8) Gonzaga ended up being much more impressive, since Gonzaga ended up 31-2 and ranked #2 in the final AP poll.
- Wins over a few other teams that ended up ranked in the final AP poll: (#7) Creighton, (#9) Michigan State, and (#25) Iowa.
- An emotional Senior Night win, sending [Zavier Simpson](#) and [Jon Teske](#) off in style.

Low Points

- The lowest point of the season was the loss at Minnesota. Sure, Minnesota can be tough to beat in The Barn, but they ended up with a 15-16 record, including 5 home losses. Michigan should have won that one.
- The home loss to Penn State really stung. This was one of the better teams that PSU has had in the last 20 years, but they didn't end up with a record much better than Michigan's (21-10, 11-9 in the Big Ten). Michigan should have won that one as well.
- The home loss to Ohio State was a travesty. The officials called a ridiculous "flagrant 1" foul on Simpson in the last minute, and it was just enough to hand the game to OSU.
- The home loss to Illinois was very depressing. Once again, this was one of the better Illinois teams in a while, but they weren't any better than teams Michigan beat earlier and later in the season. They just caught Michigan in a slump.

Final Grades

I handed out mid-term grades in early January, after the last non-conference game, when Michigan had a record of 10-3 (1-1 in the Big Ten), and were still in the AP Top 25. Those grades, listed first for each player, are mostly better than the final grades.

Freshman Eligibility

[Cole Bajema](#) (Inc./Inc.) – Cole only played in 10 games, and scored 26 points. He led the team in overall shooting percentage (10-for-13 = 76.9%), 3-point shooting percentage (4-for-7 = 57.1%), and free throw percentage (2-for-2 = 100.0%). He just didn't play much, mostly in "garbage time". He could be a valuable player next season.

[Jaron Faulds](#) (Inc./Inc.) – Jaron only played in 5 games, and scored 4 points. He's on the practice squad, and only played in "garbage time".

[Franz Wagner](#) (B/B) – Franz missed the first 4 games of the season with a broken wrist, but he played pretty well the rest of the season. He had some very impressive games, and several games where he was no help at all. He was the #1 option for firing up a 3-pointer, and he shot a mediocre percentage (41-for-132 = 31.1%). If he can get his 3-point shooting straightened out, he'll be the most valuable player on the team next season.

Sophomore Eligibility

[Colin Castleton](#) (B/C) – Colin got his chances this season, and he rarely took advantage of them. He had too many games where he just drifted around aimlessly out there. He showed that he has the tools to contribute, he just didn't have the mental aspect worked out.

[David DeJulius](#) (B+/B-) – David had a strong first half of the season, but he cooled off in the second half. He was a pure scorer in high school, and he showed flashes of that at times this season. He just needs to be more consistent.

[Brandon Johns, Jr.](#) (B/B) – Brandon filled in nicely for Livers when he was injured, but he still had too many games where he didn't contribute much. He is very good at offensive rebounding.

[Adrien Nuñez](#) (C-/D) – Adrien just isn't working out. He's gotten his chances, and he hasn't delivered. He played in 22 games this season, and started in 4 games when Wagner was injured, but only scored 44 points. He was brought in as a "sniper", but his 3-point shooting has been anemic: 11-for-43 (25.6%).

Junior Eligibility

[C.J. Baird](#) (Inc./Inc.) – C.J. only played in 7 games, and scored 8 points. He's on the practice squad, and only plays in "garbage time".

[Eli Brooks](#) (A-/A-) – Eli is a great candidate for "most improved player". He did a good job at shooting guard, and even played some point guard when needed. He led the team in 3-point attempts and makes, and shot a nice percentage (52-for-143 = 36.4%). He was a distant 2nd on the team in assists (59).

[Austin Davis](#) (C+/B+) – Austin is another candidate for "most improved player", especially during the second half of the season. It took 2.5 seasons, but he finally started playing with smoothness and confidence. He shot a nice percentage (52-for-75 = 69.3%), and he cut way down on his silly fouls.

[Isaiah Livers](#) (A/A-) – Isaiah is the most versatile player on the team, and arguably the most valuable. Before he went out with a groin injury near the end of the non-conference season, he was leading the team in scoring (13.6 points/game) and 3-point shooting percentage (29-for-58 = 50.0%). When he came back, he was good-but-not-great.

[Rico Ozuna-Harrison](#) (Inc./Inc.) – Rico only played in 4 games, and scored 2 points. He's on the practice squad, and only plays in "garbage time".

[Luke Wilson](#) (Inc./Inc.) – Luke only played in 6 games, and scored 3 points. He's on the practice squad, and only plays in "garbage time".

Senior Eligibility

[Zavier Simpson](#) (A/A) – Zavier was the undisputed leader of this team, and he did a good job at it. He led the team in scoring and assists, and finished 3rd in the nation in total assists and assists per game. He even shot a decent percentage from 3-point range (31-for-86 = 36.0%).

[Jon Teske](#) (A/B) – Jon was a beast for the first half of the season, then he all but disappeared. He had a few good games in the second half, but nothing compared to the games he had in the first half. Opponents figured out how to neutralize him offensively, and he let several opposing big men run wild, especially Luka Garza of Iowa.

Looking Ahead

Here's where things get tricky: who will be on the team next year? Here are all the moving parts as of now:

The two seniors (Simpson and Teske) are graduating. They're gone.

Two players with eligibility remaining could possibly leave early for the NBA (Livers and Wagner). Who knows what they'll decide to do. Livers missed 10 games due to injuries, and

Wagner was really up-and-down. I don't think the NBA will be too excited about either of them.

[Davis has already been offered a spot for his redshirt 5th year, and he accepted.](#)

[Brandon Wade \(6'2", 185 pounds, G\) transferred from Duquesne to Michigan](#) after playing for one year there (2018-2019). He had to sit out this season (2019-2020), but he'll be eligible to play with sophomore eligibility next season. He's a "preferred walk-on", and he'll mostly be a practice squad player.

The great unknowns are the incoming freshmen. [Only one recruit \(Zeb Jackson\) has signed a Letter Of Intent](#), but four other recruits are considered "hard commits": Hunter Dickinson, Jace Howard, Isaiah Todd, and Terrance Williams. If all five of these players actually show up on the team next season, Michigan will be a legitimate contender for the National Championship. They're that good.

However.

However, I would be surprised if Todd actually plays college basketball. He and his father have given vague hints that he might play for a year overseas, then enter the NBA Draft. If that happens, Michigan will still be a contender for the Big Ten title, but not the National Championship. Todd is the key.

Regardless, here's a quick look at all five of them:

- [Hunter Dickinson](#) (7'2", 255 pounds, C) – Hunter is a 4-star center, the #6 center in his class. He's a big, tough kid, a traditional "back to the basket" center. I can't wait to see him play. I expect him to be a starter on the team next season.
- [Jace Howard](#) (6'8", 210 pounds, F) – Jace is [Coach Howard's](#) older son, and he's a 3-star forward. He could end up as a preferred walk-on, due to the big scholarship crunch (see below). He's definitely going to be on the team next season.
- [Zeb Jackson](#) (6'2", 160 pounds, G) – Zeb is a 4-star point guard, the #10 point guard in his class. He's definitely going to be on the team next season.
- [Isaiah Todd](#) (6'10", 195 pounds, F) – Isaiah is the crown jewel of this recruiting class. He's a 5-star power forward, the #2 power forward in his class. If he goes to college, he'll almost certainly be a "one and done".
- [Terrance Williams](#) (6'6", 215 pounds, F) – Terrance is good friends with Hunter Dickinson (above), and the two of them were a "package deal". He's a 4-star forward, the #15 power forward in his class. I expect him to be on the team next season.

Besides those five commits, there are at least five more players interested in Michigan:

- [Bryce Aiken](#) (6'0", 175 pounds, G) – Bryce is a grad-transfer from Harvard. He's a good "shoot first" point guard, but Michigan is set for point guards, so ???
- [Brendan Barry](#) (6'2", 180 pounds, G) – Brendan is a grad-transfer from Dartmouth. He's a very good shooting guard, but Michigan has a good shooting guard (Brooks) returning, so ???
- [Greg Brown](#) (6'9", 195 pounds, F) – Greg is a 5-star power forward, the #1 power forward in his class. The current predictions have him going to Texas, or maybe Memphis, but not Michigan.
- [Joshua Christopher](#) (6'5", 215 pounds, G) – Josh is a 5-star shooting guard, the #3 shooting guard in his class. The current predictions have him going to Michigan.
- [Mike Smith](#) (5'11", 180 pounds, G) – Mike is a grad-transfer from Columbia. He's a good "shoot first" point guard, but Michigan is set for point guards, so ???

So, where is Coach Howard going to put all those players? I have no idea. There is a real logjam in the scholarship count. Will any of the returning scholarship players transfer? I haven't heard anything concrete, but Castleton and Nuñez are good candidates. It will be very

interesting to see who actually shows up next fall. Until then, it's hard to make any worthwhile predictions.

What's Next?

Michigan's season is over. Wait 'til next year.

Check back in mid-October for another exciting season of Nothing But 'Net.

Go Blue!