

Nothing But 'Net – Week #15 – 03/01/2021 – Closing In On The Title

The (#3) University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games this week, and they won them both. [On Thursday \(02/25/2021\), they beat \(#9\) Iowa 79-57](#) in Crisler Arena, then [on Saturday \(02/27/2021\), they beat Indiana 73-57](#) in Bloomington, IN. The wins raise Michigan's record to 18-1 (13-1 in the Big Ten). Michigan is still all alone in 1st place in the Big Ten standings.

What Happened?

The Iowa game was a huge showdown between two of the best teams in the league, and it was a see-saw battle for the whole 1st half, with neither team getting ahead by more than 4-5 points. Michigan managed to score at the buzzer, to take a 3-point lead at halftime, 32-29. The start of the 2nd half was more of the same, and Iowa took the lead for the last time, 37-36, with 17:30 to go. Michigan went on a quick 7-0 run to go up by 6 points (43-37) at the 16:08 mark, then they pushed the lead up to 11 points (50-39) with 13:48 to go. Iowa didn't give up, and got within 7 points (53-46) at the 11:59 mark, but that was as close as they got. Michigan pushed the lead up into the 16-18 point range for the rest of the game, and won by 22. This was a very important win, and they did it by stifling the leading offense in the Big Ten, and one of the leading offenses in the nation. They also kept potential national player of the year Luka Garza in check. He was clearly frustrated.

The Indiana game was a classic "trap" game, and Michigan managed to avoid the trap. Coming between two huge games for Michigan (Thursday vs. [#9] Iowa and Tuesday vs. [#5] Illinois), Indiana was hoping to catch Michigan looking ahead or taking them lightly. Instead, Michigan took care of business. It certainly wasn't Michigan's best game of the season, but it was a good solid win. The game was close early, tied up (12-12) with 13:38 to go in the half, and just a 1-point Michigan lead (22-21) at the 8:36 mark. Michigan went on a quick 10-0 run at that point, to make it 32-21 with 5:53 left in the half. Michigan kept the lead in the 9-11 point range for the rest of the half, leading by 9 at halftime, 42-33. It was still 9 points (51-42) at the 14:36 mark, when Michigan pushed the lead up into the "comfortable" range, up 17 points (59-42) with 11:23 to go. Indiana never got closer than 12 points the rest of the way, and Michigan won by 16.

Stats

[The stats for the Iowa game](#) are pretty good. Michigan shot pretty well overall (33-for-70 = 47.1%), they shot 3-pointers well (8-for-17 = 47.1%), and they shot free throws very well, just not enough (5-for-6 = 83.3%). They won the rebounding battle handily (41-32), and the turnover battle (7-9). Michigan won this game with shooting, rebounding, and defense. It was a great all-around performance.

[The stats for the Indiana game](#) are OK. Michigan shot pretty well overall (24-for-53 = 45.3%), they shot 3-pointers decently (8-for-21 = 38.1%), and they shot free throws very well (17-for-19 = 89.5%). They won the rebounding battle handily (37-27), and tied in the turnover battle (11-11). Michigan won this game with defense.

Who Started?

The starters for both games were [Eli Brooks](#), [Hunter Dickinson](#), [Isaiah Livers](#), [Mike Smith](#), and [Franz Wagner](#).

Who Looked Good?

The big story this week was Wagner, who scored a career-high 21 points vs. Iowa, then matched it with another 21 vs. Indiana. He was a perfect 8-for-8 from the free throw line in the Indiana game.

Livers was the second-leading scorer for Michigan in both games, with 16 in each. He also had 10 rebounds vs. Indiana, for a double-double. He shot very well from 3-point range: 4-for-5 vs. Iowa and 4-for-7 vs. Indiana.

Dickinson also hit double figures in both games, with 14 vs. Iowa and 13 vs. Indiana. Garza of Iowa outscored him by 2 points (16), but Dickinson had twice as many rebounds (8 vs. 4) and twice as many blocked shots (2 vs. 1) as Garza. Dickinson either outplayed Garza, or it was at least a tie.

Smith had one very good game (14 points vs. Indiana) and one pretty good game (6 points vs. Iowa). His value to the team isn't necessarily scoring, since he does a great job running the offense.

Brooks had 7 and 6 points, which is OK, but his value to the team is more running the offense and playing tough defense.

[Chaundee Brown, Jr.](#) had a pretty good game vs. Iowa (7 points), but not so much vs. Indiana (3 points). He was the only bench player to score vs. Indiana.

Who Looked Not-So-Good?

[Austin Davis](#) spelled Dickinson in both games, and chipped in 6 and 0 points.

[Brandon Johns, Jr.](#) chipped in 2 and 0 points.

Who Else Played?

[Coach Howard](#) emptied the bench at the end of both games, so a lot of players got in.

Among the scholarship players who aren't part of the main rotation:

[Jace Howard](#) played vs. Iowa, but didn't attempt a shot.

[Zeb Jackson](#) played in both games, but didn't attempt a shot.

[Terrance Williams II](#) played in both games, but didn't do anything.

Among the scout team players:

[C.J. Baird](#) played in the Indiana game, and missed his only shot attempt.

[Jaron Faulds](#) played in both games, and missed his only shot attempt, in the Indiana game.

[Brandon Wade](#) played in both games, but didn't attempt a shot. These were the first two games of his Michigan career.

Who Didn't Play?

Only 1 of the 4 scholarship players who aren't part of the main rotation ([Adrien Nuñez](#)) didn't play in either game.

Only 2 of the 5 scout team players ([Rico Ozuna-Harrison](#) and [Luke Wilson](#)) didn't play in either game.

What Does It Mean?

Michigan is closing in on a regular season Big Ten title. With 3 games left (see below), Michigan has a 1-game lead on Illinois, percentage-wise. Michigan's "magic number" to clinch

the title is 1; if Michigan wins one more game, or Illinois loses one more game, Michigan clinches the title.

In terms of the Big Ten Tournament, Michigan will certainly get a double bye, and start play on Friday.

In terms of the NCAA Tournament, Michigan is looking good for a #1 seed. Of course, a lot depends on how they do in their last 3 regular season games and the Big Ten Tournament.

What's Next?

This week, Michigan is scheduled to play three games, two at home and one on the road. On Tuesday (03/02/2021, 7:00 p.m., ESPN), they are scheduled to play (#5) [Illinois](#) in Crisler, on Thursday (03/04/2021, 7:00 p.m., ESPN), they are scheduled to play [Michigan State](#) in Crisler, then on Sunday (03/07/2021, 4:30 p.m., CBS), they are scheduled to play at Michigan State. Yes, Michigan is playing MSU twice in three days. These are the last three regular season games for Michigan.

Illinois is currently 18-6 (14-4 in Big Ten), with impressive wins over (#10) Duke, (#7) Iowa, and Wisconsin (twice), and less-than-impressive losses to Missouri, Maryland, and Michigan State. They have a couple superstars (Trent Frazier, Ayo Dosunmu, and Kofi Cockburn), and they have plenty of height: Cockburn is 7'0", and they have another 7-footer, along with a couple 6'10" guys. Cockburn scares me more than any other player in college basketball. He is a big, strong, muscular, aggressive beast of a player, and this will certainly be Dickinson's greatest test of the season.

Michigan State is currently 13-10 (7-10 in Big Ten), with impressive wins over (#6) Duke, (#15) Rutgers, (#5) Illinois, and (#4) Ohio State, and less-than-impressive losses to Northwestern, Minnesota, Purdue (twice), Rutgers, and Maryland. They have had a real rollercoaster season: they started out 6-0 in non-conference play, and were ranked as high as #4, then they lost their first three Big Ten games. They won two games, then lost another four in a row. Two more wins, then two more losses, and everyone was writing them off as "no chance to make the Big Dance". At that point, they woke up and won three games in a row, including the wins over (#5) Illinois and (#4) Ohio State. Just when it looked like they were "the hottest team in the Big Ten", they went to Maryland and got trounced. Now, they're "on the wrong side of the bubble" for the NCAA Tournament. If they can beat Michigan, even just once, they'll have an outside shot at making the tournament. They have a few good players (Aaron Henry, Rocket Watts, Josh Langford, and Joey Hauser), but they have a roster problem: they don't have a consistent point guard and they don't have a big center. The guy they play at center is only 6'9", and he's a freshman. If Dickinson is still alive after playing against Cockburn of Illinois, he'll have a distinct advantage against MSU.

Check back next week to see what happened, and why.

Go Blue!