

Nothing But 'Net – Week #16 – 03/08/2021 – Big Ten Champs!

The (#2) University of Michigan men's basketball team played three games this past week, and they lost two and won the other one. [On Tuesday \(03/02/2021\), they lost to \(#4\) Illinois 76-53](#) in Crisler Arena, [on Thursday \(03/04/2021\), they beat Michigan State 69-50](#) in Crisler Arena, then [on Sunday \(03/07/2021\), they lost to Michigan State 70-64](#) in East Lansing, MI. The losses and win leave Michigan with a final regular season record of 19-3 (14-3 in the Big Ten). Michigan won the Big Ten regular season championship outright.

What Happened?

Talk about a good news/bad news week. The good news is: Big Ten Champs! Michigan led the race for the title from wire to wire, and formally clinched the title when they beat MSU in the Thursday game. Not only did they beat their arch-rival, on national TV, to win the Big Ten title, but they did it on Senior Night. It was a wonderful moment.

The bad news is: Michigan lost two games, after going 18-1 for the rest of the season. Michigan looked very ordinary in their home loss to Illinois, and pretty weak in the away MSU game. Losing two out of three games is no way to end the season. Ugh.

As I predicted/feared, the Illinois game came down to the battle between [Hunter Dickinson](#) and Illinois' Kofi Cockburn, and Cockburn was too much for Dickinson to handle. The key moment was when Dickinson picked up his 2nd foul with 5:09 left in the 1st half. At that point, Illinois was up by 7 points (21-14), and Michigan managed to get within 3 points (21-18) at the 4:11 mark, but then Dickinson came out for the last 3:58 of the half, and Cockburn and Illinois went wild. They finished the half on a 12-4 run, to lead by 11 (33-22) at halftime. Dickinson picked up his 3rd foul with 17:51 to go in the game, and that was it for him. He played the rest of the game like a freshman, and Cockburn owned him. Michigan never got closer than 20 points the rest of the way. Once the game got away from them, they didn't stand a chance.

The home MSU game was much better. Michigan led the whole way, and they played well. Michigan led early, 7-0, with 17:04 to go in the 1st half. Michigan kept the lead in the 5-7 point range until the 7:43 mark, when MSU crept to within 2 points (18-16). Michigan finished the half strong, up 11 points (39-28). State scored the first 4 points of the 2nd half, to get within 7 points (39-32), and then Michigan went on a beautiful 10-0 run to push the lead up to 17 points (49-32). The teams traded baskets, then Michigan went on another great 10-0 run to push the lead up to 28 points (64-36) with 6:20 to go, and the game was over. Michigan could have won by 35-40 points, but [Coach Howard](#) emptied the bench with 3:19 left, and MSU made the score look a little more respectable.

The away MSU game was miserable. Michigan played like they had nothing to play for, and MSU was fired up for their Senior Night. That's a bad combination. Michigan only led a couple times, and never by more than 4 points. They were ahead 21-17 with 5:21 to go in the 1st half, when the wheels started coming off. They let State go on a 13-5 run to end the half, up 30-26. Michigan got within 1 point (30-29) early in the 2nd half, but they never got the lead back, and once the game started slipping away, Michigan was unable to catch up. MSU pushed the lead into the 8-10 point range until the last 2 minutes, when Michigan got back within 2 points (61-59, with 1:13 to go), but Michigan couldn't get a stop, and MSU made their free throws. It was a very disheartening loss.

Stats

[The stats for the Illinois game](#) are sad. Michigan didn't shoot very well overall (17-for-49 = 34.7%), they shot 3-pointers very poorly (2-for-7 = 28.6%), and they shot free throws decently (17-for-24 = 70.8%). They were crushed on the boards (42-26), but they did win the turnover battle narrowly, 11-12. They lost this game with poor shooting and rebounding.

[The stats for the home MSU game](#) are pretty good. Michigan shot well overall (26-for-52 = 50.0%), they shot 3-pointers pretty well (7-for-16 = 43.8%), and they shot free throws decently (10-for-14 = 71.4%). They won the rebounding battle (34-28), but lost the turnover battle (14-12). They won this game with 3-point shooting, especially since they held MSU to 0 made 3-pointers (0-for-9). That's my favorite stat from this game.

[The stats for the away MSU game](#) are miserable. Michigan didn't shoot very well overall (25-for-60 = 41.7%), they shot 3-pointers poorly (7-for-22 = 31.8%), and they shot free throws poorly (7-for-11 = 63.6%). They lost the rebounding battle (38-32), and tied in the turnover battle (8-8). They lost this game with poor shooting and rebounding.

Who Started?

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

Who Looked Good?

Since almost no one looked good in the Illinois game and the away MSU game, no one looked good for the whole week. So, "who looked good" is relative this week.

Brooks was the only Michigan player to hit double figures in the Illinois game, with 11 points, and he almost hit double figures (9 points) in the home MSU game. He had a decent game going early in the away MSU game (5 points), but he twisted his ankle at the 15:36 mark of the 1st half, and didn't return to the game. At this point, his status is unknown.

Wagner had a terrible game (2 points, on 1-for-9 shooting) vs. Illinois, but he was the star of the home MSU game, with 19 points. He had a decent game in the away MSU game (10 points, on 4-for-12 shooting), but he was a non-factor for most of the game, coming alive in the last few minutes. If he had contributed earlier, his late-game heroics wouldn't have been necessary.

Dickinson had a lousy game (6 points, on 1-for-8 shooting) vs. Illinois, but he did much better in the home MSU game: 14 points, on 6-for-8 shooting, and 10 rebounds, for another double-double. He had a decent game at MSU (12 points), and, like Wagner, he was too quiet for most of the game, getting most of his points when Michigan was in "desperation mode" at the end. His poor shooting in the first 35 minutes put Michigan too far behind to come back in the final 5 minutes.

Smith hit double figures in the away MSU game (11 points), but not in the other two games (5 vs. Illinois, 9 in the home MSU game). Once again, his scoring is secondary; he did a decent job running the offense: 5 assists in the home MSU game, 7 assists in the away MSU game, but 0 assists vs. Illinois.

[Chaundee Brown, Jr.](#) was Michigan's leading scorer in the away MSU game (13 points), but he was a non-factor in the other two games (3 points vs. Illinois, 0 in the home MSU game). He played a lot in the away MSU game, replacing Brooks when he injured his ankle.

[Austin Davis](#) played quite a bit this week, since Dickinson was playing like a freshman. Davis was one of the few bright spots in the Illinois game (9 points, on 4-for-4 shooting), but he only had 1 point in the home MSU game, and 4 points in the away MSU game.

Who Looked Not-So-Good?

Livers had a lousy game (7 points, on 2-for-7 shooting) vs. Illinois, and he didn't do much better in the home MSU game: 9 points, on 3-for-7 shooting. He also had 9 points in the away MSU game.

[Brandon Johns, Jr.](#) chipped in 4, 6, and 0 points.

[Zeb Jackson](#) played in the Illinois game (0-for-1) and the away MSU game (0 shot attempts). He played more than usual, and earlier than usual, in the away MSU game due to Brooks' injury.

Who Else Played?

Coach Howard emptied the bench at the end of the Illinois game and the home MSU game, so a lot of players got in.

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

[Jace Howard](#) played vs. Illinois, and scored 2 points (2-for-4 shooting free throws).

[Adrien Nuñez](#) played vs. Illinois, and scored 2 points (1-for-1 shooting).

[Terrance Williams II](#) played vs. Illinois, and scored 2 points (2-for-2 shooting free throws).

Among the scout team players:

[C.J. Baird](#) played in the home MSU game, and missed his only shot attempt. He's a senior, and he got to play on Senior Night.

[Jaron Faulds](#) played in the Illinois and home MSU games. He didn't attempt a shot vs. Illinois, but he made his only shot attempt in the home MSU game. He's a senior, and he got to play on Senior Night.

[Rico Ozuna-Harrison](#) played in the home MSU game, and missed both of his shot attempts. He's a senior, and he got to play on Senior Night.

[Brandon Wade](#) played in the home MSU game, but didn't attempt a shot.

[Luke Wilson](#) played in the home MSU game, but didn't attempt a shot. He's a senior, and he got to play on Senior Night.

Who Didn't Play?

Everyone got to play in at least one game this past week.

What Does It Mean?

Michigan won the regular season Big Ten title. In terms of the [Big Ten Tournament](#), Michigan is the #1 seed, and gets a double bye, starting play on Friday.

In terms of the NCAA Tournament, Michigan is looking OK for a #1 seed. Of course, a lot depends on how they do in the Big Ten Tournament. Losing 2 out of 3 this past week sure didn't help.

What's Next?

This week, Michigan is scheduled to play in the Big Ten Tournament, in Indianapolis, IN. As mentioned above, they're the #1 seed, and they start play on Friday (03/12/2021, 11:30 a.m., BTN) vs. the winner of the (#8 seed) Maryland/ (#9 seed) Michigan State game that will be played on Thursday.

If they win that game, they'll move on to the semifinals on Saturday (03/13/2021, 1:00 p.m., CBS), vs. the winner of the game between the #4 seed (Purdue) and the winner of the

quarterfinal game between the #5 seed (Ohio State) and the winner of the 1st round game between (#12 seed) Northwestern and (#13 seed) Minnesota.

If they win the semifinal game, the championship game is on Sunday (03/14/2021, 3:30 p.m., CBS). See the bracket [here](#).

As the #1 seed, Michigan should be favored to win the tournament championship, but they will have to play their "A" game all three days. During the regular season, Michigan beat each of the other Big Ten teams at least once, except for Illinois. Illinois is the #2 seed, and they are certainly Michigan's biggest hurdle to winning the tournament title. Once again, it will all come down to Dickinson vs. Cockburn.

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

Go Blue!