Nothing But 'Net – Week #06 – 12/05/2022 – Losing The Last 100 Seconds

The University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games this past week, and they lost both of them. On Tuesday (11/29/2022), they lost to (#3) Virginia 70-68 in Crisler Arena, then on Sunday (12/04/2022), they lost to (#19) Kentucky 73-69 in London, England. The two losses drop Michigan's record to 5-3.

Incidentally, the UVa game was part of the final ACC/Big Ten Challenge. Since the Big Ten is parting ways with ESPN after this season, ESPN decided to cancel future ACC/Big Ten Challenges. It's a shame; it was a good series.

What Happened?

Michigan hung in there with the big boys, even if they didn't get either win. In the UVa game, Michigan was actually up by one point (66-65) with 1:42 left in the game, with the ball. In the UK game, UM was within 2 points (68-66) with 1:40 left in the game. Michigan could have won either of those games. Michigan just has to play tougher in the clutch, but they did hang in there for most of both games.

Game Flow

Michigan had yet another slow start in the UVa game. UVa led for the first 7:14, by as many as 7 points, but UM finally got ahead 15-13 at the 12:46 mark. They led for the rest of the half, usually by 4-6 points, but they had a flurry in the last 44 seconds to lead by 11 at halftime, 45-34. They were still up by 11 points (48-37) with 18:40 to go, when UVa started their slow, methodical comeback. They cut the UM lead down to the 3-5 point range, and got within 1-2 points a couple times, but UM still led. They finally tied the game up (58-58) with 8:09 left, and led for most of the rest of the game. Michigan tied it up a couple times, and actually had the one-point lead mentioned above, but UVa played better in the last 100 seconds and won. It was a shame, because Michigan played well enough to win, but just made a couple dumb mistakes in key situations.

The UK game wasn't as close as the UVa game. Michigan led for a decent portion of the 1st half, but never by more than 6 points. The game was all tied up (36-36) with 1:06 left in the half, and UK led by one (37-36) at halftime. UK pushed their lead up into the 4-6 point range for the first 7 minutes of the 2nd half, but Michigan fought back, and took the lead (50-49) at the 12:42 mark. That was the last time they led. UK went up by 1-3 points, then by 6 points (60-54 with 9:09 to go), and Michigan got within 2 points (60-58 with 7:53 to go), but that was it until they got within 2 points (68-66) with 1:40 to go. Once again, Michigan was outplayed in the last 100 seconds, and let a golden opportunity for an upset slip away.

Stats

The game stats for the UVa game were surprisingly good. Michigan shot well overall (26-for-49 = 53.1%), they shot 3-pointers pretty well (8-for-19 = 42.1%), and they shot free throws very well (8-for-10 = 80.0%). They won the rebounding battle (29-25), but lost the turnover battle (12-7). They lost this game because of turnovers, especially in key situations.

The game stats for the UK game aren't quite as good. Michigan shot pretty poorly overall (25-for-64 = 39.1%), they shot 3-pointers pretty well (8-for-20 = 40.0%), and they shot free throws pretty poorly (11-for-17 = 64.7%). They lost the rebounding battle badly (46-33), but they won the turnover battle handily (7-14). They lost this game with mediocre shooting and poor 3-point defense (UK shot 9-for-15 from 3-point range).

Who Started?

The starters for both games were Kobe Bufkin, Hunter Dickinson, Jett Howard, Jaelin Llewellyn, and Terrance Williams II.

Who Looked Good?

Dickinson was the leading scorer in both games, with 23 points each game. He also had 7 and 9 rebounds and 5 and 3 blocked shots. On the downside, he didn't shoot particularly well: 9-for-17 vs. UVa and 10-for-22 vs. UK. He could have scored a lot more points if he would just DUNK THE $^%& BALL! In all the games this season he has passed up several dunk opportunities for short (2-3 foot) jumpers, which he hasn't hit consistently. He often plays like he's bored or disinterested. Maybe it's just a good "game face", but when he drives and dunks, he fires up the Michigan crowd and his teammates.

Jett Howard hit double figures in both games, with 15 and 16 points. He also didn't shoot particularly well: 6-for-11 vs. UVa and 5-for-12 vs. UK.

Bufkin was the only other Wolverine to hit double figures this week, with 11 points each game. He also didn't shoot particularly well: 4-for-8 vs. UVa and 3-for-10 vs. UK.

Williams didn't hit double figures in either game, with 8 and 3 points, but he did grab some key rebounds, with 4 and 7.

Llewellyn chipped in some offense (6 and 4 points) and ran the offense pretty well.

Isaiah Barnes didn't play in the UVa game, but he provided instant offense in the UK game, with 6 points on 2-for-2 shooting (both 3-pointers).

Dug McDaniel continues to improve. He didn't do much vs. UVa (0 points), but he had 5 points vs. UK.

Who Looked Not-So-Good?

No one looked not-so-good.

Who Else Played?

Joey Baker didn't do much, scoring 3 and 0 points.

Jace Howard played in both games, but didn't score.

Tarris Reed, Jr. didn't do much, scoring 2 and 1 points.

Will Tschetter played in the UK game, but failed to score.

Who Didn't Play?

Gregg Glenn III and Youssef Khayat were the scholarship players who didn't play in either game.

Ian Burns, Jackson Selvala, and Cooper Smith were the practice squad players who didn't play in either game.

What Does It Mean?

While it was encouraging that Michigan managed to hang with the big boys this week, they need to find a way to start winning those kind of games. They still have one more non-conference game against a ranked team (North Carolina), and many of the teams in the Big Ten will be as tough to beat as Virginia and Kentucky. If Michigan wants to go to the Big Dance, they'll need to figure out how to win the last 100 seconds of a close game against a good team.

At this point, UM is looking a lot like an NIT team, not an NCAA team.

What's Next?

This week, Michigan plays just one game. On Thursday (12/08/2022, 9:00 p.m. EST, BTN) they play at Minnesota.

Minnesota is currently 4-4 (0-1 in Big Ten). They have no impressive wins, and unimpressive losses to DePaul, UNLV, and Virginia Tech. They don't have any noteworthy players, but they do have some height: 6'10", 6'11", and a 7-footer. Minnesota is picked for near the bottom of the Big Ten this season, and if Michigan can't beat them, even in Williams Arena (The Barn), they are looking at a very gloomy year.

Check back next week to find out what happened and why.

Go Blue!