Nothing But 'Net – Week #11 – 12/23/2024 – Lose The Tough One, Beat The Cupcake

The (#24) University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games this past week, and they lost the first and won the second. On Wednesday (12/18/2024), they lost to (#13) Oklahoma 87-86 in Charlotte, NC, as part of the annual Jumpman Invitational tournament, then on Sunday (12/22/2024), they beat Purdue-Fort Wayne 89-58 in Crisler Arena. Michigan's record is now 9-3 (2-0 in Big Ten).

What Happened?

First of all, if you read my article last week, I said that Michigan only played one game this week (Oklahoma); I completely missed the Purdue-Fort Wayne game. Oops.

Despite what I said last week, Michigan played two games this week, and they lost a heartbreaker to Oklahoma (the tough game), then walloped Purdue-Fort Wayne (the cupcake). Unfortunately, the win over PFW doesn't count nearly as much as a win over Oklahoma would have. Also unfortunately, a close, heartbreaking loss still counts as a loss.

There isn't much to say about the win over PFW, but there's a lot to say about the loss to Oklahoma. Once again, it was a high-profile, winnable game, and Michigan let it slip away in the last minute. All three of Michigan's losses have been like that: very close (2 points vs. Wake Forest, 2 points vs. Arkansas, and 1 point vs. Oklahoma), they've all been high-profile opponents, they've all been on a neutral court, they've all been winnable, and they've all slipped away in the final minute. Michigan could very well be 11-0 and ranked in the Top 5, but they've thrown away three golden opportunities.

There are only four schools that wear Jumpman gear from Nike: Michigan, Florida, North Carolina, and Oklahoma. Michigan has now played each of the other three schools once each in the Jumpman Invitational, and they are 0-3.

On the positive side, Michigan has now won more games (9) than they did all last season (8-24).

Game Flow

The Oklahoma game was close early, with Michigan leading 11-10 at the 15:18 mark. Michigan went on a 10-3 run to open up a little breathing room, 21-13, with 12:04 to go, and they kept the lead in the 5-7 point range for the rest of the half, leading by 5 points (43-38) at halftime.

As they have done so often in big games this season, Michigan opened the 2nd half poorly, letting OU tie it up (43-43) at the 19:09 mark. Fortunately, Michigan went on an 11-0 run over the next 4 minutes, and led by 11 points (54-43) with 15:13 to go. OU kept chipping away at the lead, getting within 3 points at one point (58-55), but Michigan pushed the lead back up to 11 points (68-57) with 9:55 left. OU kept grinding, and they finally caught and passed Michigan at the 5:51 mark, 76-74. OU kept the lead in the 2-4 point range for a few minutes, but Michigan tied the game (82-82) with 2:12 to go. UM went ahead (86-83) with 1:14 to go, and they even got the stops they needed, but they couldn't buy a basket in the last minute, and OU hit a 4-point play with 11 seconds left to go up by 1 point (87-86). Michigan had one last shot to win the game, but they missed, and that was it.

I've watched the replay of the game-tying 3-pointer that OU made with 11 seconds left, and I sure can't see a foul to make it a 4-point play. The OU player did the right thing by stumbling and falling down after he shot, but no one touched him, and the refs fell for it.

The game flow for the PFW game is irrelevant. Michigan led the whole way, opening up a nice lead early (23-4 at the 12:11 mark), and never letting PFW get within 10 points. They finally got the lead over 20 points (35-14 with 6:27 to go), and led by 25 at halftime (54-29).

Unlike the OU game, Michigan opened the 2nd half on fire. They went on a 7-0 run in the first 79 seconds, and led 61-29 at the 18:41 mark. At this point, the game was over. Michigan pushed the lead into the 30s, and cruised to a 31-point win.

Stats

The stats for the Oklahoma game were just OK. Michigan shot pretty well overall (30-for-64 = 46.9%), they shot 3-pointers terribly (4-for-28 = 14.3%), and they shot free throws well (22-for-26 = 84.6%). They won the rebounding battle (37-32) and the turnover battle (10-13). They lost this game with very poor 3-point shooting.

The stats for the FPW game were very nice. Michigan shot well overall (37-for-59 = 62.7%), they shot 3-pointers well (10-for-21 = 47.6%), and they shot free throws well (5-for-6 = 83.3%). The rebounding stats are almost unbelievable: Michigan outrebounded PFW 48-17. However, the turnover stats are the opposite: Michigan had 18 turnovers, PFW had 6. Michigan won this game with superior shooting and rebounding. They would have won by a lot more without all the silly turnovers.

Who Started?

The starters for both games were Nimari Burnett, Tre Donaldson, Roddy Gayle Jr., Vladislav Goldin, and Danny Wolf.

Who Looked Good?

Goldin was the star of the Oklahoma game, with 26 points (a new career high) on excellent shooting: 10-for-12 overall, and 6-for-7 on free throws. He also had 11 rebounds, for an impressive double-double. He was the 2nd leading scorer for Michigan in the PFW game, with 13 points, once again on great shooting: 6-for-7 overall. He had a great week.

Donaldson was the leading scorer for Michigan in the PFW game, with 16 points. He also had 14 points in the Oklahoma game.

Wolf had one good game (15 points and 10 rebounds vs. Oklahoma) and one decent game (4 points and 13 rebounds vs. PFW). He was the leader in assists in both games, with 5 in each.

Gayle had a good week, with 15 and 12 points.

Burnett had a pretty good week, with 8 and 10 points.

Justin Pippen had the best game of his young career, with 10 points and 4 rebounds vs. PFW. He didn't attempt a shot vs. Oklahoma.

Rubin Jones chipped in some points off the bench, with 5 and 3 points.

Will Tschetter had one decent game (9 points and 4 rebounds vs. PFW) and one weak game (0 points vs. Oklahoma).

Sam Walters chipped in some points off the bench, with 3 and 7 points. He shot terribly vs. Oklahoma (1-for-6, all 3-point attempts), but a little better vs. PFW (3-for-6 overall, 1-for-4 from deep).

L.J. Cason only played in the PFW game, and he scored 5 points.

Who Looked Not-So-Good?

All the mainstream players looked OK this week.

Who Else Played?

Phat Phat Brooks played for 6 minutes in the PFW game, but didn't attempt a shot.

Ian Burns played for 1 minute in the PFW game, but didn't attempt a shot.

Howard Eisley Jr. played for a few seconds in the PFW game, but didn't attempt a shot.

Harrison Hochberg played for 1 minute in the PFW game, but didn't attempt a shot.

Jace Howard played for 8 minutes in the PFW game, and went 0-for-2.

Charlie May played for a few seconds in the PFW game, but didn't attempt a shot.

Who Didn't Play?

Everyone on the team played in at least one game. The Scout Team players played in the final minute of the PFW game.

What Does It Mean?

The Oklahoma game was Michigan's last chance to beat a big-name ranked opponent in non-conference play, and they blew it. This loss, and the other two losses to big-name opponents (Wake Forest and Arkansas), could come back to haunt Michigan when at-large bids are being considered for the NCAA Tournament. Any one of those games would have been a big win on their resume. Michigan has to learn how to hang onto the decent leads they get in just about every game, and how to close out the close games as victories.

The other result of losing the Arkansas and Oklahoma games: dropping back out of the Top 25. Michigan was ranked #14 two weeks ago and #24 last week, but they'll surely be out of the Top 25 when the new poll comes out this afternoon. They'll need to win 5 or 6 games in a row without a loss to sneak back into the Top 25, which would take the whole month of January. They had a chance to stay ranked, but they had to win at least one of those games.

What's Next?

This week, Michigan only plays one game, their last non-conference game. On Sunday (12/29/2024, 8:00 p.m., BTN), they play Western Kentucky in Crisler Arena.

Western Kentucky is currently 9-3, with no impressive wins. They don't have any noteworthy players, but they do have some height: three 6'11" players. This is a game that Michigan should win, but only if they play under control. If they have too many silly turnovers, they could lose to anyone.

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

Go Blue!