

Michigan's Magic Runs Out in Sweet Sixteen Loss to Oregon

By: Leo Blavin

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- Michigan's season, one that appeared destined for the NIT six weeks ago, finally came to an end in the Sweet Sixteen of the NCAA Tournament on Thursday night. The Wolverines offense that was so crisp in Indianapolis during the opening two rounds stalled against a stifling Oregon Ducks defense, which held Michigan to 68 points. However, the Wolverines defense kept the maize and blue in it down the stretch as both teams traded missed shots for large portions of the waning minutes in the second half.

Oregon took a late lead to the free-throw line where Dylan Ennis missed two front ends of one-and-ones allowing Michigan a chance to win the game on two separate possessions with the shot clock turned off. As was the case most of the night, the Wolverines could not score when they needed points most. Derrick Walton's fadeaway two-point jumper looked good from the moment it left his hand until it mercilessly skipped off the left side of the rim. Michigan's do it all floor general, who led the program to its first-ever Big Ten Tournament title two weeks ago, had no more left to give to the program he helped resurrect. His final shot in a maize and blue uniform will go down as a miss. Like sixty-seven other NCAA Tournament teams, the Wolverine's season ends with a loss.

Moritz Wagner and DJ Wilson finished their seasons with performances lacking much performance. Perhaps the NBA-draft hype caught their attention, and they entered tonight's game, each with one foot already out the door. Walton's fellow senior captain Zak Irvin hit several clutch second-half shots to keep Michigan within striking distance, but he too will exit the program so close to the ultimate prize it hurts.

Head coach John Beilein knows he doesn't have many more seasons left in him. He said as much after last weekend's second-round win over Louisville. He's "no spring chicken" by his own admission, and one wonders if this was his last chance to cut down the final nets in a college basketball season. Michigan fans will remain optimistic about next year's title chances if both Wilson and Wagner return for their junior seasons. However, if either opts to take the NBA money and run, Wolverine fans are left with more questions than answers heading into next season.

Beilein has accepted the changing landscape of college basketball, where it's a testament to his player development that he's sending guys to the league earlier than anticipated. Unfortunately, each season that passes without Beilein reaching the college basketball mountaintop only solidifies his spot on a list no coach wants to be on as one of the best never to win it all.