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Is Michigan's Tourney Bid a One-Shot Deal or the Start of a New Trend?



University of Michigan basketball is back. For one more game, anyway.

The NCAA selection committee found the phone number to AD Bill Martin after all and shot an invitation to the Wolverines, asking them to be there at 7:10 p.m. sharp Thursday, so that they may take on the Clemson Tigers in Round One.

The Tigers, who started 16-0, finished at 23-8. Maybe their most impressive win was a 74-47 thumping of Duke, no less, at Clemson. The Wolves beat Duke, too.

U-M joins Michigan State in the tourney. The selection committee knows the Spartans' number by heart.

I'm not a Michigan fan, though I've softened my stance over the years. Maybe it's my inferiority complex from having attended Eastern Michigan University, seven miles down the road and firmly lost in U-M's shadow.

I've been an MSU leaner, though I'm hardly heartbroken whenever the Spartans lose anything of note. I guess that makes me semi-objective when it comes to commenting on the two schools.

Regardless, I'm actually thrilled for Michigan—both the university and the state. How can it not be better when both the Wolverines and the Spartans are in the "Big Dance," as they call it? I remember how exciting it was when the University of Detroit took on powerful Michigan in the 1977 tournament. Michigan won, but not before the Titans scared the bejeebers out of them.

Of course, the only way MSU can play Michigan in this year's tourney is if they meet in—gasp!—the Final. In Detroit.

You can stop fantasizing now.

The Wolverines have been AWOL from the Dance for so long, the players who last played on a Michigan tourney team are now retired from the *NBA*.

It was 1998, in case you were wondering. The Wolves got blasted out in the second round, losing to UCLA. Since then, the program has been in flux. And that's a rather kind way of putting it.

How a school of Michigan's stature enabled its basketball program to sink to an almost comedic level is a mystery that I'd dearly love someone to solve someday.

But they're back—in the tournament, for as long as they shall live.

Clemson won't be a pushover. Few teams are when you enter the tournament as a No. 10 seed, as Michigan is in the South region. Besides, even a win over Clemson will simply likely lead to a second round date with No. 2 seed Oklahoma. Sayonara!

But U-M is in, and I really do hope that this isn't just a blip on their screen; it would be wonderful if the Wolverines could provide more than token resistance to MSU's basketball dominance in the state. For too long (with the exception of last season), the U-M/MSU thing has been relegated to Michigan dominating in football, and MSU returning the favor on the hardwood. Wouldn't it be nice if the gaps were closed in each of those sports?

Of course, they've been trying to close the gap in football in East Lansing for over 30 years, with little success.

Michigan's a 20-win team again, which used to mean, almost, an automatic invitation. But with the onslaught of conference tournaments, there are fewer at-large openings, since conference tourney winners are often not the teams who would have received an at-large bid had they not gained an automatic berth by virtue of winning their conference tournament.

That was a long sentence, and it may take you longer to read it than the Wolverines will last in the tournament. Forgive my sass, but after a 10-year absence, I'm entitled to throw some sass Michigan's way.

Now it's up to them to shove crow down my throat.

Michigan basketball is back. Well, as back as you can be when they float you an invitation 11 years after the last one.

FEEDBACK