Nothing But 'Net – Week #12 (01/19/2009) – A Dismal Week

The Week In Review

The (#24) University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games this week, and they lost both of them. On Wednesday (01/14/2009), they lost at Illinois 66-51, then on Saturday (01/17/2009), they lost to Ohio State 65-58, in Crisler Arena. The two losses drop Michigan's record to 13-5 (3-3 in Big Ten play).

Both of these games were similar, and both were dismal. They were both games that Michigan could have won, but only if they played well, which they didn't. The big problem in both games (as we shall see below in the stats) was shooting, especially 3-point shooting. If you don't shoot well, it's hard to win a "toss up" game, and the "Beilein System" is heavily dependent on 3-point shooting. Time and time again in both games, Michigan had chances to either get back in the game (Illinois) or take/extend the lead (OSU) with a wide-open 3-pointer, and the shot just clanked. When the 3-pointers are falling, Beilein's offense is deadly, and fun to watch. When the 3-pointers are clanking, it's ugly. Michigan never led in the Illinois game, and they only led for a couple minutes in the OSU game, so they were playing "catch up" ball most of the time. It didn't help that Michigan had a couple long scoring droughts in both games, especially the last 5:00 of the OSU game.

At this point, opposing coaches (hello, Coach K?) have finally figured out what has been obvious since the beginning of the year: Michigan has no post defense. If your team has a 7-footer, and every other Division 1 team seems to, all you need to do is lob the ball in to him for an easy dunk. Two points, every time down the court. The only question is, can Michigan keep up by hitting a reasonable (over 40%) percentage of their 3-pointers. If Michigan hits enough of their 3-pointers, they can afford to trade an occasional 3 points for a steady 2 points. If the 3-pointers aren't dropping, forget about it. We saw this in both games this week. The two opposing 7-foot centers, Mike Tisdale (24 points) for Illinois, and B.J. Mullens (15 points) for OSU, both scored easily whenever they wanted to. Michigan had no one to stop them.

Game Statistics

First, let's look at the shooting statistics from the Illinois game:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	19-59 (32.2%)	7-26 (26.9%)	6-9 (66.7%)
Illinois	22-46 (47.8%)	6-14 (42.9%)	16-22 (72.7%)
Advantage	Illinois	Illinois	Illinois

These are sad stats. Michigan can shoot so much better than this.

Now, let's look at the non-shooting statistics from the Illinois game:

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	30	8	11	4	5
Illinois	35	12	11	4	4
Advantage	Illinois	Illinois	Even	Even	Michigan

These stats are too close to make much difference. The shooting stats tell the story here.

Next, let's look at the shooting statistics from the Ohio State game:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	20-56 (35.7%)	10-29 (34.5%)	8-11 (72.7%)
Ohio State	24-44 (54.5%)	3-11 (27.3%)	14-20 (70.0%)
Advantage	Ohio State	Michigan	Michigan

These stats are a little better than the Illinois stats, but they're still not very good. At first glance, you might think "Michigan made 7 more 3-pointers than OSU; they should have won the game". Then you look at the free-throw shooting. Sure, Michigan shot a slightly better percentage, but OSU made more free throws than Michigan attempted. That's where they won the game.

Finally, let's look at the non-shooting statistics from the Ohio State game:

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	29	13	12	1	3
Ohio State	32	15	15	4	6
Advantage	OSU	OSU	Michigan	OSU	OSU

Once again, these stats are too close to make much difference. The free-throw shooting stats tell the story here.

Season 3-Point Shooting

The way UM's offense is set up, they need to get off at least 20 3-pointers, and hit at least 40% of them to win. In the past, I counted a win where UM didn't hit 20/40 as "fits the theory", but no more. To fit my theory, they either have to hit 20/40 and win, or hit less than 20/40 and lose. If they win, but fail to hit 20/40, that doesn't fit my theory.

Here's how things have gone so far:

Date	Opponent	3-Point Shooting	Result	Fits Theory?
11/06/2008	Saginaw Valley State (exhibition)	11-24 (45.8%)	W	Y
11/11/2008	Michigan Tech	8-24 (33.3%)	W	N
11/12/2008	Northeastern	5-14 (35.7%)	W	N
11/20/2008	UCLA	5-20 (25.0%)	W	N
11/21/2008	Duke	6-22 (27.3%)	L	Y
11/25/2008	Norfolk State	9-27 (33.3%)	W	N
11/29/2008	Savannah State	4-22 (18.2%)	W	N
12/03/2008	Maryland	12-29 (41.4%)	L	N
12/06/2008	Duke	7-16 (43.8%)	W	N
12/13/2008	Eastern Michigan	16-33 (48.5%)	W	Y
12/20/2008	Oakland	13-29 (44.8%)	W	Y
12/22/2008	Florida Gulf Coast	12-42 (28.6%)	W	N
12/29/2008	North Carolina Central	9-30 (30.0%)	W	N
12/31/2008	Wisconsin	8-24 (33.3%)	L	Y
01/04/2009	Illinois	11-27 (40.7%)	W	Y
01/07/2009	Indiana	12-40 (30.0%)	W	N
01/11/2009	Iowa	7-22 (31.8%)	W	N
01/14/2009	Illinois	7-26 (26.9%)	L	Y
01/17/2009	Ohio State	10-29 (34.5%)	L	Y
Totals		172-500 (34.4%)		8-11

This week, Michigan showed exactly how dependent they are on the 3-point shot. They shot 3-pointers poorly, and they lost both games. It looks like half of my theory is correct: if they lose, they probably shot 3-pointers poorly. UM has lost 5 games so far this season, and they've shot under 20/40 in 4 of those losses, with Maryland as the lone exception. On the other hand, they have managed to win 10 of their 14 (including exhibition) wins without shooting 20/40.

Individual Statistics

Coach Beilein stuck with his starting lineup from last week in both games this week. Here's how the starters did:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	Ill	OSU	Ill	OSU	Ill	OSU	Ill	OSU
Kelvin Grady	2-8	2-5	1-5	1-4	0-0	0-0	5	5
Manny Harris	7-13	7-16	3-5	3-6	3-4	4-4	20	21
Laval Lucas-Perry	2-7	1-5	1-4	0-4	2-4	0-1	7	2
Zack Novak	2-4	1-4	1-3	1-4	0-0	2-3	5	5
DeShawn Sims	3-14	4-13	0-4	0-0	1-1	2-3	7	10
Totals	16-36 44.4%	15-43 34.9%	6-21 28.6%	5-18 27.8%	6-9 66.7%	8-11 72.7%	44	43

As a group, the starters did OK this week. Their percentages are decent, except for 3-point shooting, but they just didn't score enough points.

Individually, only Harris hit double figures in both games. He played well in both games, and he was the main reason that Michigan was in both games.

Sims had a terrible game at Illinois, and he wasn't much better against Ohio State. If he could have played up to his normal level, Michigan might have won one or both of the games.

After a great first 6 games, Lucas-Perry has slipped a notch (or two). He scored in double figures in his first 6 games, but hasn't hit double figures in his last 3 games. Likewise, his 3-point shooting percentage was great after 6 games (16-for-35, 45.7%), but he has gone 2-for-11 (18.2%) in his last 3 games. Michigan really needs him to get back to the form he showed in his first 6 games.

Grady and Novak contributed a little, but not as much as they're capable of.

Here's how the bench players did this week:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	Ill	OSU	Ill	OSU	Ill	OSU	Ill	OSU
Stu Douglass	1-5	4-9	1-4	4-9	0-0	0-0	3	12
Zack Gibson	2-4	0-1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	4	0
C.J. Lee	0-2	1-2	0-1	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	3
David Merritt	0-2	0-1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0
Jevohn Shepherd	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0	DNP
Totals	3-13 23.1%	5-13 38.5%	1-5 20.0%	5-11 45.5%	0-0 0.0%	0-0 0.0%	7	15

As a group, the bench players didn't do much. Their shooting percentages are mediocre, except for 3-point shooting vs. OSU, and they didn't score very many points.

Individually, only Douglass contributed something, and that was just in the Ohio State game. Michigan needs a lot more help from the bench.

Big Ten Report

My weekly Big Ten Report is now a separate article, here.

The Big Picture

Well, things sure did change in one week, didn't they? Last week, we were talking about competing for the Big Ten title, and thinking about an NCAA bid. This week, we're hoping to stay in the top half of the Big Ten standings, and looking at an NIT bid.

Realistically, Michigan should be able to go 5-7 in the last 12 Big Ten games. They should be able to beat Penn State and Northwestern twice, and Iowa again. The rest of the games are more of the "should lose" or "toss up" variety. They don't stand much chance of winning at Ohio State, Purdue, Wisconsin, or Minnesota, and they'll have a tough time at home with Michigan State, Minnesota, and Purdue. If they can go 5-7 down the stretch, that will leave them at 18-12 for the regular season. That means that they'll probably have to win 2 games in the Big Ten Tournament to get into the NCAA Tournament.

Here's the 2008-2009 schedule/results:

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Score	Record
11/06/2008 (Thu)	Saginaw Valley State (exh)	Ann Arbor	W	81-55	0-0
2K Sports Classic benefiting Coaches vs. Cancer					
11/11/2008 (Tue)	Michigan Tech	Ann Arbor	W	77-55	1-0
11/12/2008 (Wed)	Northeastern	Ann Arbor	W	76-56	2-0
11/20/2008 (Thu)	UCLA	New York, NY	W	55-52	3-0
11/21/2008 (Fri)	Duke	New York, NY	L	71-56	3-1
11/25/2008 (Tue)	Norfolk State	Ann Arbor	W	83-49	4-1
11/29/2008 (Sat)	Savannah State	Ann Arbor	W	66-64 (ot)	5-1
ACC/Big Ten Challenge					
12/03/2008 (Wed)	at Maryland	College Park, MD	L	75-70	5-2
12/06/2008 (Sat)	Duke	Ann Arbor	W	81-73	6-2
12/13/2008 (Sat)	Eastern Michigan	Ann Arbor	W	91-60	7-2
12/20/2008 (Sat)	vs. Oakland	Auburn Hills, MI	W	89-76	8-2
12/22/2008 (Mon)	Florida Gulf Coast	Ann Arbor	W	76-59	9-2
12/29/2008 (Mon)	North Carolina Central	Ann Arbor	W	77-57	10-2
12/31/2009 (Wed)	Wisconsin	Ann Arbor	L	73-61	10-3 (0-1)
01/04/2009 (Sun)	Illinois	Ann Arbor	W	74-64	11-3 (1-1)
01/07/2009 (Wed)	at Indiana	Bloomington, IN	W	72-66 (ot)	12-3 (2-1)
01/11/2009 (Sun)	Iowa	Ann Arbor	W	64-49	13-3 (3-1)
01/14/2009 (Wed)	at Illinois	Champaign, IL	L	66-51	13-4 (3-2)
01/17/2009 (Sat)	Ohio State	Ann Arbor	L	65-58	13-5 (3-3)
01/20/2009 (Tue)	at Penn State	State College, PA			
01/24/2009 (Sat)	Northwestern	Ann Arbor			
01/28/2009 (Wed)	at Ohio State	Columbus, OH			
01/31/2009 (Sat)	at Purdue	West Lafayette, IN			
02/05/2009 (Thu)	Penn State	Ann Arbor			
02/07/2009 (Sat)	at Connecticut	Storrs, CT			
02/10/2009 (Tue)	Michigan State	Ann Arbor			
02/15/2009 (Sun)	at Northwestern	Evanston, IL			

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Score	Record
02/19/2009 (Thu)	Minnesota	Ann Arbor			
02/22/2009 (Sun)	at Iowa	Iowa City, IA			
02/26/2009 (Thu)	Purdue	Ann Arbor			
03/01/2009 (Sun)	at Wisconsin	Madison, WI			
03/07/2009 (Sat) or 03/08/2009 (Sun)	at Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN			
Big Ten Tournament					
03/12/2009 (Thu)	First Round	Indianapolis, IN			
03/13/2009 (Fri)	Quarterfinal	Indianapolis, IN			
03/14/2009 (Sat)	Semifinal	Indianapolis, IN			
03/15/2009 (Sun)	Championship	Indianapolis, IN			

The Upcoming Week

As you can see in the schedule above, Michigan plays two games this week. On Tuesday (01/20/2009, 9:00 p.m., Big Ten Network) they play at Penn State, and on Saturday (01/24/2009, 8:00 p.m., Big Ten Network) they play Northwestern, in Crisler Arena. These are two games that Michigan has to win if they want to stay in the top division of the Big Ten.

Come on down to Crisler, and cheer on the Wolverines.

Go Blue!