Nothing But 'Net – Week #13 (01/26/2009) – Back From The Brink

The Week In Review

The University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games this week, and they won one and lost one. On Tuesday (01/20/2009), they lost at Penn State 73-58, then on Saturday (01/24/2009), they beat Northwestern 68-59, in Crisler Arena. The loss and the win leave Michigan with a record of 14-6 (4-4 in Big Ten play).

What does "back from the brink" mean? It means that if Michigan had lost to Northwestern on Saturday night, they probably would have lost their chance to go to the NCAA Tournament this season. They got to "the brink" by losing three games in a row (at Illinois, home vs. Ohio State, and at Penn State), and it made the Northwestern game a "must win" game. Normally, there wouldn't be much to worry about with Northwestern, but they came into Crisler win a two-game win streak, both against ranked teams. On Sunday (01/18/2009), Northwestern beat (#18) Minnesota 74-65, in Evanston, then on Wednesday (01/21/2009), they beat (#7) Michigan State 70-63, in East Lansing. The win at MSU snapped the Spartan's 28-game home winning streak. So, Northwestern was not to be taken lightly this season.

Fortunately, Michigan played their "A" game against Northwestern, and controlled the tempo of the game. After some early seesaw action, Michigan opened up a little breathing room, and once they got the lead, they never gave it up. Every time Northwestern made a mini-run to get close, Michigan answered with a run of their own.

Unfortunately, Michigan didn't play well at all on the road at Penn State. The big culprit, as we shall see in the statistics section, was 3-point shooting. The Michigan offense leans heavily on 3-pointers, and when they aren't falling, the game usually doesn't go well.

Game Statistics

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	22-56 (39.3%)	5-30 (16.7%)	9-13 (69.2%)
Penn State	29-50 (58.0%)	9-17 (52.9%)	6-16 (37.5%)
Advantage	Penn State	Penn State	Michigan

No doubt about it: PSU was hot, and Michigan was not. In particular, UM's 3-point shooting was the worst I can remember.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	26	9	9	1	3
Penn State	37	18	13	0	4
Advantage	PSU	PSU	Michigan	Michigan	PSU

The only important stat here is Rebounds. Those 11 extra possessions sure helped Penn State.

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws

Michigan	22-52 (42.3%)	9-27 (33.3%)	15-18 (83.3%)
Northwestern	24-53 (45.3%)	10-27 (37.0%)	1-3 (33.3%)
Advantage	Northwestern	Northwestern	Michigan

Talk about misleading stats: if you look at the overall shooting and 3-point shooting, you would think that Northwestern won the game, and then you look at free-throw shooting. Those 14 extra points made all the difference in a 9-point win.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	41	18	9	4	4
Northwestern	22	16	7	2	4
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	NW	Michigan	Even

Once again, other than Rebounds, 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
01/20/2009	Penn State	5-30 (16.7%)	L	Y
01/24/2009	Northwestern	9-27 (33.3%)	W	N
Totals		186-557 (33.4%)		9-12

I guess the best way to describe Michigan's dependence on the 3-point shot is: "if they shoot well (20/40), they'll almost certainly win, but if they shoot 3-pointers poorly **against a quality opponent**, they'll probably lose". That's what these stats show.

Individual Statistics

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

Player	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
	PSU	NW	PSU	NW	PSU	NW	PSU	NW
Kelvin Grady	1-5	3-8	1-5	3-7	0-0	2-3	3	11
Manny Harris	1-9	2-9	0-5	0-2	2-2	4-4	4	8
Laval Lucas-Perry	2-8	2-6	0-6	1-4	2-2	0-0	6	5
Zack Novak	1-4	1-5	0-3	1-5	4-4	4-6	6	7
DeShawn Sims	10-14	5-8	0-0	0-0	1-2	5-5	21	15
Totals	15-40 37.5%	13-36 36.1%	1-19 5.3%	5-18 27.8%	9-10 90.0%	15-18 83.3%	40	46

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. Of course, the 3-point shooting percentage against Penn State is embarrassing.

Individually, only Sims hit double figures in both games. He played well in both games, and he was the main reason that Michigan was in both games. He also had 11 rebounds against Penn State, for a double-double.

Up until this week, Harris had been a very reliable scorer. He had missed double figures only four times last season, and twice this season. He had a miserable time shooting this past week, going a combined 3-for-18. However, even though he didn't contribute many points, he did contribute in other ways, with 12 rebounds and 4 assists in the Northwestern game.

None of the other starters contributed much. They're all capable of much more.

Here's how the bench players did this week:

Player	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
	PSU	NW	PSU	NW	PSU	NW	PSU	NW
Stu Douglass	3-8	3-5	3-8	2-4	0-0	0-0	9	8
Zack Gibson	2-3	4-6	1-1	0-0	0-2	0-0	5	8
C.J. Lee	0-1	0-0	0-1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0
David Merritt	0-0	1-2	0-0	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	3
Eric Puls	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0	DNP
Jevohn Shepherd	2-3	0-1	0-0	0-1	0-1	0-0	4	0
Anthony Wright	0-1	1-2	0-1	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	3
Totals	7-16 43.8%	9-16 56.3%	4-11 36.4%	4-9 44.4%	0-3 0.0%	0-0 0.0%	18	22

As a group, the bench players did OK this week. Their shooting percentages are pretty good, except for free-throw shooting, and they scored a few points.

Individually, no one hit double figures in either game, but Douglass contributed came close in both games. Gibson played pretty well, but no one else contributed much.

Big Ten Report

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

The Big Picture

Last week, I guessed that Michigan should be able to beat Penn State and Northwestern twice, and Iowa one more time. Well, that kind of fell apart when they lost at Penn State. Now, I can only see 3 more potential wins: home vs. Penn State, at Northwestern, and at Iowa. They rest of the games look pretty iffy. If Michigan can play the way they did against Northwestern, they stand a chance in the home games against Michigan State, Minnesota, and Purdue, so maybe they'll win 2 of those 3. That would be 5 more wins, which works out to a 9-9 record in the Big Ten and a 19-12 record 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	L	73-58	13-6 (3-4)
01/24/2009 (Sat)	Northwestern	Ann Arbor	W	68-59	14-6 (4-4)
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			
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)	at Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN			

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Score	Record
or 03/08/2009 (Sun)					
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 Wednesday (01/28/2009, 6:30 p.m., Big Ten Network) they play at Ohio State, and on Saturday (01/31/2009, 1:00 p.m., CBS) they play at Purdue. I'll be stunned if they win either of these games.

Go Blue!