Nothing But 'Net – Week #16 (02/16/2009) – Living "On The Bubble"

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 (02/10/2009), they lost to (#9) Michigan State 54-42 in Crisler Arena, then on Sunday (02/15/2009), they beat Northwestern 70-67 (ot) in Evanston. The loss and the win leave Michigan with a record of 16-10 (6-7 in Big Ten play).

The MSU game was so sad. For the most part, Michigan played well enough to win, but they had a few small lapses, and that was all MSU needed to put the game just out of reach. The final margin (12 points) is very deceptive: it was a 5-6 point game most of the 2nd half, and the deficit only got up to 12 because Michigan tried desperation tactics at the end, which led to a bunch of late MSU free throws.

The Northwestern game was almost sad. Michigan didn't play particularly well, but they were lucky that Northwestern played even worse. On the one hand, it's a little scary that Michigan had to go to overtime to beat NU, but on the other hand, it's encouraging that they have won all 3 of their overtime games this season.

Game Statistics

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	16-46 (34.8%)	4-24 (16.7%)	6-11 (54.5%)
Michigan State	18-43 (41.9%)	3-14 (21.4%)	15-19 (78.9%)
Advantage	Michigan State	Michigan State	Michigan State

MSU won all 3 shootings stats, which explains how they won the game.

If you had told me before the game that UM would hold MSU to 21.4% shooting on 3-pointers, I would have said that Michigan would win the game. I still can't imagine this UM team shooting 16.7% from 3-point range.

I also have trouble imagining the best free-throw shooting team in the Big Ten (Michigan) shooting 54.5% at the line. Ugh.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	28	10	13	1	4
Michigan State	31	14	11	3	4
Advantage	MSU	MSU	MSU	MSU	Even

These stats are too close to matter much. The shooting stats are the important ones.

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	21-45 (46.7%)	7-26 (26.9%)	21-27 (77.8%)
Northwestern	23-58 (39.7%)	4-17 (23.5%)	17-23 (73.9%)
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan

Michigan won all 3 of these stats, and that's why they won the game. The biggest stat was free-throw shooting. Those extra 4 points were more than the margin of victory.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	32	15	17	4	6
Northwestern	33	11	11	1	10
Advantage	NU	Michigan	NU	Michigan	NU

I can't believe the Michigan got out-rebounded by the worst rebounding team in the Big Ten. Those 17 turnovers are also a big concern.

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
01/28/2009	Ohio State	7-26 (26.9%)	L	Y
01/31/2009	Purdue	6-23 (26.1%)	L	Y
02/05/2009	Penn State	10-26 (38.5%)	W	N
02/07/2009	Connecticut	9-29 (31.0%)	L	Y
02/10/2009	Michigan State	4-24 (16.7%)	L	Y
02/15/2009	Northwestern	7-26 (26.9%)	W	N
Totals		229-711 (32.2%)		13-14

Michigan beat Northwestern despite shooting a lot less than 40%, but they couldn't overcome their poor 3-point shooting vs. MSU. What's really frustrating is that the Michigan players are getting plenty of good looks at 3-pointers, they're just not hitting them. These are the same UM players that were hitting the same shots earlier in the season. What has changed? Are they tired? Is it just a matter of confidence? Bad luck? I don't know.

Individual Statistics

Coach Beilein used two different starting lineups this week, still trying to find the right combination. Here's how the starters did:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	MSU	NU	MSU	NU	MSU	NU	MSU	NU
Stu Douglass	Bench	0-4	Bench	0-4	Bench	0-0	Bench	0
Zack Gibson	2-4	Bench	1-1	Bench	1-3	Bench	6	Bench
Manny Harris	2-10	8-15	1-6	1-6	2-4	9-10	7	26
C.J. Lee	1-4	1-3	0-2	1-3	0-0	4-6	2	7
Laval Lucas-Perry	1-3	Bench	1-2	Bench	0-0	Bench	3	Bench
Zack Novak	1-6	2-5	1-6	2-5	1-2	1-2	4	7
DeShawn Sims	Bench	4-6	Bench	0-1	Bench	0-0	Bench	8
Totals	7-27 25.9%	15-33 45.5%	4-17 23.5%	4-19 21.0%	4-9 44.4%	14-18 77.8%	22	48

As a group, the starters had a lousy week. Their percentages were terrible, except for overall shooting in the Northwestern game, and they didn't score nearly enough points in the MSU game.

Individually, only Harris hit double figures in either game, and he only did it in the Northwestern games. The rest of the starters were unimpressive.

Here's how the bench players did this week:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	MSU	NU	MSU	NU	MSU	NU	MSU	NU
Stu Douglass	0-2	Starter	0-2	Starter	2-2	Starter	2	Starter
Zack Gibson	Starter	2-4	Starter	0-0	Starter	2-4	Starter	6
Kelvin Grady	0-2	0-0	0-2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0
Laval Lucas-Perry	Starter	2-3	Starter	1-2	Starter	5-5	Starter	10
David Merritt	0-0	1-2	0-0	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	3
Jevohn Shepherd	0-1	0-1	0-0	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0
DeShawn Sims	9-14	Starter	0-3	Starter	0-0	Starter	18	Starter
Anthony Wright	DNP	1-2	DNP	1-2	DNP	0-0	DNP	3
Totals	9-19 47.4%	6-12 50.0%	0-7 0.0%	3-7 42.9%	2-2 100.0%	7-9 77.8%	20	22

As a group, the bench players had a mediocre week. Their shooting percentages were up and down, and they scored a reasonable number of points.

Individually, only Lucas-Perry and Sims hit double figures, and they only did it in one game each. Of course, they were starters in the other games this week, but they didn't hit double figures in those games.

The rest of the bench players didn't contribute much.

Big Ten Report

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

The Big Picture

Incredibly, even after losing 7 of their last 10 games, Michigan still stands a chance of making the NCAA Tournament. The conventional wisdom is that Michigan will need at least 20 wins, and at least a 9-9 record in the Big Ten, to make The Big Dance. To get there, the Wolverines need to win 3 of their last 5 games and one game in the Big Ten Tournament, which will be tough. The only relatively easy game left is at Iowa, and they might be able to beat Minnesota in Ann Arbor, but the home game vs. Purdue looks shaky, and it's really tough to win at Minnesota and Wisconsin.

On the positive side, by winning their 16th game, Michigan has guaranteed themselves a non-losing season, since the worst they can do is 16-16. That means that they will be eligible to play in the NIT, if they don't make it to the NCAA Tournament. Now I know that the big goal is to make the NCAA Tournament, but the NIT would be a nice stepping stone towards that goal.

The other positive thing about the Northwestern win is that it assures Michigan of a better record in the Big Ten (at worst 6-12) than last season (5-13). That's progress, even if it's slower than many people would like.

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	L	72-54	14-7 (4-5)
01/31/2009 (Sat)	at Purdue	West Lafayette, IN	L	67-49	14-8 (4-6)
02/05/2009 (Thu)	Penn State	Ann Arbor	W	71-51	15-8 (5-6)

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Score	Record
02/07/2009 (Sat)	at Connecticut	Storrs, CT	L	69-61	15-9 (5-6)
02/10/2009 (Tue)	Michigan State	Ann Arbor	L	54-42	15-10 (5-7)
02/15/2009 (Sun)	at Northwestern	Evanston, IL	W	70-67 (ot)	16-10 (6-7)
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 Thursday (02/19/2009, 7:00 p.m., Big Ten Network) they play Minnesota in Crisler Arena, and on Sunday (02/22/2009, 5:00 p.m. EST, Big Ten Network) they play at Iowa. Both of these games are "toss up" games, although the Minnesota game is certainly going to be tougher than the Iowa game.

Come on down to Crisler and cheer on the Wolverines.

Go Blue!