

Nothing But 'Net – Week #22 (03/30/2009) – Season Wrap-up, Final Grades, And A Look Ahead

Season Wrap-up

The 2008-2009 season is over for the University of Michigan men's basketball team, and it was very encouraging. In general, the Wolverines exceeded the expectations of most fans, including me. Based on last season's dismal 10-22 record, I was hoping for enough improvement for Michigan to have a winning record, and make it to the [National Invitational Tournament \(NIT\)](#) this season, then the [NCAA Tournament](#) next season, and actually win a game in the NCAA Tournament the season after that. Instead, Michigan moved things up a couple of seasons, and made it to The Big Dance this season, and won one game.

When I look at a season, I like to divide the games into 3 categories: games Michigan should win, games Michigan probably don't stand much chance of winning, and "toss up" games. In a successful season, Michigan would win all the "should win" games, some of the "toss up" games, and maybe one or two of the "should lose" games. Here's how this season's games were divided up in my mind:

"Should win" games (12): Michigan Tech, 2nd round 2K Classic opponent (Northeastern or IUPUI), Norfolk State, Savannah State, Eastern Michigan, Oakland, Florida Gulf Coast, North Carolina Central, Northwestern (home and away), Penn State (home), and Minnesota (home).

"Should lose" games (10): One of the 2K Classic games at MSG, Maryland, Duke, Illinois (away), Ohio State (away), Purdue (home and away), Connecticut, Michigan State, and Wisconsin (away).

"Toss up" games (9): One of the 2K Classic games at MSG, Wisconsin (home), Illinois (home), Indiana (away), Iowa (home and away), Ohio State (home), Penn State (away), and Minnesota (away).

So, if Michigan had won all 12 of their "should win" games, and more than half (5 out of 9) of their "toss up" games, that would have worked out to a record of 17-14. However, Michigan did better than that: 19-12. Here's how they did it:

- "Should Win" games (12-0). They won all the games that they should have.
- "Should Lose" games (2-8). They actually won two games that they were expected to lose: Duke (home) and Purdue (home). They also hung in there in three of the "should lose" games that they did end up losing: Maryland, Connecticut, and Wisconsin (away).
- "Toss Up" games (5-4). They beat UCLA (MSG), Illinois (home), Indiana (away), Iowa (home), and Minnesota (away), and lost the other four games.

When you look at it this way, you can see that the key to their success this season was winning those two "should lose" games. That was the difference between finishing 17-14 (NIT) and 19-12 (NCAA).

Here are the final 2008-2009 results:

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Score	Record
11/06/2008 (Thu)	Saginaw Valley State (exh)	Ann Arbor	W	81-55	0-0

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Score	Record
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)
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	W	74-62	17-10 (7-7)
02/22/2009 (Sun)	at Iowa	Iowa City, IA	L	70-60 (ot)	17-11 (7-8)
02/26/2009 (Thu)	Purdue	Ann Arbor	W	87-78	18-11 (8-8)
03/01/2009 (Sun)	at Wisconsin	Madison, WI	L	60-55	18-12 (8-9)
03/07/2009 (Sat)	at Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN	W	67-64	19-12 (9-9)
Big Ten Tournament					
03/12/2009 (Thu)	Iowa (1 st round)	Indianapolis, IN	W	73-45	20-12 (9-9)
03/13/2009 (Fri)	Illinois (Quarterfinal)	Indianapolis, IN	L	60-50	20-13 (9-9)
NCAA Tournament					
03/19/2009 (Thu)	Clemson (1 st round)	Kansas City, MO	W	62-59	21-13 (9-9)
03/21/2009 (Sat)	Oklahoma (2 nd round)	Kansas City, MO	L	73-63	21-14 (9-9)

As you can see, Michigan started the season strong (13-3), then they had a rough patch in the 9 games starting with the away game vs. Illinois, when they went 2-7. They recovered nicely and came on strong down the stretch, going 4-2 to finish the regular season, and 1-1 in the [Big Ten Tournament](#) and the NCAA Tournament.

Good/Bad Wins/Losses

Not all wins are good wins, and not all losses are bad losses. Sure, a win is a win, and a loss is a loss, but some wins can be discouraging, and some losses can be encouraging. I know, Michigan doesn't believe in "moral victories" in any of their sports, but I do. Therefore, I've gone back over the season, and found the good and bad wins, and the good and bad losses:

Good wins

Date	Opponent	Location	Score	Comments
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11/20/2008	(#4) UCLA	New York, NY	55-52	UCLA was ranked #4 at the time, and this was a huge win for the team and the program.
12/06/2008	(#4) Duke	Ann Arbor	81-73	Duke was ranked #4 at the time, and this was an even bigger win than the UCLA game. It was great that it was at home.
01/04/2009	Illinois	Ann Arbor	74-64	Illinois ended up finishing 2 nd in the Big Ten, so beating them was an accomplishment.
02/19/2009	Minnesota	Ann Arbor	74-62	This was a key win in Michigan's drive to finish 0.500 in Big Ten play.
02/26/2009	(#16) Purdue	Ann Arbor	87-78	Purdue was ranked #16 at the time. This was another "must win" game for Michigan.
03/07/2009	Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN	67-64	This was probably the win that got Michigan into the NCAA Tournament.
03/12/2009	Iowa	Indianapolis, IN	73-45	This was a big win because it came in the Big Ten Tournament. Winning a tournament game, any tournament game, is a big deal. It was nice to win in a rout.

Good losses

Date	Opponent	Location	Score	Comments
12/03/2008	Maryland	College Park, MD	75-70	Michigan led for most of the game, and faded at the end.
02/07/2009	(#1) Connecticut	Storrs, CT	69-61	Michigan hung with them the whole game, but couldn't quite pull off the big upset.
03/01/2009	Wisconsin	Madison, WI	60-55	Once again, Michigan hung with them the whole game, but faded at the end.

Bad wins

Date	Opponent	Location	Score	Comments
11/29/2008	Savannah State	Ann Arbor	66-64 (ot)	Michigan should have won by 20, but barely escaped in overtime.
01/07/2009	Indiana	Bloomington, IN	72-66 (ot)	Sure, it was a road win, but Indiana was REALLY bad this season, and Michigan should have won comfortable, not in overtime.

Bad losses

Date	Opponent	Location	Score	Comments
01/17/2009	Ohio State	Ann Arbor	65-58	Ohio State was pretty good this season, but not as good as Michigan made them look in this game.
01/20/2009	Penn State	State College, PA	73-58	Sure, it was a road game, but

				Penn State wasn't that good this season, and Michigan lost by 15 points.
02/22/2009	Iowa	Iowa City, IA	70-60 (ot)	I know: it's tough to win on the road, but Iowa was bad this season, and Michigan let the game slip away in the last minute of regulation, then stunk up the joint in overtime.

Not bad: 7 "good wins" and 3 "good losses" vs. only 2 "bad wins" and 3 "bad losses".

Season Statistics

[The Athletic Department publishes complete statistics after every game](#), and they're very thorough and complete. They're also a bit much to digest. Here are the "stats lite" for this season.

First, let's look at the [team shooting statistics for the season](#):

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	812-1910 (42.5%)	305-912 (33.4%)	412-544 (75.7%)
Opponents	811-1864 (43.5%)	196-631 (31.1%)	395-545 (72.5%)
Advantage	Opponents	Michigan	Michigan

These stats show why Michigan had such a successful season: they shot better than their opponents. They had a decided edge in 3-point shooting and free throws, and were really close in overall field goal shooting.

Next, let's check out the [team non-shooting statistics for the season](#):

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	1087	542	402	92	223
Opponents	1202	484	476	107	179
Advantage	Opp	Mich	Mich	Opp	Mich

Somehow, Michigan managed to win two thirds of their games this season despite being out-rebounded most of the time. It's amazing.

Also, notice that Michigan had 542 assists on 812 baskets. That's 66.7%, which is very good.

Now, let's look at the [individual shooting stats for the season](#):

Player	Field Goals	3-Pointers	Free Throws	Points	
				Total	Per Game
Ben Cronin	2-4 (0.500)	0-0 (0.000)	4-4 (1.000)	8	4.0
Stu Douglass	71-193 (0.368)	52-155 (0.335)	19-28 (0.679)	213	6.1
Zack Gibson	59-122 (0.484)	7-30 (0.233)	12-24 (0.500)	137	3.9
Kelvin Grady	44-118 (0.373)	30-83 (0.361)	17-24 (0.708)	135	4.2
Manny Harris	181-436 (0.415)	52-159 (0.327)	176-204 (0.863)	590	16.9
C.J. Lee	32-77 (0.416)	19-52 (0.365)	17-26 (0.654)	100	2.9
Laval Lucas-Perry	47-126 (0.373)	31-90 (0.344)	43-55 (0.782)	168	6.5

David Merritt	22-56 (0.393)	13-37 (0.351)	7-8 (0.875)	64	1.8
Zack Novak	72-194 (0.371)	52-151 (0.344)	31-45 (0.689)	227	6.7
Eric Puls	5-7 (0.714)	3-4 (0.750)	0-0 (0.000)	13	1.2
Jevohn Shepherd	31-68 (0.456)	4-21 (0.190)	12-20 (0.600)	78	2.6
DeShawn Sims	224-444 (0.505)	26-82 (0.317)	66-93 (0.710)	540	15.4
Anthony Wright	22-65 (0.338)	16-48 (0.333)	8-13 (0.615)	68	2.7

Most seasons, I say to “forget about the subs and scrubs”, but this season almost everyone on the team averaged at least 10 minutes per game. The only two exceptions were Cronin, who got redshirted for medical reasons after only playing in 2 games, and Puls, who only played in “mop up” situations. The rest of the players all played pretty regularly, and they all started at least 5 games over the course of the season.

Looking at the regulars, many of them shot at or above 40%, which is pretty good. Look at Sims’ overall shooting percentage: over 50%. That’s awesome. The biggest problem here is that Michigan really only had two reliable scorers (Harris and Sims). They need to develop one or two more credible scoring threats to keep opponents from concentrating on Harris and Sims. At times, Douglass, Grady, Lucas-Perry, and Novak all appeared to be potential candidates to become the elusive 3rd scoring threat, but they weren’t consistent enough. Still, they had good seasons, especially considering that they’re all freshmen except for Grady, who is a sophomore.

In the Beilein system, everyone needs to be able to shoot 3-pointers, and most of the players on this season’s team did pretty well, with the exception of Gibson and Shepherd. Shepherd is a graduating senior, so we don’t have to worry about him for next season, but Gibson has to work on his 3-point shot over the summer.

Finally, let’s check out the [individual non-shooting stats for the season](#):

Player	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Ben Cronin	5	0	0	1	0
Stu Douglass	50	74	44	4	26
Zack Gibson	76	16	24	26	14
Kelvin Grady	43	60	24	1	15
Manny Harris	237	154	110	18	43
C.J. Lee	67	58	24	0	19
Laval Lucas-Perry	44	31	29	5	16
David Merritt	28	36	24	0	15
Zack Novak	120	48	30	1	17
Eric Puls	2	0	1	2	0
Jevohn Shepherd	33	23	14	3	8
DeShawn Sims	238	26	46	27	40
Anthony Wright	45	16	19	4	10

There are a few interesting stats here, most of them involving Harris:

- It’s incredible that Harris was only 1 rebound behind Sims for the season. That’s a lot of rebounds for a guard.
- It’s amazing that Harris had 154 assists to go with his 181 made baskets. That means that he had a hand in scoring 335 of Michigan’s 812 baskets (41%).
- Harris still has to work on his control. 110 turnovers is still too many.

Team Honors

Regardless of the awards announced at the Basketball Bust, here are my awards for this year's team:

Most Valuable Player: Manny Harris

Best Defensive Player: C.J. Lee

Most Hustle: Zack Novak

Most Improved: C.J. Lee

Final Grades

It's time for final grades for the team, and Coach Beilein. I broke this season up into 3 parts, roughly corresponding to the non-conference schedule and the two halves of the Big Ten schedule. Here are the grades:

Name	Grades			Comments
	1st Tri.	2nd Tri.	Final	
Freshmen				
Ben Cronin	Inc.	Inc.	Inc.	Ben only played in 2 games, for a total of 10 minutes, and he's been redshirted for this season due to a hip injury that required surgery. He'll still have freshman eligibility next season.
Stu Douglass	B	B-	B+	Stu played well when he was in the starting lineup, but not so well coming off the bench. He's got a nice 3-point shot, and he handles the ball pretty well.
Laval Lucas-Perry	Inc.	B	B	For his first 6 games, Laval looked like the third scorer (along with Manny Harris and DeShawn Sims) that Michigan needs, but since then he has lost his shooting touch.
Zack Novak	B	B	B+	Zack is a scrappy player, and he plays much bigger than his actual size. He's another good 3-point shooter, and a good defender.
Corey Person	Inc.	Inc.	Inc.	Corey didn't play in any games, so we didn't get to see what he can do. He's on the team as a practice player.
Eric Puls	Inc.	Inc.	Inc.	Eric didn't play in enough games to see what he can do. He's on the team as a practice player.
Sophomores				
Kelvin Grady	B	B	B-	Kelvin has played pretty well coming off the bench. He runs the offense well, he's very fast, and he shot 3-pointers pretty well.

Manny Harris	A	B+	A	Manny started out strong this season, tailed off in the first half of the Big Ten part of the schedule, then came on strong down the homestretch. When he's "on", he shoots well, he can drive the lane, he rebounds well, and he plays good defense. Most importantly, he's a leader on the floor. When he's "off", he tends to try too hard.
Anthony Wright	C+	C	C	Anthony began the season as a starter, but he has moved further and further down the bench as the season has gone on. He's got a nice 3-point shot, but he needs to work on some other aspects of his game, including ballhandling, footwork, and help defense.
Juniors				
Zack Gibson	B-	B-	B-	Zack has done pretty well this season. He's the tallest player on the team, with Ben Cronin out. He plays good, solid defense, and he's got a decent shooting touch. He needs to work on his footwork and his ballhandling a little.
DeShawn Sims	A	B+	A-	DeShawn is the most improved player this season. He has been a real leader on the court, with good offense and defense. He's been a beast on the boards, often playing against the biggest players on the opposing teams.
Seniors				
C.J. Lee	B-	B-	B	C.J. is fast, and he ran the offense pretty well. He's got a pretty good shot, but he seemed afraid to take it sometimes. He needed to be more aggressive out there.
David Merritt	B	B-	B	David ran the offense very well, and he was able to bring the ball upcourt against heavy pressure. When he did shoot, he shot pretty well.
Jevohn Shepherd	C+	C	C	Jevohn is another player who went from starter to bench player to the end of the bench. When he was in the game, he was very energetic and athletic, and he was a tenacious defender, but he never developed a good complete game. He needed to improve his ballhandling and shooting.
Coach				

John Beilein	B+	B	A-	It's hard to argue with success. Coach Beilein turned the program around in just 2 years, going from a 10-22 season to a 21-14 season, and (more importantly) a berth in the NCAA Tournament. He's done a great job molding a team that plays well together.
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As you can see, the grades were pretty consistent all season long.

Looking Ahead

It's obvious that "the Beilein system" works; now it's time to take it to the next level. The trip to the NCAA Tournament this season was too short; next season we're hoping for (at least) the Sweet 16.

Michigan is losing some valuable senior leadership (Lee, Merritt, and Shepherd), but a large and talented group of players is returning next season, and [a nice freshman class of recruits](#) is on the way. Michigan needs some height and bulk up front, and they got it.

Before I go any further, I need to say a few words about recruiting. While fresh players are the lifeblood of any successful college program, some of the so-called experts place way too much emphasis on getting the greatest number of highly-ranked recruits. They tend to just look at the (somewhat arbitrary) "star" ranking system, and they issue these proclamations about how this school or that school has the #1 or #2 recruiting class, as if it were some mathematical formula. If only it were that easy! There are a lot more factors than the number of recruits and how many "stars" they've been assigned. As we saw this season, team chemistry can help turn a collection of walk-ons and 2- and 3-star recruits into a team that can beat a team packed with 5-star recruits. In the case of Beilein's system, he is looking for a certain kind of player, so he might be chasing recruits that only get 2 or 3 stars. The experts look at all the 5-star recruits going elsewhere and announce that Beilein is getting out-recruited. Of course, half of those 5-star recruits end up leaving for the NBA after 1 or 2 seasons, but they get a lot of press while they're in college. They may not help their programs in the long run, but they're a wonderful short-term solution.

Coach Beilein is looking for a certain kind of player who will fit in with the rest of team, and stay at Michigan for all 4 years. He's looking for players who are quick and versatile, and who can play anywhere on the floor. Everyone on the floor needs to be able to play point guard. Everyone needs to be able to run the floor, flat out, for 40 minutes. Everyone needs to be able to shoot 3-pointers, get rebounds, and play multiple styles of defense. Those players might not be 5-star recruits, but they're more valuable to the team than any "one year wonder". Beilein knows what kind of players he wants on his team, and he gets them. Don't worry about how many stars they get, or who else was chasing them.

Here's a quick look at the incoming freshman class:

[Ben Cronin](#)

7'0", 235 pounds, C
Syracuse, NY

Cronin was a freshman this season, but [he needed hip surgery](#), so he was granted a medical redshirt year, and he'll have freshman eligibility next season. We got to see a little of him in the first few games, before his surgery, and he looked pretty good out there. He was a

little timid, and it was obvious that he didn't want to "bang" in there, but that could have been due to his injured hip. We'll have to wait and see how he does next season, when he's healthy.

Blake McLimans

6'10", 210 pounds, Power Forward

Hamburg, NY

Here's one of those quick, versatile players who can play on the perimeter, and still bang underneath. McLimans needs to add about 25 pounds of muscle, and I'm sure he will in Michigan's conditioning program.

Jordan Morgan

6'9", 240 pounds, Power Forward/Center

Detroit, MI

Morgan brings more height and bulk underneath, but he's still nimble and versatile.

Darius Morris

6'3", 175 pounds, Point Guard

Los Angeles, CA

You can never have too many true point guards. Morris is quick, with good ballhandling skills, and a good outside shot. He also needs to add a few pounds of muscle, but that shouldn't be a problem.

Matt Vogrich

6'4", 185 pounds, Shooting Guard

Lake Forest, IL

You can never have enough pure shooters, especially in Beilein's 3-point-heavy offense. Vogrich is also a good defender and rebounder.

As you can see, there is reason to be optimistic. Be sure to check back in November, when I start writing columns for next season. Until then...

Go Blue!