

Nothing But 'Net – Week #02 (10/26/2009) – Season Preview, Part 1: The Players

Season Preview

Since there are still almost two weeks until the first (exhibition) game of the season (Friday 11/06/2009) for the 2009-2010 University of Michigan men's basketball team, this season's preview is broken up into two parts: the players and the schedule. This week, we'll look at the players: players lost from last season's team, returning players, and newcomers. Next Monday, we'll look at the schedule.

So far, I've gotten to see Michigan twice this season: "Michigan Madness" on Friday 10/16/2009, and the open practice on Saturday 10/24/2009. It wasn't enough of a look to get a really good feel for the newcomers, but I did get some first impressions.

Players Lost

The Wolverines lost four players from last season's roster: three seniors who graduated, and one sophomore who switched sports:

- [C.J. Lee](#) – C.J. was one of the three graduating seniors. He did a nice job last season, and contributed to the team's success. He was quick, and made good decisions. He will be missed.
- [David Merritt](#) – David was another of the graduating seniors. He also did a good job last season. He was even quicker than C.J. Lee, and he also made good decisions on the court. He will also be missed.
- [Jevohn Shepherd](#) – Jevohn was the third of the three graduating seniors. He didn't contribute as much as Lee and Merritt, but he did have his memorable moments.
- [Kelvin Grady](#) – Kelvin switched sports to play slot receiver on the football team. He had an up-and-down season last year, but he did bring energy and quickness to the lineup when he was in. He will be missed.

While none of the departing players were "stars", you'll notice that three of the four were quick point guards. As we shall see below, that is Michigan's weakness this season.

Returning Players

Michigan returns a very large and solid core of returning players from a fairly successful season. Just about everyone is back, and they're all a year older and a year wiser. You could see everyone on the team really start to "get it" last season. The Beilein System, both offensively and defensively, is fairly complicated, and it takes a while to get comfortable with it. This batch of returning players all "got it" last season, and they're ready to hit the ground running this season.

Here they are, grouped by eligibility:

Freshmen

[Ben Cronin](#) (#35)

Height: 7' 0"

Weight: 265

Position: Center

Comments: "Big Ben" played in two games last season, before a nagging hip injury forced him to take a medical redshirt year so he could get it operated on. He's back this season, and he looks OK out there, but still a little gimpy. We'll have to see how his hip holds up to the pounding of a Big Ten schedule. He's tall, and he's got a very nice 3-point shot, but he runs and dribbles like a 7-footer.

[Corey Person](#) (#23)

Height: 6' 4"

Weight: 200

Position: Guard

Comments: Corey was a walk-on freshman last season, and he chose to redshirt, so he never got into any games. He has 4 years of eligibility remaining. Watching him play in "Michigan Madness" and the open practice, he looked smooth and confident out there. I don't expect him to play much this year, but I'm sure he'll be an important contributor in practice.

Sophomores

[Stu Douglass](#) (#1)

Height: 6' 3"

Weight: 185 pounds

Position: Guard

Comments: Stu had his shining moments last season, and he proved that he can really shoot the 3-ball. He's pretty good in transition, and he's a decent ballhandler. He plays good, solid defense, but he needs to work on his passing and rebounding.

[Laval Lucas-Perry](#) (#31)

Height: 6' 3"

Weight: 185 pounds

Position: Guard

Comments: LLP transferred from Arizona in December 2007, so he didn't get to start playing until December 2008. His first game (vs. Oakland) was very impressive, and he had a couple more big games, but his effectiveness really fell off as the season progressed. He needs to get back to the energy level he displayed in his very first game as a Wolverine. We know that he can shoot 3-pointers really well, he just needs to start doing it again. LLP is the other best candidate, along with Darius Morris (see below) to play point guard.

[Zack Novak](#) (#0)

Height: 6' 5"

Weight: 210 pounds

Position: Guard

Comments: What can I say about a player like Zack? He was awesome last season, as a true freshman. He did everything we wanted him to do, and more. He's listed as a guard, but he ended up playing small forward many times, and he did a great job. He's a ferocious rebounder, and a rock-solid defender. He's kind of a streaky shooter, but when he's "on", he's deadly from 3-point range.

[Eric Puls](#) (#30)

Height: 6' 10"

Weight: 210

Position: Center

Comments: Eric started as a "preferred walk-on", but he is now on scholarship. He elected to redshirt his freshman year, and he played a little last season, so he has sophomore

eligibility. He mostly played in "garbage time", but he did well when he was in. He played in 11 games, and made his first three 3-point shots, before missing #4. We'll see if he gets more playing time this season.

Juniors

[Manny Harris](#) (#3)

Height: 6' 5"

Weight: 185

Position: Guard

Comments: Manny (and DeShawn Sims, below) were the heart and soul of Michigan's team last season. Manny is an explosive player who can take over the game. When he's "on", he's almost impossible to guard, one-on-one. If you cover him too tight, he has an explosive first step to blow by you for the dunk. If you back off him, he can nail the 3-ball. He's quick, he's a good shooter, he's tall (for a guard) so he can rebound, and he's a good defender. He's been Michigan's most valuable player the last 2 seasons, and he's expected to carry Michigan again this season. Unfortunately, he's good enough that this is almost certainly his last season in college.

[Anthony Wright](#) (#12)

Height: 6' 6"

Weight: 235

Position: Forward

Comments: Anthony redshirted his first year in the program, and he has junior eligibility. He's a big, powerful guy, with a great touch from 3-point range. He didn't play as much as expected last season (25 games, 11.2 minutes/game), but he'll get a fresh start this season.

Seniors

[Zack Gibson](#) (#32)

Height: 6' 10"

Weight: 220

Position: Forward

Comments: Zack is a transfer from Rutgers, where he didn't play much during his freshman year. He played pretty well his last 2 seasons at Michigan, and he has senior eligibility this season. He's got a nice 3-point shot, and he plays good defense when he remembers to move his feet. He's a good solid player who can contribute important minutes this season.

[DeShawn Sims](#) (#34)

Height: 6' 8"

Weight: 235

Position: Forward

Comments: DeShawn (along with Manny Harris, above) is the co-MVP on this team. He's tall and powerful, and he's a great scorer. He's had some great games in his career, and he should help Michigan continue to improve this season.

Newcomers

There are six newcomers on the team this season, including five scholarship freshmen and one "preferred walk-on" freshman. Here they are:

[Eso Akunne](#) (#5)

Height: 6' 4"

Weight: 220

Position: Guard

Comments: Eso is a local (Ann Arbor) player, and he started out as a "preferred walk-on", but he was recently [given a scholarship](#). So far, he's looked pretty comfortable out there. He's pretty fast, and pretty smooth. I don't have a good feel yet for his actual skills. Hopefully, we'll get to see him during the non-conference schedule, so we know what he's capable of.

[Josh Bartelstein](#) (#20)

Height: 6' 3"

Weight: 190

Position: Guard

Comments: Josh is a "preferred walk-on" this season. As we have seen, Coach Beilein is developing an impressive walk-on program at Michigan, with a history of developing preferred walk-ons into productive scholarship players. That's certainly possible for Josh, who has all the tools to be a Division-1 player.

[Blake McLimans](#) (#22)

Height: 6' 10"

Weight: 220

Position: Forward

Comments: Michigan needed more height last season, and they got it this season, including Blake McLimans. He's tall, but he's not too bulky, so he's still quick up and down the court. He can shoot well from outside, and he can take the ball to the hole. I'm really excited about Blake, and I hope he lives up to his promise.

[Jordan Morgan](#) (#52)

Height: 6' 8"

Weight: 240

Position: Forward

Comments: Michigan also needed more muscle inside last season, and they got that as well, including Jordan Morgan. Unfortunately, Jordan hurt his left knee, and had surgery in July. It isn't clear yet whether he'll just miss the first few weeks of the season or take a redshirt year. He looked pretty good shooting on the sidelines of the open practice.

[Darius Morris](#) (#4)

Height: 6' 4"

Weight: 180

Position: Guard

Comments: Darius is the key newcomer this season, because he is the best candidate for the starting point guard position. No pressure for an incoming true freshman, right? So far, he's looked pretty good in the Michigan Madness and open practice scrimmages, but he obviously has a long learning curve to climb. He seems to see the court well, and distribute the ball effectively, but he needs to work on his defense and outside shooting a little.

[Matt Vogrich](#) (#13)

Height: 6' 4"

Weight: 180

Position: Guard

Comments: Matt is the other newcomer that I'm really excited about. The advance word is that he's one of the all-time best outside shooters that Michigan has ever recruited. If he

can adapt to the speed of the college game, and do all the other things he needs to do (mostly ballhandling and defense), he could be quite an addition to the team. He didn't shoot the ball particularly well in the open practice and Michigan Madness, but it's still the first 2 weeks of practice. We'll see how he does in the real games.

Analysis

Coach [John Beilein](#) has got a LOT of talent to work with this season, and he'll be able to come up with many different combinations, depending on the circumstances. He's got lots of height (one 7-footer and three 6' 10" players), lots of speed (pretty much everyone under 6' 10"), and lots of shooters (most of the team).

That said, if he has his way, Beilein would really prefer to have a set and stable starting lineup that he uses every game. Even though he substitutes early and often, he likes to start with a predictable lineup. Here's my guess at the initial starting lineup for the first few games of the season:

- Center: Ben Cronin (backed up by Eric Puls). There are many times when Michigan plays with 3 guards and 2 forwards, so Beilein might not start anyone at center.
- Forwards: DeShawn Sims and Zack Novak (backed up by Anthony Wright, Zack Gibson, Blake McLimans, and maybe Jordan Morgan). Sure, Novak is listed as a guard, but he could still start in the small forward slot.
- Guards: Manny Harris and Darius Morris (backed up by the rest of the team). It's tough to not start Stu Douglass, so we might see 3 guards, 2 forwards, and no center.

As you can see, there are lots of combinations possible, and I'm sure that Beilein will try them all in the early games. Based on what he sees, and any injuries (let's hope not), the starting lineup will evolve as the season progresses.

The Upcoming Week

It's still almost two weeks until the first (exhibition) game, but the season preview continues next week, when we look at the schedule. See you then.

Go Blue!