

Nothing But 'Net – Week #06 – 12/06/2010 – How Michigan Basketball Can Win The Rest Of Their Games And The National Championship

OK, you're wondering, how CAN Michigan's basketball team win the rest of their games and the National Championship? It's simple: they just need to play every game like they did the first half against Clemson on Tuesday. Here's a more ominous question: how can they lose every game remaining on their schedule? That's also simple: they just need to play like they did for much of the game vs. Harvard on Saturday. It was that kind of week: a great half and a good half against Clemson, and a bad half and a decent half against Harvard. For the record, Michigan won both games ([69-61 at Clemson](#), [65-62 vs. Harvard](#)), so their record is now 5-2. And, I guess they did things in the right order, because if they had played at Clemson like they did vs. Harvard, they would have lost big time, but still.

The Clemson game was actually pretty impressive. After playing a good game in [a close loss to then-#9 Syracuse](#) over Thanksgiving break in the [2010 Legends Classic](#), it looked like Michigan was starting to improve. Then came the disastrous 2nd half vs. [UTEP in the consolation game of the Legends Classic](#), which showed how poorly Michigan is capable of playing. Things didn't look good for their first true road game (the Legends Classic games were at a neutral site: Atlantic City, NJ), at Clemson, as part of the [ACC/Big Ten Challenge](#). Clemson plays in a small (7200 seat) arena, and it was packed and loud. Fortunately, the Wolverines took control of the game early, which took the crowd out of it a little bit. They built a nice 12-point lead (19-7) in the first 7:00, built it as high as 20 points (36-16) with 3:35 to go in the 1st half, and had a 16-point lead (40-24) at halftime. They let the lead slip down to 10 (42-32) in the first 4 minutes of the 2nd half, but they kept it around there for the next 10 minutes, then built it back up to 18 points (59-41) with 5:00 left in the game. They just traded points for time the rest of the way, and won by 8.

The impressive part was that Michigan controlled the tempo, and kept scoring throughout the game. If they can stay away from the 10+ minute scoreless stretches, like they had to start the 2nd half vs. UTEP, they can hang in there with any team on their schedule.

Then came the Harvard game. Harvard is coached by our old buddy [Tommy Amaker](#), and Michigan lost to Harvard the last time they played them, back in 2007, so this was an important game psychologically. Would UM play well, like they did vs. Syracuse and Clemson, or poorly, like they did vs. UTEP? Unfortunately, it was more like UTEP than Clemson. Michigan looked to be cruising to an easy win in the early going, getting up 17-10, then the roof fell in. Harvard went on a 17-3 run, and Michigan went from up 7 to down 7, 27-20. It was still a 7-point deficit at halftime (32-25), and Harvard pushed their lead up to 12 points (37-25) in the first 2 minutes of the 2nd half. Things were not looking good, but Michigan went on a 19-1 run to regain the lead, 44-38. Harvard answered with an 8-0 run of their own, to go back up 46-44. Time for one more run: 7-0 by UM, to get the lead for good. It got close (51-50 with 4:30 to go), but Michigan managed to hold the lead the rest of the way, and win, barely.

Remember in the Season Preview article when I said that UM would be unpredictable this season? See above for some good examples.

As a team, Michigan shot pretty well overall in both games (45% and 47%). Their 3-point shooting was OK vs. Clemson (30%), and better vs. Harvard (38%). They lost the rebounding battle to Clemson (38-35), but they out-rebounded Harvard (36-30). In both games they had more turnovers than assists, which is unusual.

Here are the complete stats for the [Clemson](#) and [Harvard](#) games.

Individually, we're starting to see the effect of not having 2 "go to" players like Manny Harris and DeShawn Sims on the team. There has been a different high scorer in 5 of the 7 games so far. Here's the list of who has hit double figures in each game:

- South Carolina Upstate: [Tim Hardaway, Jr.](#) (19), [Darius Morris](#) (17)

- Bowling Green: [Evan Smotrycz](#) (14), [Jordan Morgan](#) (12)
- Gardner-Webb: Morris (21), Morgan (20), Hardaway (15), [Stu Douglass](#) (10)
- Syracuse: Morgan (11), Douglass (11)
- UTEP: Morris (20), [Zack Novak](#) (10)
- Clemson: Smotrycz (18), Hardaway (15), Morris (13)
- Harvard: Douglass (19), Morris (13), Novak (12)

As you can see, Smotrycz had a career game at Clemson, and Douglass was the hero in the Harvard game. Just to prove that he's a freshman, Smotrycz followed up his big game against Clemson with an 0-5 performance (0 points) vs. Harvard.

Even though he's only been the high scorer twice, Morris has hit double figures in 5 of the 7 games, and he leads the team in scoring so far. Hardaway, Morgan, and Douglass have each hit double figures 3 times so far.

Oh yeah, the Big Ten won the ACC/Big Ten Challenge again this year (6-5), for the 2nd time in a row.

It's time to introduce a new feature: the Nothing But 'Net Expectation-O-Meter (NBNEOM). This handy meter has 4 settings:

- Exceeds Expectations
- Meets Expectations
- Doesn't Meet Expectations
- Total Doom

Fans have different expectations for every team/player/season/game, and how we feel about a team largely has to do with how well they meet expectations. With so many new players on this season's Michigan team, it's hard to set concrete non-conference expectations, but there are a few obvious ones:

- Beat (most of) the Little Guys: South Carolina Upstate, Bowling Green, Gardner-Webb, Harvard, Concordia, North Carolina Central, Oakland, and Bryant.
- Win a couple Toss Up games: UTEP, Clemson, Utah.
- Don't get trounced by The Big Boys: Syracuse, Kansas.
- Show steady improvement as a team and individually.

So far, the NBNEOM is set firmly at "Meets Expectations".

Michigan has a busy December, with 7 games, all at home. Harvard was the first one, and they have 2 more this week: Monday at 7:30 vs. [Concordia](#) and Friday at 6:30 vs. [Utah](#). Michigan should beat Concordia like a Grand Canyon mule, but the Utah game could be a tough one. Utah (5-2) beat Michigan in Provo last year, and they have exactly the kind of team that Michigan will have problems with. They have two players who are 7 feet tall or more (one is 7'3", the other is 7'0"), and a third who is 6'10". They are all taller than Michigan's starting center (Morgan). The two seven-footers have 29 blocks between them this season. Yikes!

Go Blue!