

Nothing But 'Net – Week #07 – 12/13/2010 – Growing Up Before Our Eyes

If you have watched the Michigan basketball team all nine games this season, you should be able to see the improvement from the first game to the ninth. This is a very young team, but they're growing up before our eyes. They played two games this week, both at home. They played Concordia on Monday and Utah on Friday, and they won both of them. They looked just OK for most of the game against Concordia, then they woke up and finished strong. They looked very good for the whole game vs. Utah. [They beat Concordia 86-65](#), and [they beat Utah 75-64](#). These two wins raise Michigan's record to 7-2. Michigan has now won 4 games in a row.

The Concordia game was a "can't win" game. It would have been nice if UM had started strong, opened up a big lead, and toyed with Concordia for the whole 2nd half, with lots of playing time for the subs and scrubs, but that didn't happen. Concordia had nothing to lose, and they played way over their heads. They kept the game close for the first 30 minutes, but couldn't keep it up for the last 10 minutes. Concordia had been playing way over their average, and Michigan had been playing way below their average, and when both teams started heading towards their true averages, the UM lead ballooned. Michigan shot better, rebounded better, and won all the other statistical categories.

The Utah game, on the other hand, was a true "toss up". With their distinct height advantage, Utah could have dominated the paint, and forced UM into a jump-shooting contest. However, Michigan didn't concede anything inside, and kept the game balanced. They opened up a nice lead early in the game, built it up to 17 points (39-22) at halftime, and managed the tempo in the 2nd half nicely to win comfortably. It was pretty impressive how they shut down Utah's 7'3" backup center, holding him to 0 points, 1 rebound, 0 blocked shots, 2 fouls, and 2 turnovers, in 17 minutes of "action". Their starting center, who's "only" 7'0", did a little better, with 8 points, 4 rebounds, and 2 blocked shots. Still, [Jordan Morgan](#) outscored them both with 11 points, and had 4 rebounds as well. As a team, Michigan shot slightly better than Utah from the floor, but really helped themselves from the free-throw line (13-for-16).

All the stats for the [Concordia](#) and [Utah](#) games are here.

Remember at the beginning of the season when everyone was asking "where is Michigan's scoring going to come from?" We're starting to see the answer: everyone. In both games this week, Michigan had 4 players in double figures. In the Concordia game, it was Morgan (23 points), [Darius Morris](#) (19), [Stu Douglass](#) (13), and [Zack Novak](#) (12). In the Utah game, it was Morris (19, again), [Tim Hardaway, Jr.](#) (17), Morgan (11), and Novak (11). There were also a few double-doubles this week: Novak had a career-high 14 rebounds to go with his 12 points in the Concordia game, and Morris had 12 and 10 assists in the two games to give him two double-doubles. It's very impressive that he scored 19 points in each game and still had double-figures in assists. He is clearly the most improved player on Michigan's team, and one of the most improved players in the Big Ten and nationally. He's great at bringing the ball upcourt against pressure, and driving the lane with awesome finishing moves. His outside shot is greatly improved over last season, but it's still not the best part of his game.

I don't want to pick on [Evan Smotrycz](#), because I think he's going to be a great player at Michigan and a real fan favorite, but I have to point out that since his great game vs. Clemson (18 points), he has scored 0 (Harvard), 2 (Concordia), and 0 (Utah) points. He needs to get back on track. I know he'll shake it off and get back to playing his "A" game, I just hope that it's sooner rather than later.

I also need to mention that [Matt Vogrich](#) is starting to make the most of his minutes off the bench (18 and 19 minutes, respectively) by scoring more (7 and 8 points, respectively).

So, what's up with the recently-introduced Nothing But 'Net Expectation-O-Meter (NBNEOM) this week? Do we have a setting between "Meets Expectations" and "Exceeds Expectations"? We don't? We should. That's where it's pointing. The first 30 minutes of the Concordia game

were a little depressing, but the last 10 minutes met expectations, and the whole Utah game exceeded expectations.

The season rolls on, and Michigan has two more home games this week: Tuesday at 7:00 vs. [North Carolina Central](#), and Saturday at noon vs. [Oakland](#). Remember last week when I called North Carolina Central and Oakland "the Little Guys"? Well, I might have been only half right. I expect Michigan to beat NCC handily, but Oakland could be a lot tougher than I thought just a week ago. Oakland has already played three Big Ten teams this season, and although they've lost all three games, they've been right in there in all three of them. They led (#14) Purdue for a good chunk of the 1st half, and were within a bucket with 13:30 left in the game, before Purdue pulled away for a 82-67 win. They led (#16) Illinois at halftime and for the first 5:00 of the 2nd half, before Illinois pulled away for a 74-63 win. But, the most impressive performance was on Saturday, when they hung with (#7) Michigan State for the whole game, and ended up losing 77-76. Oakland pulled within 3 points with 6 seconds left, but couldn't quite catch State. Still, they've shown that they can hang in there with Top-25 Big Ten schools on the road, so they won't be at all intimidated by playing unranked Michigan in Crisler Arena. I'm resetting the Expectation-O-Meter for this one from "should win" to "toss up".

Go Blue!