

Nothing But 'Net – Week #11 – 01/17/2011 – Remember When This Season Looked Promising?

There's still a lot of basketball left to play for the Michigan men's basketball team, but if they don't play a lot better than they did Saturday at Indiana, it's going to be a long, sad season. They played two games last week, and they lost both of them, but one of them wasn't a surprise. [On Tuesday, they played very tough against \(#2\) Ohio State in Crisler Arena,, and they lost 68-64.](#) That was the third of their three games in a row where they didn't stand much chance, the other two being at Wisconsin, and home vs. (#3) Kansas. Well, they lost all three, but they played very well against the ranked teams. Then came the game at Indiana. What a disaster! They got down early, and couldn't do a thing to get back into the game. [They ended up losing 80-61.](#) The two losses drop Michigan's record to 11-7 (1-4 in the Big Ten). They have now lost 4 games in a row. It's hard to remember that 3 weeks ago, Michigan was 10-2, and the season looked very promising.

The OSU game was very encouraging. Michigan controlled the tempo for most of the game, and managed to slow down (but not stop) OSU's star freshman center, [Jared Sullinger](#). If they could have done something (anything!) to stop Ohio State's 12-0 run in the 2nd half, they would have been in position to win the game at the end, instead of just trying desperately to tie it up.

After UM had played so well in back-to-back games against Top-3 teams, they should have been able to dominate a weak IU team. Sure, it's tough to win on the road, but UM made IU look like the LA Lakers. It was the most discouraging game since the UTEP game back in November.

Looking at the stats for the [OSU game](#), they were pretty much even except for one key category: free throws. OSU shot 17-for-25, while UM shot 5-for-7. That's 12 extra points. Sure, OSU had a couple more rebounds (26-23), and a couple less turnovers (12-10), but the real difference was at the free throw line.

In the [Indiana game](#), the problem was rebounding. IU had more than twice as many rebounds as UM: 37-18. That's embarrassing. Shooting percentage was also a problem: IU shot 29-43 (67.4%), while UM shot 20-55 (36.4%). That's how you get blown out by almost 20 points by one of the worst teams in the Big Ten.

Individually, there were several players with good stats. Michigan had 4 players in double figures in both games: [Darius Morris](#) (18 points), [Zack Novak](#) (16), [Evan Smotrycz](#) (14), and [Tim Hardaway, Jr.](#) (11) in the OSU game, and Morris (22), Hardaway (10), Novak (10), and [Jordan Morgan](#) (10) in the IU game. That's the good news. The bad news was Morgan with 0 points against Ohio State, Smotrycz with 3 points against Indiana, 5 bench points vs. OSU, and 6 bench points vs. IU.

So, is this season in the toilet? Not yet, but it's teetering on the rim. Michigan sure doesn't look like an NCAA Tournament team, so we should be thinking more in terms of the NIT, but it's hard to see them staying above 0.500 at this point. At 11-7, with 13 games left in the regular season, they would need to go 5-8, then 1-1 in the Big Ten Tournament to stay above 0.500. It's hard to see 5 more wins, the way they've been playing. They should beat Iowa at least once, maybe twice, and maybe Indiana in Crisler, but the rest of the games look pretty bleak. Even Penn State, who Michigan beat in Crisler, is looking much better, and so is Northwestern.

As you can imagine, the Nothing But 'Net Expectation-O-Meter (NBNEOM) will have to be reset down to "Not Meeting Expectations".

The Big Ten season grinds on. This week, Michigan plays at Northwestern on Tuesday (01/18, 9:00 EST), then at home vs. Minnesota on Saturday (01/22, 7:00). Both of these teams are improved over last season, and both games will be a tough test for Michigan. A win in either game would be a major boost.

Go Blue!