

Nothing But 'Net – Week #12 – 01/24/2011 – Voyage To The Bottom Of The League

There's no way to sugarcoat this: the Michigan men's basketball team is terrible this season. After two more losses this week (at Northwestern and home vs. Minnesota), they're tied for last place in the standings. Sure, they had a great (non-conference) start, at 10-2, and sure, they've gotten close to beating several highly-ranked teams ([Syracuse](#), [Kansas](#), and [Ohio State](#)), but the point is that this isn't horseshoes or hand grenades; close doesn't count. If they can play well enough to take Kansas to overtime, they should be able to beat Indiana (2 weeks ago) and Northwestern, even on the road. Instead, they played terribly in both those games, and lost badly.

[The game at Northwestern on Tuesday was the latest fiasco](#). They got behind early, panicked, and never got back in it. They lost 74-60. Then, [on Saturday, they played \(#15\) Minnesota in Crisler](#). Even though they lost, they looked a little better. They led for the entire 1st half, until the last 30 seconds, when Minnesota took their first lead, 31-29. After halftime, they couldn't buy a basket (for the first 7 minutes) or even a point (for the first 5 minutes), while Minnesota extended their lead. Michigan fought back, and actually got the lead back, once, by one point (41-40), for 46 seconds. Once Minnesota got the lead back, Michigan panicked (again), and the game was over. Michigan lost 69-64. It wasn't as close as the final score would indicate. Minnesota just traded points for time to get the win.

I keep talking about panicking, and here's what I mean: when Michigan is controlling the tempo, they can keep the game close, and everything is fine. Then their opponent will start a small 5- or 7-point run, and UM just panics. Instead of controlling the tempo and playing for a good shot, they just start throwing up the first shot they can see. If they make them, the game continues to be competitive, but if they miss them, which is often the case, the game starts getting away from them. Sometimes, they manage to stop panicking, and even manage to creep back into the game, but it usually doesn't work out. I can't think of a single game this season where they've panicked and recovered to win. Maybe the Penn State game.

So, now Michigan is 11-9 (1-6 in the Big Ten), with a 6-game losing streak, and a record of 1-7 since the Big Ten season started. They still need 5 more wins to finish above 0.500 and be eligible for the NIT, and it's hard to see where those 5 wins are going to come from. Iowa, probably twice, maybe Indiana at home, and that's about it.

The stats are depressing, but here goes. First, [Northwestern](#): Michigan shot poorly (23-for-58 = 39.7%), and they shot 3-pointers poorly (6-for-21 = 28.6%). That was enough to cost them the game right there. They did (barely) out-rebound Northwestern (38-35), and they did have more assists (8) than turnovers (7), but that was the only good news. They shot a little better (23-for-53 = 43.4%) against [Minnesota](#), and their 3-point shooting was better as well (12-for-35 = 34.3%), but they got hammered on the boards (38-13). That is not a typo; Minnesota had almost 3 times as many rebounds as Michigan. If you don't think that 25 extra possessions are big in a 5-point game, you haven't watched much basketball. Of course, Minnesota took advantage of those extra possessions by shooting well: 26-for-41 = 63.4%, a full 20% better than Michigan. It was an ugly game.

Individually, only [Darius Morris](#) hit double figures in both games (16 and 11), but he didn't start scoring in the Minnesota game until it was too late. When he has a bad

game, Michigan has a bad game. The other players to hit double figures this week were [Stu Douglass](#) (17 points vs. Northwestern), and [Tim Hardaway, Jr.](#) (20 vs. Minnesota) and [Zack Novak](#) (11 vs. Minnesota). [Evan Smotrycz](#) had a rough week (0 and 5 points), especially vs. Minnesota. He scored Michigan's first 5 points, then he went stone cold. He ended up shooting 2-for-9 (1-for-7 from 3-point range). [Jordan Morgan](#) also had a rough week (5 and 8 points). Those 8 points against Minnesota look pretty good, but he scored them all once Minnesota had the game in hand, when they were trading points for time.

Last week I asked if this season was in the toilet, and I said that it was teetering on the rim. Well, now it's in the toilet, but it's not beyond saving. The chances of Michigan finishing in the top half of the Big Ten standings are vanishingly small, as are their chances of making the Big Dance. They still stand a chance of knocking off some ranked teams, and of getting to the NIT, but they have to turn things around soon.

No big surprise here: the Nothing But 'Net Expectation-O-Meter (NBNEOM) is firmly set at "Not Meeting Expectations".

The beat goes on. This week, Michigan plays at Michigan State on Thursday (01/27, 7:00), then at home vs. Iowa on Sunday (01/30, 4:00). Three weeks ago, I might have gone out on a limb and said that UM stood a chance at MSU, but not any more. Even though State is having a down year (for them), they'll be sky-high to beat up on Michigan. The Iowa game is a little more promising. If Michigan can't beat Iowa in Crisler, they might not win another game this season.

Go Blue!