

Nothing But 'Net – Week #13 – 01/31/2011 – We're Not Dead Yet!

Cue up the [Monty Python](#)! The Michigan men's basketball team isn't dead yet. They're not exactly stunning the college basketball world, but they did have a very good week, [beating Michigan State in East Lansing on Thursday \(61-57\)](#) and [Iowa in Crisler Arena on Sunday \(87-73\)](#). Just like that, they went from 1-6 in the Big Ten to 3-6 (13-9 overall). They also climbed out of last place, into 8th place. It was a very good week.

Michigan still has some work to do to make it to the NIT, but it looks a lot more promising than it did a week ago. They have 9 games left, and they need to win 3 of them to stay above .500.

There is nothing I like better than beating Michigan State in basketball, and Michigan doesn't do it often enough. Michigan has beaten MSU in Ann Arbor a few times (2003, 2006, and 2007) recently, but the last time they beat the Farmers in East Lansing was 1997, so this was a Very Big Deal™. After playing some uninspired ball the last few games, it was great to see Michigan play a good, solid game vs. MSU. The big thing was, they never panicked. They fell behind early (6-0 and 16-11), but they hung in there, and took the lead for good with 11 minutes left in the 1st half, 17-16. MSU got close to tying/leading a couple times, but Michigan fought off every MSU rally. UM led by 6 at halftime (33-27), and came out strong to start the 2nd half, with an 8-0 run in the first 4 minutes. That pushed the lead up to 14 (41-27). State got as close as 6 (48-42) with 10 minutes left, but UM pushed the lead back up to 13 (55-42) with another 7-0 run. From there, MSU steadily chipped away at the lead, and had it down to just 2 points (57-55) with 22 seconds left. Time for some heroics by [Stu Douglass](#): he hit a big 3-pointer, and that was the game. It was an impressive victory.

Just an aside: if you ever get the opportunity to listen to a Michigan State radio broadcast, do yourself a favor and skip it. I was driving across the state from Milan to Ludington on Thursday night, so I had to listen to the game on the radio instead of watching it on TV. Don't worry, I recorded it on my DVD recorder and watched it later, but I listened to it live on the radio. I had the misfortune of driving around Lansing for part of the 1st half, and driving between Lansing and Grand Rapids for the 2nd half, and the only radio stations I could find that carried the game were playing the MSU broadcast. Yuck. Besides being shameless "homers", the announcers were really weak at actually describing the game. They updated the score and time left very infrequently, and they only gave stats about the MSU players. My favorite moment was when [Colton Christian](#) hit his one and only shot as the shot clock ran out. The MSU announcers went on and on about how unfair it was that a player with such a lousy shooting percentage had hit such a difficult shot in such an important game. You would have thought Christian had committed a crime or something. Of course, my second favorite moment was when Douglass hit his big 3-pointer to ice the win: one of the announcers just said "dagger", and that was it. He later complained about how unfair it was that Douglass hit that shot, implying that he was lucky and that "it was the biggest shot of his life". Nice.

After the big, emotional victory over their archrivals, there was a real danger that Michigan would suffer a letdown vs. Iowa on Sunday. Iowa played well in the 1st half, especially early, and they led for most of the half. Michigan finally got the lead for good with 1:13 left in the 1st half, and led by 3 (35-32) at halftime. Once again, they played very well in the first 4 minutes of the 2nd half, extending the lead to 11

points (48-37). That's a 13-5 run. They got the lead up to 21 (69-48) with 9 minutes left, then weathered an Iowa rally that cut the lead to 8 points (77-69) with 3:19 left. Michigan pushed the lead back up to 15 points (84-69) with a 7-0 run, and that was the ball game. It was a game that Michigan should have won by at least 14 points, and they played pretty well, especially in the 2nd half.

Stats

The stats have been depressing lately, but not this week. Michigan shot well in both games (23-for-46 = 50% vs. [MSU](#), and 33-for-56 = 58.9% vs. [Iowa](#)), and they shot 3-pointers really well in both games (10-for-21 = 47.6% and 14-for-28 = 50%). When the 3-pointers are falling, the Beilein Offense is fun to watch. As a special bonus, Michigan won (Iowa) or tied (MSU) the rebounding battle: 29-29 vs. MSU and 29-26 vs. Iowa. The rest of the stats aren't important; it was Michigan's hot shooting that won both games.

Individually, there were several big performances, but one stands out: [Darius Morris](#) had a triple-double in the Iowa game, with 12 points, 11 assists, and 10 rebounds! It's only the 3rd triple-double in Michigan history; Manny Harris did it last season vs. Northern Michigan, and (my favorite Michigan player) Gary Grant did it back in 1987. It's another Very Big Deal™. Also impressive was the fact that all 5 starters hit double figures for Michigan in the Iowa game. Besides Morris, [Tim Hardaway, Jr.](#) (19 points), [Jordan Morgan](#) (17), [Evan Smotrycz](#) (14), and [Zack Novak](#) (13) all hit double figures. Speaking of Novak, he was the hero of the big MSU victory, with 19 points on 6-for-9 shooting, including 6-for-8 from 3-point range. Morris (17 points) and Hardaway (10) also hit double figures vs. MSU. Smotrycz (0 points) and Morgan (4 points) weren't a factor in the scoring against State, so it was great to see them return to form vs. Iowa.

Time to reset the Nothing But 'Net Expectation-O-Meter (NBNEOM) back to "Meeting Expectations". Let's just hope it can stay there for the rest of the season.

2nd Trimester Grades

Since Michigan is now about 2/3 of the way through their schedule, and exactly halfway through their Big Ten schedule, it's time to hand out 2nd trimester grades:

True Freshmen

[Colton Christian](#): C+

Not much has changed for Colton since the 1st trimester grades. He still hasn't been playing much (19 games, 5.3 minutes/game), and he still hasn't scored much (4 points) or shot well (2-for-11). He did have a big basket vs. MSU.

[Tim Hardaway, Jr.](#): B+

Tim is still the 2nd leading scorer on the team (11.8 pts/game). His shooting numbers are still good (36.2% and 31.3%), he's gotten even more rebounds (85), and he still has more assists (31) than turnovers (23).

[Jon Horford](#): B-

Jon has slipped a little since the Big Ten schedule started. His scoring average has dropped from 3.4 pts/game to 2.8, and his shooting percentage has slipped from 54.2% to 50%. Still, he's doing OK for a freshman, but he has lots of room for improvement.

[Evan Smotrycz](#): B+

Evan continues to be a little inconsistent out there, with more good games and bad games. His shooting percentages (40.3% and 38.8%) are about the same as earlier, and his rebounding total (54) is still kind of low for a player his size. He's been asked to play some center, when Jordan Morgan gets in foul trouble, and he's done OK filling in, but he's much better playing out on the wing, shooting 3-pointers.

Redshirt Freshmen

[Blake McLimans](#): C+

Blake continues to show tons of potential and flashes of promise, but we're still waiting for him to really deliver. He still doesn't seem comfortable out there.

[Jordan Morgan](#): A-

Jordan continues to be a very pleasant surprise out there. Even though he isn't as tall as many of the centers he's been asked to guard, he has used his strength and quickness to keep them in check. His numbers have slipped a little since the Big Ten season started, but he's still shooting a great percentage (60.7%).

Transfer Player (Sophomore)

[Jordan Dumars](#): Incomplete.

Jordan became eligible right around Christmas time, but he still hasn't played. He has a new knee injury, and it appears that he will sit out the rest of this season, and apply for a medical redshirt. He'll have 3 years of eligibility remaining next fall.

Sophomores

[Eso Akunne](#): C-

Eso still hasn't played much (12 games, 32 minutes), and he hasn't scored in the Big Ten, so he still only has 5 points on the season. He played a much bigger role last season, before he became academically ineligible, and he hasn't been able to get back to that level this season.

[Josh Bartelstein](#): Incomplete

Josh has only played in "mop up" action so far (10 games, 18 minutes), but he has finally scored: he hit a 3-pointer in the Purdue game.

[Darius Morris](#): A

Darius gets the only straight A, and he sure has earned it. He's still the leading scorer on the team (15.4 pts/game), the leader in assists (158), and the leader in steals (26). His shooting percentages have slipped a little (51.2% and 29.4%), but they're still pretty good. He's even pulled down 81 rebounds. He runs the offense well, has good court vision, and is excellent at bringing the ball upcourt against heavy pressure. He's the fastest player on the team, and he has amazing body control.

[Corey Person](#): Incomplete

Corey is another player who has only played in "garbage time" so far (4 games, 8 minutes), all in the non-conference season. He has scored 1 point.

[Matt Vogrich](#): C+

Matt has come off the bench in every game so far, and he's done OK, but not great. He still hasn't hit double figures yet, and he's had a few scoreless games, but he's shooting pretty well (40.9% and 38.3%) and getting a few rebounds (31). He needs to make more of the minutes he's been getting.

Juniors

[Stu Douglass](#): B

Stu continues to play well in his role as "6th man". His numbers have fallen off a bit since the Big Ten season started, but he's still doing pretty well. He has been a leader out there, and a steady force when he's in.

[Zack Novak](#): A-

Zack continues to be a great leader, and a true warrior out there. He has moved up to being the 3rd leading scorer (9.9 pts/game) on the team, and he is still the leading rebounder (133). As I said in his last "report card", all that is amazing when you consider that he is really a shooting guard who is occasionally asked to play small forward. He routinely guards players 4-6 inches taller than he is, and he shuts them down. But the one thing about Zack that doesn't necessarily show up on the stat sheet is his hustle. He never stops hustling out there, and he never gives up. He scraps and dives for loose balls, he chases down opposing players on breakaways, and he sets brutal picks. He is a fierce competitor, and the most valuable player on the team.

[Darrick Ervin II](#): Incomplete.

Darrick is another "mop up time" player (3 games, 3 minutes), all in the non-conference season. He hasn't taken a shot yet.

Overall, the grades didn't change much. No one went up, and only a couple players went down, but not by much.

Next Week

Every Big Ten team has at least one week where they play both games on the road, and this week is Michigan's turn. Just to make it even more challenging, the first of

the two road games is on Thursday (02/03, 7:00) at (#1) Ohio State. OSU is undefeated (22-0), but [Michigan played them to a standstill in Ann Arbor earlier this month \(01/12\) before losing, 68-64.](#) Still, it would be a major upset for Michigan to beat them on their home court. The other road game this week is also challenging, but not quite as bad as the trip to Columbus. On Sunday (02/06, noon), Michigan plays at Penn State. [Michigan beat PSU earlier this month \(01/02\) in Crisler, 76-69,](#) but since then Penn State has knocked off several Top-25 teams in State College: (#18) Michigan State on 01/08, 66-62, (#16) Illinois on 01/11, 57-55, and (#15) Wisconsin on 01/29, 56-52. They are really good at home, and it would be quite an achievement for Michigan to win there. So, it should be a fun week on the road in the Big Ten.

Go Blue!