

Nothing But 'Net – Week #15 – 02/14/2011 – Revenge Week

The Michigan men's basketball team got some revenge this week, beating two teams in Crisler that they had lost to (badly) on the road earlier this season. Two teams that they should have beaten on the road. Two teams that embarrassed them. Two teams that they owed. Revenge is sweet.

[On Wednesday, they beat Northwestern 75-66](#), then [on Saturday, they beat Indiana 73-69](#). The 2 wins raise Michigan's record to 16-10 (6-7 in the Big Ten).

Both games played out the same: Michigan slowly built a nice halftime lead, held or extended it in the 2nd half, then almost gave it all away in the closing minutes. In the Northwestern game, Michigan led by 15 (34-19) at halftime, and still led by 15 (67-52) with about 5:00 left. Just when it looked like they were going to coast home with an easy win, Northwestern went on a 14-0 run in 2 minutes and 40 seconds to cut the lead to 1 point, 67-66. Fortunately, Michigan went on an 8-0 run to finish the game. The IU game was very similar. Michigan led by 8 (32-24) at halftime, and extended the lead to 22 (66-44) with 5:26 left. Once again, it looked like they would coast home with an easy win. No one can lose a 22-point lead in 5:26, right? Well, Michigan showed that if you can't hit your free throws down the stretch, no lead is big enough. For the game, Michigan only shot 51.4% (19-for-37) from the free-throw line, but in the last 5:26, they did much worse: 7-for-18 (38.9%). They missed the front end of 2 of their 3 one-and-one attempts, and they had 5 turnovers (out of 12 total) in the last 5:26. All that helped IU go on a 12-0 run to cut the lead to 10 (66-56), and get as close as 3 (70-67), before UM managed to make just enough free throws to hang on for the win. It was nerve-wracking.

I know, a win is a win, and every win is big this time of year, but that kind of sloppy play at the end of a game can turn a comfortable win into a heartbreaking loss. Michigan was lucky to have big enough leads in both games that they got away with doing a poor job closing them out. It's going to be a lot harder in the last 5 games. Michigan will be lucky to have any sort of lead with 5 minutes to go in any of the remaining games, and if they play that poorly in "crunch time", they'll get blown out.

Time for the rest of the stats. Michigan shot pretty well in the [Northwestern](#) game: 27-for-52 (51.9%) overall, 6-for-15 (40%) from 3-point range, and 15-for-21 (71.4%) from the free-throw line. They out-rebounded NU handily (38-25), and the rest of the stats were about even. They won the game at the free-throw line, since they made more free throws (15) than NU shot (7). The shooting was even better in the [Indiana](#) game, except for free-throw shooting: 23-for-43 (53.5%), 8-for-15 (53.3%), and 19-for-37 (51.4%). Michigan did outscore IU at the free-throw line (19-13), but they missed too many in crunch time. They also got out-rebounded 34-28. The rest of the stats were about even.

Individually, several players had big games this week. Two players ([Tim Hardaway, Jr.](#) and [Darius Morris](#)) hit double figures in both games. Hardaway had 17 points vs. Northwestern (and 10 rebounds, for a double-double), and 26 points in the IU game. Morris had 11 and 15. Three other players hit double figures in one game: [Jordan Morgan](#) had 27 points vs. Northwestern, and [Stu Douglass](#) (13) and [Zack Novak](#) (10) hit double figures in the IU game. Unlike last season, Michigan has had good balanced scoring in most of their games, which really helps. It keeps the opposing defenses from double-teaming the leading scorer, since Michigan has so many scoring options.

Even though Michigan won 2 games, the Nothing But 'Net Expectation-O-Meter (NBNEOM) stays right where it was, pointing firmly at "Meeting Expectations". These were 2 games that Michigan was expected to win, they just meant a little more due to the revenge factor.

With an overall record of 16-10, Michigan is inching closer to an NIT bid. With 5 games left in the regular season, and at least one game in the Big Ten Tournament, the worst they can do at this point is 16-16, which would make them eligible for an NIT bid. If they can manage to get up to 19 wins, they might get into the Big Dance. Of their remaining regular season games, none of them is easy, and a couple will be very challenging:

02/16 (Wed) at Illinois (8:30 p.m.)
02/19 (Sat) at Iowa (4:30 p.m.)
02/23 (Wed) vs. Wisconsin (6:30 p.m.)
02/26 (Sat) at Minnesota (4:30 p.m.)
03/05 (Sat) vs. Michigan State (2:00 p.m.)

It's tough to win on the road in the Big Ten, and 3 of Michigan's last 5 games are on the road. Michigan has always had trouble winning at Illinois, and Minnesota is very good at home this season. Even lowly Iowa has been tough at home. Just last week, they beat Michigan State by 20 (72-52) in Iowa City. The remaining 2 home games aren't much easier. Wisconsin is in 2nd place in the league, and they just beat the #1 team in the nation, previously-undefeated Ohio State. Since Michigan beat MSU in East Lansing earlier this season, the Spartans will be looking for some revenge of their own. In short, Michigan will be fortunate to win even one of the last 5 games.

As you can see in the mini-schedule above, Michigan plays 2 games this week, both on the road. I don't expect much from the Illinois game, but maybe Iowa?

Go Blue!