

Nothing But 'Net – Week #16 – 02/21/2011 – NIT = Yes, NCAA = Maybe

The Michigan men's basketball team split a pair of road games this week, [losing at Illinois on Wednesday 54-52](#), then [beating Iowa 75-72 in overtime on Saturday](#).

Given how hard it is to win anywhere on the road in the Big Ten, the Iowa win is a big deal. The loss at Illinois was just sad, since Michigan had a chance to win it at the end. Still, the loss and the win give Michigan an overall record of 17-11 (7-8 in the Big Ten), which is more than enough to ensure a bid to the NIT. If Michigan can scratch out another 2 wins in the last 3 games, they'll stand a decent chance of getting to the Big Dance.

The Illinois game was so frustrating. Michigan started strong, and led 11-5 at the 1st media timeout. Unfortunately, they started unraveling at that point, and trailed by 10 (32-22) at halftime. They didn't do much in the first 9 minutes of the 2nd half, and they were still down 9 points (43-34) with 10:42 left in the game. That's when UM went on a 10-2 run, and closed within a point (45-44). They hung around, never falling more than 4 points behind, but never getting the lead. Finally, they got the ball for the last shot with 14 seconds left, down by 2 (54-52). [Evan Smotrycz](#) got off a decent 3-pointer with 4 seconds left, but it missed. [Stu Douglass](#) got the rebound and fired up a wild 3-pointer at the buzzer that hit the front of the rim, bounced straight up, and almost went in, but "almost" isn't good enough. Still, it was a gutsy effort, even if it goes in the books as another "L".

The Iowa game was remarkably similar. This time, UM opened up a 14-4 lead just after the 1st media timeout. And, once again, they started unraveling at that point. Iowa went on a 17-4 run, to lead 21-18. Iowa pushed the lead as high as 10 (30-20), and led by 8 at halftime (32-24). It could have been even worse: UM turned the ball over with 2 seconds left in the 1st half, and an Iowa player hit a half-court 3-pointer at the buzzer. However, the refs looked at the replay for 5 minutes, and (correctly) ruled that the ball didn't leave his hands in time, so it was waved off. Whew!

Iowa took the lead up to 10 again (37-27) early in the 2nd half, before UM started a comeback. With 10:35 left in the game, Michigan tied it up, 40-40, then opened up a small (55-49) lead with 6 minutes left. Iowa tied it up (63-63) with 2 minutes left, and went ahead by 2 (65-63) in the final minute. [Jordan Morgan](#) hit 2 clutch free throws with 12 seconds left, and we went to overtime.

Michigan led for most of the overtime, but never by more than 4 points. [Tim Hardaway, Jr.](#) made a pair of clutch free throws with 15 seconds left to push the lead up to 3 points (75-72), and Iowa missed a pair of 3-point attempts in the last 5 seconds. Whew, again.

I know you want stats, so here you go. Michigan shot very poorly in the [Illinois](#) game: 37.3% overall, and an amazing 11.1% (2-for-18) from 3-point range. If they could have made even one more of their 3-pointers, they would have won the game. As usual, UM lost the rebounding battle (38-32), but they had a lot less turnovers (12-5) than Illinois. It was just lousy shooting that cost them the game.

The stats for the [Iowa](#) game are a little better. They shot much better (48.1% and 30%), but they still lost the rebounding battle (36-27). They also had a lot more turnovers than usual (13), but less than Iowa (16). This game was won with slightly better shooting than Iowa.

Individually, it was "[Darius Morris](#)/Tim Hardaway, Jr./Jordan Morgan" week. All 3 of them hit double figures in both games, and they were the only Michigan players to hit double figures in either game. Hardaway had the best week, with 10 and 30, but Morris (11 and 20) and Morgan (12 and 18) weren't far behind. The other 2 starters ([Stu Douglass](#) and [Zack Novak](#)) didn't do much, scoring-wise. Douglass had 5 and 3, with lousy shooting percentages: 2-for-11 (1-for-8) vs. Illinois, and 1-for-5 (1-for-4) vs. Iowa. Novak did a little better vs. Illinois (7 points, on 3-for-7 [0-for-3] shooting), but only had 2 points vs. Iowa, with terrible shooting: 0-for-10 (0-for-6). Douglass probably cost Michigan the Illinois game, and Novak almost cost Michigan the Iowa game. The Wolverines need these 2 players to get back to their earlier form. They also could use some bench scoring; they got 7 points (2 from [Matt Vogrich](#) and 5 from Smotrycz) in the Illinois game, and just 2 points (from [Eso Akunne](#)) in the Iowa game. Smotrycz, a former starter, has almost disappeared. It's time for the bench players to contribute.

The now-famous Nothing But 'Net Expectation-O-Meter (NBNEOM) needs to be reset to "Exceeds Expectations". At the beginning of the season, Michigan was picked for 10th place in the Big Ten, with no postseason hopes. At this point, UM is in 6th place, has clinched a spot in the NIT, and stands a fair chance of getting to the Big Dance.

So, Michigan has 3 games left in the regular season, 2 of them at home (Wisconsin and Michigan State) and one on the road (at Minnesota). Minnesota has been pretty tough at home this season, so that might be a little much to hope for, but the two home games are winnable. This week, it's Wisconsin in Crisler Arena on Wednesday (2/23, 6:30 p.m.) and at Minnesota on Saturday (2/26, 4:30 p.m. EST). Michigan has to win one of these games to stand a chance at the NCAA Tournament.

Go Blue!