

Nothing But 'Net – Week #19 – 03/14/2011 – Dancin'

The big news this week isn't how the Michigan men's basketball team did in the [Big Ten Tournament](#), the big news is that [Michigan is going to The Big Dance](#): the [NCAA Tournament](#)! At the beginning of the season, hardly anyone (including me) gave them much chance of going to the NCAA Tournament. The optimistic fans were hoping for a bid to the [National Invitation Tournament \(NIT\)](#), but even that didn't look very likely:

- The team was too young: no seniors, 2 juniors, and a bunch of sophomores and freshmen.
- The team was too short: no players over 6' 10", and no true center.
- The team had lost too much scoring from last year: Manny Harris and DeShawn Sims accounted for 54% of UM's scoring.
- The Big Ten was too tough: 7 of the 11 teams were ranked at some point during the season.

Well, Michigan overcame all those obstacles, and made it the Big Dance. It is truly amazing (amaizing?).

Oh yeah, the Big Ten Tournament. Well, it went OK, but not great. Michigan was the #4 seed, which meant that they got to play the #5 seed (Illinois) on Friday, then play the #1 seed (Ohio State) on Saturday. UM played a mediocre game for 32 minutes vs. Illinois, but [they came back strong in the last 8 minutes and won the game, 60-55](#). They actually played better vs. Ohio State, but [they just didn't have the weapons to beat the #1 team in the nation, and they lost 68-61](#). The win and the loss left Michigan with an overall record of 20-13 (9-9 in the Big Ten), and put them in contention for a spot in the NCAA Tournament. [They scheduled a Selection Sunday Viewing Event in Crisler for Sunday night](#), and about 1500 fans showed up to see the good news. I worked as an usher, and it was a lot of fun.

The Illinois game started out OK for the first 14 minutes, but it didn't look very promising from that point on. It was all tied up (19-19) with 6:00 left in the 1st half, then Illinois went on a 15-4 run to finish the half. That made it 34-23. The start of the 2nd half wasn't much better, and Illinois stretched their lead to 12 points (51-39) with 8:34 left in the game. That's when UM woke up, and finished the game on a 21-4 run.

The OSU game was close for most of the 1st half. With 2:00 left in the half, it was tied up, 27-27, but UM let things slip away a little, and OSU led 31-27 at halftime. The first 4 minutes of the 2nd half were a disaster, with OSU scoring the first 7 points to open up an 11-point lead (38-27). That was all they needed. Even though Michigan fought back and got within 2 points (47-45) with 10 minutes left in the game, OSU quickly built the lead back up to 14 points (59-45) with a 12-0 run, and that was the game.

The stats tell the stories, as usual. In the [Illinois](#) game, Michigan won with 2 things: 3-point shooting (11-for-24 = 45.8%) and free-throw shooting (9-for-11 = 81.8%). While the free-throw shooting percentage is nice, the real story was that Michigan got 9 points from the line, while Illinois only got 2 points (on 2-for-3 shooting). That's the difference in the game right there. The stats for the [OSU](#) game show why Michigan lost: overall shooting (22-for-59 = 37.3%) and 3-point shooting (9-for-29

= 31.0%). Michigan needed to shoot 3-pointers against OSU like they did vs. Illinois.

Individually, it was the Dynamic Duo again: [Tim Hardaway, Jr.](#) and [Darius Morris](#). They both scored in double figures in both games. Morris had 17 and 16, and Hardaway had 16 and 15. [Zack Novak](#) was the only other UM player to hit double figures this week, with 14 points in the Illinois game. He only had 6 points in the OSU game. The other 2 starters ([Jordan Morgan](#) and [Stu Douglass](#)) chipped in some points (Morgan had 4 and 6, and Douglass had 3 and 7), but they weren't as productive as usual.

Bench scoring has been a problem a lot this season, and it wasn't very good in these games. Only [Evan Smotrycz](#) (6 points) scored off the bench in the Illinois game, and only Smotrycz (9 points) and [Matt Vogrich](#) (2 points) scored in the OSU game.

The Nothing But 'Net Expectation-O-Meter (NBNEOM) has been reset to point to "Greatly Exceeds Expectations".

On to the NCAA Tournament! Since the tournament expanded to 68 teams this year, there are now 4 "play in" games early in the week, and these games are called Round 1. So, Michigan opens play in Round 2 vs. [Tennessee](#) on Friday (3/18, time TBA) in Charlotte, NC. Tennessee was 19-14 (8-8 in the SEC), with quality wins over Villanova and Pittsburgh, and embarrassing losses to Oakland (who Michigan beat handily) and Charlotte. Tennessee doesn't have much more height than Michigan, but they do have 6 seniors on their team. It should be an interesting matchup. If Michigan can get past Tennessee, they'll play the winner of the (#1) Duke vs. (#16) Hampton game, presumably Duke. That would be a tough matchup, but Michigan has played very well against highly-ranked teams this season, even if they haven't beaten any of them.

Go Blue!