

Nothing But 'Net – Week #16 – 02/13/2012 – A Winning Streak

The (#22) University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games last week, one at home and one on the road, and they won both of them. [On Wednesday \(02/08/2012\) they beat Nebraska 62-46](#) on the road, then [on Sunday \(02/12/2012\) they beat Illinois 70-61](#) in Crisler Arena. This raises Michigan's record to 19-7 (9-4 in the Big Ten). It was nice for Michigan to finally win 2 games in a row, after going W-L-W-L-W-L-W-L in their previous 8 games.

While the win at Nebraska doesn't sound very impressive, it was a bigger deal than you might think. Just ask Indiana; they lost at Nebraska back on January 18th. Sure, Michigan is a better team, but (as I've said many times) it's tough to win on the road in the Big Ten. And, Michigan didn't just win at Nebraska, they dominated. The 1st half was slow, flat, and boring, and both teams looked miserable, but the 2nd half was one of the most impressive performances I've seen by a Michigan team. Take away a couple missed shots by the scrubs in garbage time, and UM shot an amazing percentage (16-for-19 = 84.2%). That's incredible.

The Illinois game was also impressive, but for a different reason: Illinois was a contender for the Big Ten title (before this week), and they were ranked for much of the season. They have a guard (Brandon Paul) who scored 42 points vs. Ohio State earlier this season, and a 7'1" center (Meyers Leonard) who is a handful. Leonard scored the first 2 baskets for Illinois, and Paul hit a 3-pointer, and suddenly it was 7-2, Illinois. Yikes. However, UM managed to tie the game 7-7, and go ahead for the first time at 10-8. Illinois went back up 20-19, but Michigan regained the lead (21-20), and never trailed again. Oh yeah, Leonard ended up with 5 points! After going 2-for-2 in the first 2 minutes, he only tried 3 more shots all game, and missed them all. I don't know why the Illinois coach (Bruce Weber) didn't use Leonard more, but I'm glad he didn't.

The stats are fun this week. First, the [Nebraska](#) game: Michigan shot well overall (24-for-46 = 52.2%), they shot 3-pointers well (11-for-24 = 45.8%), and they didn't shoot many free throws (3-for-4 = 75.0%). As usual, they lost the rebounding battle (29-22), but they won the turnover battle (14-7). The stats for the [Illinois](#) game are pretty similar: Michigan shot 50.0% (23-for-46) overall, they shot 43.8% (7-for-16) from 3-point range, and they shot 77.3% (17-for-22) from the free-throw line. They lost the rebounding battle (33-27), and won the turnover battle (13-9).

Individually, both [Zack Novak](#) and [Trey Burke](#) hit double figures in both games. Novak had 14 vs. Nebraska and 12 vs. Illinois, and Burke had 12 and 14. Two other starters each hit double figures in one of the two games. [Stu Douglass](#) had 13 and 4, and [Tim Hardaway Jr.](#) had 6 and 15. The fifth starter, [Jordan Morgan](#), had 8 and 4. One other player, [Evan Smotrycz](#), hit double figures in one of the two games. He had 0 points vs. Nebraska, but 13 in the Illinois game, coming off the bench.

Speaking of the bench, UM finally got some bench scoring! [Matt Vogrich](#) hit 3-of-4 of his 3-pointers vs. Nebraska, for 9 points, then hit both of his 3-point attempts and a layup for 8 points vs. Illinois. Combined with Smotrycz's 13 points, that gave UM 21 points off the bench in a single game. Wow!

The numbers are nice, but the best part of the Illinois game was that both Hardaway and Smotrycz finally broke out of their recent slumps. If they can revert to their December form, Michigan will do just fine down the stretch.

The Nothing But 'Net Expectation-O-Meter (NBNEOM) has been reset to point to "Exceeds Expectations". Winning a second road game, even vs. Nebraska, is a big deal, and handling a quality opponent like Illinois is very impressive.

Michigan only plays one game this week, and it's a biggie. On Saturday (02/18/2012, 9:00 p.m., ESPN), they play (#3) Ohio State in Crisler Arena. OSU is clearly the better team, and it will be a big upset if UM manages to beat them, but it is possible. The game is at 9:00 at night, and it's on ESPN, so the atmosphere should be pretty intense. Michigan is perfect (14-0) at home this season, and they've beaten some good teams (Wisconsin, Michigan State, Indiana, and Illinois to name a few).

Check back next week to see what happened, and why.

Go Blue!