

Nothing But 'Net – Week #17 – 02/20/2012 – A HUGE Win

The (#17) University of Michigan men's basketball team only played one game last week, and they won it. [On Saturday \(02/18/2012\) they beat \(#6\) Ohio State 56-51](#) in Crisler Arena. This raises Michigan's record to 20-7 (10-4 in the Big Ten), and keeps them perfect (15-0) in Crisler Arena this season. Michigan is now tied with Ohio State for 2nd place in the Big Ten, one game behind Michigan State. For more complete details, see my weekly [Big Ten Report](#).

This was a HUGE win. Personally, I like beating Michigan State more than anything, but this win was even more impressive than [Michigan's win over MSU earlier this season](#). For one thing, OSU was ranked higher than MSU was when Michigan beat them, but that's not all. This game had more hype than any home game in recent memory, it got Michigan to the all-important 20-win level, and it was important for both teams in the Big Ten title race. The game was nationally televised on ESPN, and College Game Day broadcast from Crisler all day. The crowd was big and loud, and the atmosphere was electric. A situation like that can go one of two ways: either Michigan can come out inspired and play a great game, or they can get distracted by all the hype and the pressure and try too hard. This was one of the inspired games. OSU has bigger, better players across the board, and if Michigan didn't "manage" the game by controlling the tempo, OSU would just grind them down for the victory. That's what happened earlier this season, [when Michigan played in Columbus](#). Not this time. Michigan got ahead early (6-0 after 3 minutes), and never surrendered the lead. The lead got down as low as 1 point (17-16 with 7 minutes left in the 1st half), and as high as 10 points (numerous times, the last time at 42-32 with 11:43 left), but UM never let OSU get the lead, which was crucial. OSU brought a large contingent of fans, and they were just waiting for something to cheer about, but Michigan kept them quiet. By the way, as an usher, I've got to say that the visiting fans have been very well behaved this season, with the exception of one rude, whiny, crybaby family from Indiana. Even the normally thuggish MSU fans were decent this year.

It was a one-possession game with 2:00 left, and UM up 52-49. [Jordan Morgan](#) missed a jumper, and OSU grabbed the rebound. A 3-pointer would tie the game, and things were looking pretty scary. Fortunately, OSU turned the ball over, and [Trey Burke](#) hit an amazing runner in the lane to push the lead back up to 5 points (54-49) with 1:17 left. OSU hit a pair of free throws to cut the lead back to 3 points (54-51), but Burke hit an even more amazing runner in the lane, off the high glass, to put the game away (56-51) with 9 seconds left. OSU hoisted a couple shots in the last 9 seconds, but they both missed, and that was the game. It was stunning to see how poorly OSU coach Thad Matta managed the last 42 seconds of the game. With Michigan up by 3, he let Burke dribble around uncontested for almost all of the 35-second shot clock, then he let him drive in and score the game-winning basket. Conventional wisdom would call for a foul right away, and a chance to get the ball back with 40 seconds left and no more than a 5-point deficit. Instead, Matta was content to watch Burke dribble around and use up most of the game clock. Nice coaching!

The [stats](#) are not pretty, but they do show that Michigan outplayed OSU. UM shot fairly well overall (22-for-47 = 46.8%), which is much better than OSU (19-for-49 = 38.8%). Both teams shot terribly from 3-point range: UM was 3-for-13 (23.1%), but OSU was even worse (3-for-16 = 18.8%). Free throw shooting was a wash: UM shot

9-for-14 (64.3%), while OSU shot 10-for-15 (66.7%). The big difference was overall shooting. That's where Michigan won the game.

The non-shooting stats are pretty typical for Michigan for this season. They lost the rebounding battle (34-25) and won the turnover battle (13-8). It would be nice to win the rebounding battle occasionally, but UM is 7-5 this season when they're out-rebounded.

The individual stats are pretty good, at least for the starters. Burke (17 points), [Tim Hardaway Jr.](#) (13), and Morgan (11) all hit double figures, and the other 2 starters, [Zack Novak](#) (6 points) and [Stu Douglass](#) (7 points), both hit key baskets when the game was in the balance late in the 2nd half. Besides his 11 points, Morgan also had 11 rebounds, for his first career double-double. Burke (3 turnovers) and Hardaway (4) both played a little out-of-control at times, but they more than made up for it with their scoring.

Do a little quick arithmetic: $17+13+11+6+7=54$ points. That means that UM got exactly 2 points from the bench: [Evan Smotrycz](#) had a basket, and that was it. It was even worse for OSU; they got zero points from their bench.

The Nothing But 'Net Expectation-O-Meter (NBNEOM) continues to point to "Exceeds Expectations". Beating the #6 team in the nation is a big deal, and being in position to win the Big Ten title is quite an accomplishment.

Michigan plays two games this week, one on the road and one at home. On Tuesday (02/21/2012, 8:00 p.m. EST, Big Ten Network), then play at Northwestern, then on Saturday (02/25/2012, 6:00 p.m., Big Ten Network), they play Purdue in Crisler Arena. Any road game in the Big Ten is dangerous, and Northwestern is no exception. Just ask Michigan State; they lost at Northwestern earlier this season. If Michigan wants to stay within striking distance of the Big Ten title, they need to win both games this week.

The game on Saturday vs. Purdue is the final home game this season, so it's Senior Night. Technically, there are 4 seniors on the team: Novak, Douglass, [Corey Person](#), and [Ben Cronin](#), but Person doesn't play much and Cronin will never play again for medical reasons, so the main honored players are Zack Novak and Stu Douglass. They have been the heart and soul of the team for the last 4 years, and it will be a real bittersweet moment saying farewell to them. I just hope the whole team plays well and beats Purdue, to send them off with a perfect 16-0 home record their senior years.

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

Go Blue!