

Nothing But 'Net – Week #18 – 02/27/2012 – It Was Fun While It Lasted

The (#11) University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games last week, and they won one and lost one. [On Tuesday \(02/21/2012\) they beat Northwestern 67-55 \(overtime\) in Evanston](#), then [on Saturday \(02/25/2012\) they lost to Purdue 75-61 in Crisler Arena](#). The win and loss leave Michigan with a record of 21-8 (11-5 in the Big Ten). The loss to Purdue ruined Michigan's perfect season at home. They finished their home schedule 15-1, which is still very good. The loss also knocked Michigan out of contention for the Big Ten title. Being in the title hunt in the next-to-last week of the season was fun, but it didn't work out. Maybe next year...

The win at Northwestern was pretty encouraging. Sure, Michigan had to go to overtime to beat NU, but any road win is a good win. Michigan didn't play very well for most of regulation, but they still found a way to hang in there and force overtime. They were nearly flawless in overtime, and won easily.

Michigan didn't play particularly well vs. Purdue either, and Purdue was red hot. That's a bad combination. Purdue started out strong, leading 12-2 after 5 minutes. They led for almost the entire game, although UM did grab a slim 2-point lead (42-40) with 12 minutes left in the game. The lead didn't last long (51 seconds), although Michigan did get within 1 point (46-45) with 9 minutes to go, and within 3 points (52-49) with 5 minutes left. The last 5 minutes were a disaster, with Purdue closing the game on a 23-12 run.

So, what happened? How did Purdue beat Michigan so handily in Crisler? I think there were a couple of factors that combined to doom UM: the students were on Spring Break, the team was distracted by all the hoopla and emotion of Senior Night, and the team felt the pressure of the undefeated home record and the Big Ten race. Michigan looked tight and tentative in the first 5 minutes, and they looked confused on defense throughout the game. Purdue attacked the rim more than any other team this season, and it worked like a charm. It just was not a very promising game from the opening tipoff.

If you go back and look at all my articles since 1999, including many in the dark days of Ellerbe and Amaker (go ahead, I'll wait while you go back and look), you won't find me saying much about the officiating. That's not because I don't have much to say, it's because I try not to blame the outcome of the game (win or lose) on the officiating. I will say that compared to other leagues, the Big Ten has some of the lamest, most inconsistent refs in NCAA basketball. They may not affect the final outcome, but they do affect the style of the game. The UM/Purdue game was a good example. The officials for this game were wildly inconsistent about what they called a foul and what they let slide. It didn't affect the final outcome, Purdue played a better game and they deserved to win, but the officiating sure did affect the way we got there.

Let's look at the stats, even if we don't want to. In the [Northwestern game](#), Michigan shot pretty poorly overall (21-for-56 = 37.5%), but they shot pretty well from 3-point range (14-for-38 = 36.8%). They didn't shoot very well from the free-throw line: 11-for-18 (61.1%). Take a second to look at the 3-point shooting numbers again: 38 shots is a lot. As usual, Michigan lost the rebounding battle (39-35), but they won the turnover battle (14-7). The stats for the [Purdue game](#) are pretty sad: Michigan shot decently overall (25-for-60 = 41.7%), but they were off

from 3-point range (9-for-32 = 28.1%). Free throws are what killed Michigan in the Purdue game. Michigan was 2-for-4 (50.0%, duh), while Purdue was 14-for-16 (87.5%). As I said above, Purdue attacked the rim all night, and that's why they got to the line 16 times vs. 4 for Michigan. Those extra 12 points are pretty much the difference. Oh yeah: rebounding was even (31-31), and Michigan lost the turnover battle (9-5).

Individually, 2 of the starters ([Trey Burke](#) and [Tim Hardaway Jr.](#)) hit double figures in both games. Burke had 19 vs. Northwestern and 12 vs. Purdue, while Hardaway had 14 and 10. 2 of the other starters had double figures in one game: [Stu Douglass](#) (12 and 7) and [Zack Novak](#) (7 and 12). The final starter, [Jordan Morgan](#), had 4 and 8. Burke, Novak, and Hardaway might have been the leading scorers for Michigan in the Purdue game, but all 3 of them were pretty inefficient. Burke was 4-for-12 (2-for-6 from 3-point range), Novak was 4-for-11 (4-for-10 on 3-pointers), and Hardaway was 5-for-13 (0-for-6 from 3-point range). They accounted for 23 of Michigan's 35 missed shots, and 16 of the 24 missed 3-pointers. Ouch.

The bench chipped in some points this week. [Matt Vogrich](#) had 9 points at Northwestern, and 3 points vs. Purdue, while [Evan Smotrycz](#) had 2 and 5. When the Purdue game was out of reach, [Coach Beilein](#) cleared the bench, so little-used senior guard [Corey Person](#) got to play for one minute, and he made the most of it with a career-high 4 points on 2-for-3 shooting. He had an awesome drive to the basket with a sweet finish. Maybe he should have played more earlier?

The Nothing But 'Net Expectation-O-Meter (NBNEOM) has to be reset to point to "Meets Expectations". Winning a road game, even vs. Northwestern, is a big achievement, but losing at home to a non-contender like Purdue is a step backwards.

This is the last week of the regular season, and Michigan plays two games this week, both on the road. On Thursday (03/01/2012, 7:00 p.m. EST, ESPN), they play at Illinois, then on Sunday (03/04/2012, 1:00 p.m., ESPN), they play at Penn State. Any road game in the Big Ten is dangerous, even Illinois and Penn State. Both teams are having a tough time this season, and they would like nothing better than to beat a contender like Michigan. If the Wolverines can win both games, they will assure themselves of a first-round bye in the upcoming Big Ten Tournament.

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

Go Blue!