

Nothing But 'Net – Week #19 – 03/05/2012 – Big Ten (Co) Champions!

The (#13) University of Michigan men's basketball team played their final two games of the regular season on the road last week, and they won both of them. [On Thursday \(03/01/2012\) they beat Illinois 72-61](#), then [on Sunday \(03/04/2012\) they beat Penn State 71-65](#). The wins raise Michigan's final regular season record to 23-8 (13-5 in the Big Ten). More importantly, the wins, combined with two Michigan State losses this week, allowed UM to tie for the Big Ten title with Michigan State and Ohio State! This is a really big deal, and completely unexpected. At the beginning of the season, most experts expected Michigan to finish near the top of the Big Ten, but few expected Michigan to win it. As recently as last week, when [UM lost their last home game of the season to Purdue](#), it looked highly improbable, though mathematically possible. No way would MSU lose both games, even though they were against contenders. Well, they did, and Michigan won a share of the title, their first since 1986.

The two road wins for Michigan were important, but unimpressive. On the one hand, any road win is a big win, but Illinois and Penn State are two of the worst teams in the Big Ten this season, so beating them wasn't very inspiring. Still, Michigan did what they had to do, and they did it relatively efficiently. Michigan never trailed in the Illinois game, although they did let Illinois tie the game up once (14-14) with 12 minutes left in the 1st half, and pull within one point (43-42) with 15 minutes left in the game, but they never surrendered the lead, and won going away. The PSU game was similar, although Michigan did trail for much of the first 8 minutes of the game. With 12 minutes left in the 1st half, PSU was up 17-16, but UM hit a 3-pointer to go up 19-17, and they never trailed again. The UM lead got up to 19 points in both halves, but PSU fought back in the 2nd half, and got the deficit down to 4 points (64-60) with a minute left to play. Fortunately, UM played tough down the stretch, and hung on for the big win.

Stats? Stats. First, the [Illinois](#) game: UM shot pretty well overall (21-for-45 = 46.7%), but they shot very well from 3-point range (9-for-19 = 47.4%), and they shot extremely well from the free-throw line (21-for-23 = 91.3%). Very impressive. The non-shooting stats are kind of surprising, since UM won the rebounding battle (32-27), but lost the turnover battle (13-8). Weird. The stats for the [Penn State](#) game are even more impressive. Michigan shot very well overall (25-for-42 = 59.5%), extremely well from 3-point range (10-for-18 = 55.6%), and pretty well from the free-throw line (11-for-15 = 73.3%). They lost the rebounding battle (31-23), but they also lost the turnover battle (14-12). Those 14 turnovers made the game close, even though Michigan was shooting so well.

Looking at the individual stats, it was great to see [Trey Burke](#) and [Tim Hardaway Jr.](#) both hit double figures in both games again this week. Burke had 21 vs. Illinois and 19 vs. PSU, while Hardaway had 25 and 13. One of the other starters ([Zack Novak](#)) hit double figures in one of the games, with 8 points vs. Illinois and 11 vs. Penn State. The other 2 starters ([Stu Douglass](#) - 6 and 9, and [Jordan Morgan](#) - 7 and 2) each had big baskets, but didn't hit double figures.

The bench didn't chip in much in the Illinois game ([Evan Smotrycz](#) - 3, and [Colton Christian](#) - 2), but they sure did in the PSU game (Smotrycz - 17).

The Nothing But 'Net Expectation-O-Meter (NBNEOM) has to be reset yet again, this time to point to "Exceeds Expectations". Winning 2 road games is a big achievement, but winning a share of the Big Ten title is AWESOME!

On to the [Big Ten Tournament](#)! Michigan is the #2 seed in the tournament, so they get a "bye" on Thursday, and play Friday (03/09/2012, 6:30 p.m. EST, Big Ten Network) vs. the winner of the #7/#10 game played on Thursday between (#7) Northwestern and (#10) Minnesota. If they win that one, Michigan will move on to play the winner of the (#3) Ohio State vs. (#6) Purdue/(#11) Nebraska game on Saturday (03/10/2012, Time TBA, CBS). If they win that, they'll play in the championship game on Sunday (03/11/2012, 3:30 p.m. EST, CBS). As the #2 seed, it's not unreasonable to expect Michigan to be playing on Sunday, but they'll have to play well to get there.

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

Go Blue!