

Nothing But 'Net – Week #01 – 10/29/2012 – Season Preview

Welcome back for another season of Nothing But 'Net, your best source for a unique usher-based point-of-view of University of Michigan men's basketball. I know what you're thinking: "why would I want to know what an usher thinks about the basketball team?" Good question! Easy answer: I'm more than just an usher, I'm a (2-time) alumnus (LSA 1978 and School of Information 2004), and I've been a UM basketball fan since 1974. How's that? Still want more? I've been writing this column weekly (during the season) since 1999, longer than any of the other Web-based writers. Sure, there are other writers out there, and I read their stuff, but they don't bring you the fan-based viewpoint that you get at UMGoBlue.com. Check back every Monday morning from now until the end of the season (hopefully after the National Championship game) for a quick review of what happened last week, and what to expect during the upcoming week, all in one easy-to-read article.

You want easy-to-read? OK, let's get right to the big question:

How good is the 2012-2013 team going to be? The easy answer: really good.

In general, preseason polls aren't worth the electrons they're made up of, but they do give a decent guess at what to expect, and most of the polls have UM in the Top 10, averaging around 6. Michigan has a strong group of returning players, and an excellent group of incoming freshmen. UM won a share of the Big Ten championship last season, and expectations are high. Keep reading for more details.

Last Season

Michigan ended the season with a record of 24-10 (13-5 in the Big Ten). This is on the upper end of what most of the experts predicted. UM also won a share of the Big Ten regular season title, along with Michigan State and Ohio State. That was definitely the highlight of the season. The bad news was how poorly they played in the [Big Ten Tournament](#) and the NCAA Tournament. They barely won their 1st game in the Big Ten Tournament vs. Minnesota, then they got blown out in their next game against Ohio State. Still, they were awarded a #4 seed in the NCAA Tournament, but that didn't stop them from losing to a #13 seed, Ohio University. It was a lousy end to a good season.

Even though the season ended with a whimper instead of a bang, things were looking very promising for next season, with most of the key players returning from last season's team, and a very impressive recruiting class set to come in. Then the bad news hit, all on the same day: first, [three players \(Carlton Brundidge, Colton Christian, and Evan Smotrycz\) all decided to leave the team at the same time](#), then [the best player on the team \(Trey Burke\) announced that he was examining his NBA draft options](#). None of this was good news, but it might still work out OK. Losing Smotrycz was a blow, but the incoming recruits should soften that blow somewhat. The other two players (Brundidge and Christian) didn't play much, and they won't be missed. The big question mark was Burke. Fortunately, [he decided to stay!](#)

Players Lost

Michigan lost 6 players from last season's team: 2 graduating seniors and 4 transfers:

- Stu Douglass – Graduated.
- Zach Novak – Graduated.
- Evan Smotrycz – [Left the program](#), and transferred to Maryland.
- Colton Christian – [Left the program](#), and transferred to Florida International.
- Carlton Brundidge – [Left the program](#), and transferred to Detroit-Mercy.
- Sai Tummala – [Left the program](#).

After 4 very productive years, Stu Douglass and Zack Novak finally graduated. They were true Michigan Men™, and they will be missed, not just for their on-court contributions, but also for their leadership.

The other 4 players won't be missed, except for maybe Smotrycz. Christian and Brundidge didn't play much, and didn't do much when they did play. Tummala was a preferred walk-on who redshirted last year, and never played.

Players Returning

Michigan has a very talented group of players returning this season. Here they are, by class year (eligibility):

Freshman Eligibility

[Max Bielfeldt](#) #44 (6'7", 245 pounds, F) – Max was voluntarily redshirted last year, so he retains freshman eligibility. He's a big, strong player, but we've never seen him play in a college game. I suspect he'll be mostly a scout team player, and only get into the game for "garbage time".

Sophomore Eligibility

[Trey Burke](#) #3 (6'0", 190 pounds, G) – Trey was one of the best players on the team last season, and he's a key component on this season's team. He is an elite point guard, with a nice shooting touch and great passing ability. It was a big deal when he decided to skip the NBA draft after last season and return for his sophomore season.

[Jon Horford](#) #15 (6'10", 250 pounds, F) – Jon started last season playing pretty well, certainly much-improved from his freshman season, then he broke a bone in his right foot after just 9 games, and missed the rest of the season. He was granted a medical redshirt season, so he has sophomore eligibility. I'm expecting him to be a steady contributor, although he's going to have to work hard to earn minutes in the crowded UM front court.

Junior Eligibility

[Tim Hardaway Jr.](#) #10 (6'6", 205 pounds, G) – Tim was the other "best player on the team" last season, along with Trey Burke, and he's going to be counted on to be another key component on this season's team. He had a fabulous freshman season, but his sophomore season was just a little "off". He had several great games, but he would often disappear for an entire first half, then play like a man possessed in the second half. He's quick, he's tough, he can shoot from outside and drive to the basket, he's got good vision, and he's got great "basketball smarts".

[Blake McLimans](#) #22 (6'10", 240 pounds, F) – Blake is listed as a senior on the official UM web page, but he voluntarily redshirted during his freshman year, so he has junior eligibility. He came to Michigan with a reputation as a good 3-point shooter, but he went 1-for-19 during his freshman season. He did a little better last season, starting off hitting 3 of his first 4 attempts, but ended the season shooting 5-for-12. He needs to improve on that to see much playing time this season. For a player his size, he gets remarkably few rebounds (21 last season), and plays a lot shorter than his actual height.

[Jordan Morgan](#) #52 (6'8", 250 pounds, F) – Jordan redshirted his freshman year, for various medical reasons, so he has junior eligibility. He plays taller than his listed height, and he plays hard and tough underneath. He was Michigan's only true center last season, once Jon Horford went out with his foot injury, but he'll have a lot more help this season.

Senior Eligibility

[Eso Akunne](#) #5 (6'2", 225 pounds, G) – Eso played in 12 games last season, until he injured his foot. He missed the last 13 games, but doesn't qualify for a medical redshirt year. Even when he did play, he didn't do much. He did shoot 3-pointers well: 4-for-5.

[Josh Bartelstein](#) #20 (6'3", 210 pounds, G) – Josh played in 11 games last season. He is primarily a practice squad player. He also writes a very interesting and amusing blog during the season.

[Corey Person](#) #32 (6'3", 210 pounds, G) – Corey is listed as a Grad Student, but he has senior eligibility. He was honored during Senior Night at the end of last season, but he's back again this season. Go figure. He is primarily a practice squad player.

[Matt Vogrich](#) #13 (6'4", 200 pounds, G) – Matt is the only mainstream player in the senior class. He's a good 3-point shooter, but needs to work on his overall game a bit to get more playing time.

New Players

Here comes the fun part: a top 5 recruiting class.

[Michael \("Spike"\) Albrecht](#) #2 (5'11", 170 pounds, G) – When it looked like Trey Burke might leave for the NBA, [Coach Beilein](#) went right out and got the best point guard still available, as insurance. That's Spike. He's a pure "pass first" point guard, with lots of "basketball IQ", but not a Big Ten body. We'll see how he does out there against the big boys.

[Caris LeVert](#) #23 (6'5", 170 pounds, G) – Check it out: he's 6 inches taller than Spike, but he weighs the same. So, he's a little on the thin side. Caris is the "sleeper" of this recruiting class. He didn't come in with all the hype that the next 3 guys (Mitch McGary, Glenn Robinson III, and Nik Stauskas) brought with them, but from everything I've been hearing from practice, he can flat-out play. He's fast and clever. He just needs some time in the weight room.

[Mitch McGary](#) #4 (6'10", 250 pounds, F) – Mitch is the most-heralded player in this recruiting class, ranked as high as #2 in the country at one point, and I'm hoping that he'll be the center that Michigan has needed for the last 10 years. He's tall, he's big, he's strong, and he's a pretty good all-around player.

[Glenn Robinson III](#) #1 (6'6", 210 pounds, F) – If Mitch McGary is the most-heralded recruit in this class, Glenn is a close second. He wasn't very highly ranked when he committed to UM, but he climbed in the rankings during his last 2 seasons in high school, and now he's considered to be a big-time recruit. He's quick, smooth, and very athletic, and he's a great scorer. I can't wait to see him play. Oh yeah, his nickname before he got to UM was "Tre" (or "Trey"), but since UM already has a prominent Trey (Burke), he's trying to change it to "GIII" or "GRIII". You have been warned.

[Nik Stauskas](#) #11 (6'6", 190 pounds, F) – Nik could be the elusive "great 3-point shooter" that the Beilein system needs. He has rung up impressive numbers in practice with his 3-point shooting, but we'll have to see if he can do it in a real college game. Also, he needs to work on his all-around game, especially his defense, if he wants to be a mainstream player.

All in all, it's a great recruiting class, with some height (finally), some power, some shooting, and some athleticism. Now it's up to Coach Beilein to figure out how to turn all this talent into a coherent team.

This Season

Let's take a look at Michigan's schedule for this season:

Date	Opponent	Location	Time (ET)
11/01/2012 (Thu)	Northern Michigan (exh)	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
11/05/2012 (Mon)	Saginaw Valley State (exh)	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
11/09/2012 (Fri)	Slippery Rock	Ann Arbor, MI	8:30 p.m.

NIT Season Tip-Off			
11/12/2012 (Mon)	IUPUI	Ann Arbor, MI	9:00 p.m.
11/13/2012 (Tue)	Cleveland St./Bowling Green	Ann Arbor, MI	8:00 p.m.
11/19/2012 (Mon)	Consolation (if necessary)	Ann Arbor, MI	TBA
11/20/2012 (Tue)	Consolation (if necessary)	Ann Arbor, MI	TBA
11/21/2012 (Wed)	Semifinal	New York, NY	7:00/9:00 p.m.
11/23/2012 (Fri)	Championship	New York, NY	2:30/4:30 p.m.
ACC/Big Ten Challenge			
11/27/2012 (Tue)	North Carolina State	Ann Arbor, MI	7:30 p.m.
12/01/2012 (Sat)	Bradley	Peoria, IL	4:00 p.m.
12/04/2012 (Tue)	Western Michigan	Ann Arbor, MI	8:30 p.m.
12/08/2012 (Sat)	Arkansas	Ann Arbor, MI	12:00 p.m.
12/11/2012 (Tue)	Binghamton	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
12/15/2012 (Sat)	West Virginia	Brooklyn, NY	8:00 p.m.
12/20/2012 (Thu)	Eastern Michigan	Ann Arbor, MI	8:30 p.m.
12/29/2012 (Sat)	Central Michigan	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
01/03/2013 (Thu)	Northwestern	Evanston, IL	7:00 p.m.
01/06/2013 (Sun)	Iowa	Ann Arbor, MI	TBA
01/09/2013 (Thu)	Nebraska	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
01/13/2013 (Sun)	Ohio State	Columbus, OH	1:30/4:30 p.m.
01/17/2013 (Thu)	Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN	7:00 p.m.
01/24/2013 (Thu)	Purdue	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
01/27/2013 (Sun)	Illinois	Champaign, IL	6:00 p.m.
01/30/2013 (Wed)	Northwestern	Ann Arbor, MI	6:30 p.m.
02/02/2013 (Sat)	Indiana	Bloomington, IN	9:00 p.m.
02/05/2013 (Tue)	Ohio State	Ann Arbor, MI	9:00 p.m.
02/09/2013 (Sat)	Wisconsin	Madison, WI	12:00 p.m.
02/12/2013 (Tue)	Michigan State	East Lansing, MI	9:00 p.m.
02/17/2013 (Sun)	Penn State	Ann Arbor, MI	12:00 p.m.
02/24/2013 (Sun)	Illinois	Ann Arbor, MI	1/4/6 p.m.
02/27/2013 (Wed)	Penn State	State College, PA	6:30 p.m.
03/02/2013 (Sat)	Michigan State	Ann Arbor, MI	5:15 p.m.
03/03/2013 (Sun)			1:00/4:00 p.m.
03/06/2013 (Wed)	Purdue	West Lafayette, IN	7:00 p.m.
03/10/2013 (Sun)	Indiana	Ann Arbor, MI	1/4/6 p.m.
Big Ten Tournament			
03/14/2013 (Thu)	1 st Round	Chicago, IL	TBA
03/15/2013 (Fri)	2 nd Round	Chicago, IL	TBA
03/16/2013 (Sat)	Semifinals	Chicago, IL	1:40/4:05
03/17/2013 (Sun)	Championship	Chicago, IL	3:30 p.m.

Some comments on the schedule:

- Michigan has two exhibition games this season, instead of the typical single game.
- Michigan is the only ranked team in the NIT Season Tip-Off, but it's still a good field. Besides UM, the other "name" teams are Virginia, Kansas State, and Pittsburgh.
- Unlike all the other "destination" preseason tournaments, the NIT Season Tip-Off is the only one that doesn't guarantee a spot in the championship rounds to the "host" (favored) teams. That means that Michigan, Virginia, Kansas State, and Pittsburgh (the host teams) each have to win the 4-team "regionals" that they're hosting to advance to the championship rounds in Madison Square Garden. That's why there are 2 "Consolation" games listed on the schedule, marked as "if necessary". If either IUPUI or the winner of the Cleveland State/Bowling Green game upsets Michigan, UM will stay home and play games on 11/19 and 11/20. I don't know who they would play. However, if Michigan wins their "regional", they will go to NYC for Thanksgiving.

- Michigan usually plays all their December non-conference games at home, but not this season. They're going to Peoria to play Bradley, then to Brooklyn to play West Virginia.
- There are 2 tough stretches in the schedule:
 - Starting on 02/02: @Indiana, home vs. Ohio State, @Wisconsin, @MSU. If UM can even go 2-2 in that stretch, they'll be in great shape.
 - Starting on 03/02: home vs. MSU, @Purdue, home vs. Indiana. Those are the last 3 games of the regular season, and UM needs to finish strong.
- Michigan only plays Iowa and Nebraska once (home) and Minnesota and Wisconsin once (away). This is an unfavorable situation, since Iowa, Nebraska, and Minnesota are all lower-division teams, and playing at Wisconsin is a nightmare.

Expectations

I like to divide the games up into 3 categories ("Should Win", "Should Lose", and "Toss Up"):

- Should Win (19) – Slippery Rock, IUPUI, Cleveland State/Bowling Green, Bradley, Western Michigan, Arkansas, Binghamton, West Virginia, Eastern Michigan, Central Michigan, Northwestern (twice), Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota, Purdue (home), Penn State (twice). Illinois (home).
- Should Lose (4) - @Indiana, @OSU, @Wisconsin, @MSU.
- Toss Up (8) – Both games in NYC, N.C. State, Purdue (away), Illinois (away), OSU (home), MSU (home), Indiana (home).

So, if UM can win all 19 of the "Should Win" games, and half of the 8 "Toss Up" games, that would give them a record of 23-8 (12-6 in the Big Ten). That probably won't be good enough to win the Big Ten, but it will get UM a good seed in the NCAA Tournament.

This Week

As you can see in the schedule above, Michigan's first (exhibition) game is this Thursday (11/01, 7:00 p.m., No TV) vs. Northern Michigan. Of course, UM will win handily, and get to try all kinds of combinations of players out there. Come on down to the newly renovated Crisler Arena to check out this season's edition of Michigan Basketball, and stop by sections 209/210 to say hi.

Go Blue!