

Nothing But 'Net – Week #01 – 10/28/2013 – Season Preview

Wow! Is it college basketball season already? It's only October!

Yeah, it's time for University of Michigan men's basketball, and this is the place to read all about it: "Nothing But 'Net" on UMGoBlue.com. Check back every Monday morning between now and the end of the season (hopefully the National Championship game again) for a quick, concise wrap-up of the previous week, and a look ahead at the upcoming week, all in one easy-to-read article.

As always here at UMGoBlue.com, the perspective is "by fans, for fans". I'm a fan (since 1974), and I go to all the home games, and watch/listen to all the away games. I don't have any special access (other than being an usher in Sections 209-210), I don't go to the press conferences, and I don't interview high school recruits. I see the same things you do, and write about them as a fan.

So, let's get right to the big question:

How good is the 2013-2014 team going to be? The easy answer: really good.

This is exactly what I said at this time last year, and look how that worked out: Michigan went to (and should have won) the National Championship game. I don't know if they'll make it that far this season, but they certainly have a reasonable chance. The preseason polls all put Michigan in the Top 10, UM returns a strong sophomore class, and the incoming freshman class looks very promising. Sure, there are questions, but things are looking good. Keep reading for more details.

Last Season

Michigan ended the season with a record of 31-8 (12-6 in the Big Ten). They won their first 16 games, [including a perfect 13-0 in non-conference play](#). They were 3-0 in the Big Ten, and ranked #2 in the nation when they finally played a "flat" game, and [lost at Ohio State](#). They won their next 4 games, and worked their way up to being ranked #1 in the nation, then they had to play [at Indiana, where they lost](#). They had a rough schedule, starting with the Indiana game, and lost 3 out of 4 games. They finished tied for 4th place in the Big Ten, but they almost ended up tied for 1st place. They played Indiana in Crisler Arena in the final regular season game, and a [last-second tip-in that would have won the game rolled off](#). If that shot had dropped, UM would have tied for 1st place. Sigh.

As is their tradition, [Michigan won their 1st game in the Big Ten Tournament](#) (Penn State), [then lost the 2nd game](#) (Wisconsin). Sigh, again.

So, going into the NCAA Tournament, there was little reason to expect Michigan to go very far. [They were awarded a #4 seed](#), so they were expected to get as far as the Sweet 16, which would be a nice milestone for an up-and-coming program. They did win their first 2 games ([South Dakota State](#) and [Virginia Commonwealth](#)), and advanced to the Sweet 16, but they had to play the #1 seed in the South region, Kansas. It was an exciting game, but with 6:50 left, UM was down 14 points (68-54), with 2:52 left, UM was down 10 points (72-62), and with 21 seconds left, they were still down 5 points (76-71). In a miracle finish, [Michigan managed to tie the game up at the buzzer, and win it in overtime!](#) Two days later, [they swamped Florida](#) (see what I did there?) by 20 points to go to the Final Four. [They beat a good Syracuse team in the National Semifinal game](#), but [lost to Louisville in the National Championship game](#). They played well enough to win, but they were the victims of some less-than-stellar officiating down the stretch. Sigh, yet again.

As expected, two of the stars from last season's team ([Trey Burke](#) and [Tim Hardaway, Jr.](#)) left school early for the NBA. [They both got drafted in the 1st round](#), and they appear to have promising pro careers ahead of them, so they made reasonable decisions. Burke had a

monster season last year as a sophomore, [winning just about every Player Of The Year award out there](#). Hardaway also had a great junior season, and they both will be missed.

However, there are incoming freshmen who might be able to fill the gaps. It's asking way too much of true freshmen, right out of high school, to replace players like Burke and Hardaway, but [Derrick Walton, Jr.](#) and [Zak Irvin](#) have the talent to eventually be great players in their own right. Walton plays point guard, so he'll try to fill Burke's position, and Irvin is a wing player with a great shot, so he'll try to fill Hardaway's spot. More on the freshmen below.

Players Lost

Besides Burke and Hardaway, Michigan lost 5 other players from last season's team: 4 graduating seniors and 1 transfer:

- Eso Akunne - Graduated.
- Josh Bartelstein - Graduated.
- Corey Person - Graduated.
- Matt Vogrich - Graduated.
- Blake McLimans - [Left the program, and transferred to Miami \(OH\)](#).

These 5 guys made up the practice squad for Michigan, and they will be missed. They didn't play much, especially last season, but they helped prepare the mainstream players for upcoming games. Akunne and Vogrich both started several games during their careers, but they were eventually replaced by more talented youngsters. Bartelstein, McLimans, and Person only ever played in "garbage time". Bartelstein wrote a very enjoyable blog the last few years.

McLimans is an interesting story. He didn't play at all his freshman year, so he still had one year of eligibility left, but he graduated with his class. There's an NCAA rule that allows graduating seniors with a year of eligibility left to enroll in grad school at another school (as long as the new school has a program that the previous school doesn't offer) and have instant eligibility, without having to sit out a "transfer year". So, that's what McLimans is doing. He didn't get much playing time at Michigan, but I hope things work out well from him at Miami.

Players Returning

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

Freshman Eligibility

None. There was some talk about redshirting [Caris LaVert](#) at the beginning of last season, but they "burned his shirt" in Game #7, so there are no returning redshirt freshmen.

Sophomore Eligibility

[Michael \("Spike"\) Albrecht](#) #2 (5'11", 175 pounds, G) – Spike had a pretty good freshman season, but the undisputed highlight was his 17 points off the bench in the National Championship game vs. Louisville. He was playing behind Trey Burke, so he didn't get as much of a chance to show us what he can do. He will this season, as I'm sure [Coach Beilein](#) will lean on him early, until Derrick Walton is ready to play big-time college ball.

[Max Bielfeldt](#) #44 (6'7", 245 pounds, F) – Max was voluntarily redshirted his freshman year, so he has sophomore eligibility. He's a big, strong player, and he did pretty well last year. Unfortunately for him, Michigan has a very strong forecourt this season, so he might not get much playing time.

[Caris LeVert](#) #23 (6'6", 185 pounds, G) – Caris grew an inch and put on 15 pounds since last season, which will surely help. He had a pretty good freshman season, once they "burned his

shirt" in Game #7. He's quick, he's nimble, he's got a good shot, and he's got great "basketball IQ". I can't wait to see what he does this season.

[Mitch McGary](#) #4 (6'10", 255 pounds, F) – Mitch started slow last season, but he kept improving as the season went on, and he had a monster NCAA Tournament. He is a preseason All American, and if he can keep playing at the level he achieved in the Big Dance, he will be the best frontcourt player in college basketball this season. He's tall, he's big, he's strong, he's agile, and he knows how to finish around the basket. He's a ferocious defender, and he runs the court well in transition. He is one of the reasons that Michigan is ranked so high this season.

[Glenn Robinson III](#) #1 (6'6", 220 pounds, F) – Glenn had a great freshman season. He started all 37 games last season, and he had some great games. He was a little hesitant with his outside shooting, and he had some quiet games where everyone was surprised when he was the leading scorer at the end. He is also a preseason All American, and a lot is expected of him this season.

[Nik Stauskas](#) #11 (6'6", 205 pounds, G) – I know this sounds like a broken record, but Nik had a great freshman season. He started out hot from 3-point range, and for a while he led the nation in 3-point shooting percentage. He finally cooled off (a little) when the Big Ten schedule rolled around, and the Big Ten coaches figured out how to deny him his favorite 3-point shots, but he still kept contributing. It turns out that he's "more than just a shooter": he drove to the hoop with authority, he distributed the ball well, he played better-than-average defense, and he hustled for a lot of loose balls. He is being counted on to toss in a bunch of 3-pointers this season, along with all the other things he can do.

Junior Eligibility

[Jon Horford](#) #15 (6'10", 250 pounds, F) – Jon broke a bone in his right foot during his sophomore year, so he was granted a medical redshirt season, and has junior eligibility. He had a few nagging injuries last season, but when he was in there, he played pretty well, especially on defense. He needs to work on his offensive game a little. He and [Jordan Morgan](#) (below) will be counted on to provide upperclass leadership.

Senior Eligibility

[Jordan Morgan](#) #52 (6'8", 250 pounds, F) – It seems like Jordan has been here forever. He redshirted his freshman year, for various medical reasons, and now he finally has senior eligibility. He plays taller than his listed height, and he plays hard and tough underneath. He started most of the games at center last season, until he rolled his ankle in late January. He missed a few games, and came back slowly, which allowed Mitch McGary to start and develop into a force. Jordan will still get his minutes this season, but he might end up behind McGary. He can still help out a lot, especially with some senior leadership.

New Players

Coach Beilein brought in another top-notch recruiting class. While it isn't a big or as highly-ranked as last season's freshman class, it fills in the gaps on the roster quite nicely:

[Cole McConnell](#) #12 (6'5", 200 pounds, G) – Cole is a "preferred (or recruited) walk-on", which means that he has a spot on the team, but not a scholarship (yet). He also has taken over for Josh Bartelstein as the team blogger, and he shows real promise. Of course, his "official" blog is carefully monitored by the Athletic Department, so it won't contain anything outrageous. His personal Twitter feed ([@cmcconnell4](#)) is much more entertaining. Reading his bio on MGoBlue.com, it looks like he's a good shooter. Hopefully, we'll get to see him play.

[Andrew Dakich](#) #5 (6'2", 185 pounds, G) – Does the name "Dakich" seem familiar? His father, Dan Dakich, played his college ball at Indiana, and is now an ESPN college basketball analyst,

and a pretty good one. Andrew is another "preferred walk-on", but he's a talented guard, and he could see some game action in real games, not just "garbage time".

[Mark Donnal](#) #34 (6'9", 230 pounds, F) - Mark is another big body for the frontcourt. Given all the depth at forward/center, he's a good candidate for a redshirt. I don't know much about him, but I'm looking forward to seeing him play in the 2 exhibition games.

[Zak Irvin](#) #21 (6'6", 200 pounds, G) - Zak is a highly-recruited sharpshooter, and was "Mr. Basketball" in Indiana last year. He's a great shooter and scorer, and he will get a chance to fill Hardaway's spot in the roster.

[Sean Lonergan](#) #20 (6'5", 195 pounds, F) - Sean is another "preferred walk-on", destined for the practice squad.

[Derrick Walton Jr.](#) #10 (6'1", 185 pounds, G) - Derrick has the most pressure on him, since everyone will be watching him to see if he can at least partially replace Trey Burke. He's a great shooter and scorer, and is good at seeing the floor and distributing the ball. We'll have to see how he does against major college competition.

The key freshmen are obviously Walton and Irvin. If they can step in and at least partially replace Burke and Hardaway, respectively, Michigan will do fine this season. Donnal is not as much of a factor, and the other 3 freshmen are destined for the practice squad.

This Season

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

Date	Opponent	Location	Time (ET)
10/29/2013 (Tue)	Concordia (MI) (exh)	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
11/04/2013 (Mon)	Wayne State (exh)	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
11/08/2013 (Fri)	UMass-Lowell	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
11/12/2013 (Tue)	South Carolina State	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
11/17/2013 (Sun)	Iowa State	Ames, IA	5:00 p.m.
Puerto Rico Tip-Off			
11/21/2013 (Thu)	Long Beach State	San Juan, PR	5:00 p.m.
11/22/2013 (Fri)	Florida St./Virginia Common.	San Juan, PR	5:00/7:30 p.m.
11/24/2013 (Sun)	Championship/Consolation	San Juan, PR	TBA
11/29/2013 (Fri)	Coppin State	Ann Arbor, MI	3:00 p.m.
ACC/Big Ten Challenge			
12/03/2013 (Tue)	Duke	Durham, NC	9:15 p.m.
12/07/2013 (Sat)	Houston Baptist	Ann Arbor, MI	12:00 p.m.
12/14/2013 (Sat)	Arizona	Ann Arbor, MI	12:00 p.m.
Brooklyn Hoops Holiday Invitational			
12/21/2013 (Sat)	Stanford	Brooklyn, NY	8:30 p.m.
12/28/2013 (Sat)	Holy Cross	Ann Arbor, MI	6:30 p.m.
01/02/2014 (Thu)	Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN	5:00 p.m.
01/05/2014 (Sun)	Northwestern	Ann Arbor, MI	TBA
01/09/2014 (Thu)	Nebraska	Lincoln, NE	7:00 p.m.
01/14/2014 (Tue)	Penn State	Ann Arbor, MI	8:00 p.m.
01/18/2014 (Sat)	Wisconsin	Madison, WI	4:00 p.m.
01/22/2014 (Wed)	Iowa	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
01/25/2014 (Sat)	Michigan State	East Lansing, MI	7:00 p.m.
01/30/2014 (Thu)	Purdue	Ann Arbor, MI	9:00 p.m.
02/02/2014 (Sun)	Indiana	Bloomington, IN	1:00 p.m.
02/05/2014 (Wed)	Nebraska	Ann Arbor, MI	6:30 p.m.
02/08/2014 (Sat)	Iowa	Iowa City, IA	12:00 p.m.
02/11/2014 (Tue)	Ohio State	Columbus, OH	9:00 p.m.

02/16/2014 (Sun)	Wisconsin	Ann Arbor, MI	1:00 p.m.
02/23/2014 (Sun)	Michigan State	Ann Arbor, MI	12:00/6:00 p.m.
02/26/2014 (Wed)	Purdue	West Lafayette, IN	7:00 p.m.
03/01/2014 (Sat)	Minnesota	Ann Arbor, MI	6:00 p.m.
03/04/2014 (Tue)	Illinois	Champaign, IL	5:00 p.m.
03/08/2014 (Sat)	Indiana	Ann Arbor, MI	6:00 p.m.
Big Ten Tournament			
03/13/2014 (Thu)	1 st Round	Indianapolis, IN	TBA
03/14/2014 (Fri)	2 nd Round	Indianapolis, IN	TBA
03/15/2014 (Sat)	Semifinals	Indianapolis, IN	1:40/4:05
03/16/2014 (Sun)	Championship	Indianapolis, IN	3:30 p.m.

Some comments on the schedule:

- Michigan has two exhibition games this season, instead of the typical single game.
- Michigan (#9) and Virginia Commonwealth (#15) are the only ranked teams in the Puerto Rico Tip-Off, but it's still a good field. The other "name" teams are Kansas State, Georgetown, and Florida State.
- The toughest stretch in the schedule is definitely the 3 games starting on 02/11 @OSU, followed by a home vs. Wisconsin, and home vs. MSU.
- After several years of the same 4 "one play" teams (Iowa, Nebraska, Minnesota, and Wisconsin), Michigan has 4 new "one play" teams: Penn State (home), Northwestern (home), Illinois (away), and Ohio State (away). Those are 2 tough away games, but easy home games. It should be reversed next season, which is even better.

Expectations

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

- Should Win (17) – UMass-Lowell, South Carolina State, Iowa State, Long Beach State, Coppin State, Houston Baptist, Arizona, Stanford, Holy Cross, Northwestern, Nebraska (twice), Penn State, Iowa (twice), Purdue (home), Minnesota (home).
- Should Lose (5) – Duke, Wisconsin (away), MSU (away), Indiana (away), OSU (away).
- Toss Up (8) – 2nd and 3rd round games in PR, Minnesota (away), Wisconsin (home), MSU (home), Purdue (away), Illinois (away), Indiana (home).

So, if UM can win all 17 of the "Should Win" games, and half of the 8 "Toss Up" games, that would give them a record of 21-9 (11-7 in the Big Ten). That 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 Tuesday (10/29, 7:00 p.m., No TV) vs. Concordia (MI). Of course, UM will win handily, and get to try all kinds of combinations of players out there. Come on down to Crisler Arena to check out this season's edition of Michigan Basketball, and stop by sections 209/210 to say hi.

Go Blue!