

Nothing But 'Net – Week #01 – 11/10/2014 – Season Preview

Finally! It's time for college basketball! After the disappointing UM football season, I'm ready for some basketball. The first game is tonight (11/10/2014) in Crisler Arena at 7:00. It's an exhibition vs. Wayne State. The team also had an open practice last week (Wednesday, 11/05/2014), which I went to and enjoyed.

Here's my standard description of this weekly column:

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.

Once again, let's get right to the big question:

How good is the 2014-2015 team going to be? The quick answer: pretty good.

The last couple of years, my answer has been "really good", not "pretty good". Last year, I was right: UM won the Big Ten title outright (by 3 games), and made it to the Elite Eight in the NCAA Tournament. This year, I don't have my expectations set as high. For the third or fourth year in a row, Michigan has the same problem: extreme youth. That makes it hard to predict how good (or bad) Michigan will be. On the one hand, UM will lean heavily on 6 new freshmen, which can be a recipe for disaster. On the other hand, [Coach Beilein](#) has proven time and again that he can get great results from a young, inexperienced team. Michigan is ranked in the mid-20's in all the preseason polls, and picked to finish 4th or 5th in the (newly expanded) Big Ten.

Read on for more details.

Last Season

Michigan ended last season with a record of 28-9 (15-3 in the Big Ten). They went 8-4 in non-conference play, with some good wins ([Florida State](#), in San Juan, and [Stanford](#), in Brooklyn), some understandable losses (at [Iowa State](#), at [Duke](#), and home vs. [Arizona](#)), and one disappointing loss ([Charlotte](#), in San Juan). They won their first 8 Big Ten games, including big wins at [Nebraska](#) (their only home loss last year), at [Wisconsin](#), home vs. [Iowa](#), and at [Michigan State](#), before they hit a rough patch. They lost 3 out of their next 5 games (at [Indiana](#), at [Iowa](#), and home vs. [Wisconsin](#)), before winning their last 5 games, which works out to 15-3 in league play.

They entered the Big Ten Tournament as the #1 seed, and made it to the championship game, where [they got crushed by Michigan State](#).

They entered the NCAA Tournament as a #2 seed, and they made it to the Elite Eight, where [they lost on a last-second shot to Kentucky](#).

The trouble with having a good team with good players is that those good players are enticed by the NBA to leave early. After the 2012-2013 season, UM lost [Trey Burke](#) and [Tim Hardaway, Jr.](#), [who both got drafted in the 1st round](#). After last season, [they lost 3 more stars: Mitch McGary, Glenn Robinson III, and Nik Stauskas](#). Stauskas (8th pick) and McGary (21st pick) went in the 1st round, and GR3 (40th pick), went in the 2nd round. Those 5 players

were the starting 5 for Michigan when [they played in the National Championship game in April 2013](#). That's a lot of talent to lose.

Players Lost

Besides McGary, GR3, and Stauskas, Michigan lost 4 other players from last season's team: 2 freshmen, 1 graduating senior, and 1 transfer:

- [Cole McConnell](#) - Left the program.
- [Brad Anlauf](#) - Left the program.
- [Jon Horford](#) - Left the program, and transferred to the University of Florida.
- [Jordan Morgan](#) - Graduated.

McConnell and Anlauf were freshmen walk-ons on the practice squad, and they only played in "garbage time". Other than a [brief mention on UMHoops.com](#), I can't find out anything else about their departure from the team. McConnell did have injury problems last season. He also wrote an amusing official blog for the team last season, and I'll miss that.

Even though Horford was a senior, he had junior eligibility, due to a redshirt season (his sophomore season, with a broken foot). He is the 2nd player in as many years to use the "graduate transfer 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 Horford is doing. It's a shame he decided to leave, since he would have been the featured big man this season, with Morgan graduating and McGary leaving for the NBA.

Finally, there's Jordan Morgan. What a great guy! He didn't just graduate, he got his BS in Engineering, then got his Masters in Engineering. He was a mainstay defensively, and he always played hard, kept his mouth shut, and was a quiet leader. He will be missed.

Players Returning

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

Freshman Eligibility

[Mark Donnal](#) #34 (6'9", 240 pounds, F) - Mark voluntarily redshirted last season, so he still has freshman eligibility. He practiced with the team all last season, and the word out of practice was that he gave Morgan and Horford all they could handle. He didn't show much of that ability in the open practice, but he did show a lot of potential. He is certainly the best outside shooter that Beilein has had in a "big man" since he got to Michigan. He'll be the starter at center, at least until someone beats him out.

Sophomore Eligibility

[Andrew Dakich](#) #11 (6'2", 190 pounds, G) - Andrew was the leader of the practice squad ("The Bench Mob") last season, especially during the games, when his reactions on the bench were often as exciting as the plays on the court. He only played in "garbage time" last season, but he looked pretty good in the open practice, and he might get some mainstream playing time this season. Note, he changed his number from 5 last season to 11 this season.

[Zak Irvin](#) #21 (6'6", 215 pounds, G/F) - Zak put on 15 pounds of muscle in the off-season, and you can't miss the new look. He was "just a shooter" last season, and he was very good at it, but we're expecting to see a more complete game from him this season. He should be one of the stars, and one of the leading scorers in most games.

[Sean Lonergan](#) #20 (6'5", 200 pounds, F) - Sean is the other returning member of last season's "Bench Mob". He only played in "garbage time" last season, and I expect more of the

same this season. He looked good in the open practice, but there's a lot of talent ahead of him.

[Duncan Robinson](#) #22 (6'8", 190 pounds, G/F) - Duncan is a transfer from (Division III) Williams College. He'll have to sit out this season, and he'll have sophomore eligibility next season. He was a great scorer at Williams. We'll see how that translates to Division I basketball next season.

[Derrick Walton Jr.](#) #10 (6'0", 185 pounds, G) - Derrick had a very good freshman season, but he was following a tough act (Trey Burke), and he was on a team with 3 future NBA players. I expect him to be a bigger part of the offense this season, and if he shows the same improvement between his freshman and sophomore seasons that previous players have under Beilein (Darius Morris, Trey Burke, and Nik Stauskas, for example), he'll be another star and leading scorer on the team.

Junior Eligibility

[Michael \("Spike"\) Albrecht](#) #2 (5'11", 175 pounds, G) - Spike is one of the oldest and most experienced players on this team, and one of the leaders. He'll back up Walton at point guard, and chip in the occasional big 3-pointer.

[Max Bielfeldt](#) #44 (6'7", 245 pounds, F) - Max was voluntarily redshirted his freshman year, so he has junior eligibility. He's a big, strong player, and he did pretty well last year. He is the only big man on the team with any experience in a college game, so he'll get some playing time, especially early in the season, while the young big men are learning the game.

[Caris LeVert](#) #23 (6'7", 200 pounds, G) - Caris grew another inch and put on another 15 pounds since last season, for the second year in a row. He's certainly the most versatile player on the team, and he should be one of the stars and leading scorers.

Senior Eligibility

None. Bielfeldt is listed on the [official roster](#) as a senior, but he still has junior eligibility. Listing him as a senior just means that he probably won't be invited back for his redshirt senior year. Maybe he'll use the "graduate transfer rule" next year?

New Players

Coach Beilein brought in another interesting recruiting class. While it isn't as highly-ranked as the last couple classes, it fills in the gaps on the roster quite nicely:

[Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman](#) #12 (6'4", 175 pounds, G) - From here on, he's either going to be "MAAR" or "Rahk" (his nickname on the team). Rahk was a late signing by Coach Beilein. He looked good in the open practice, and he should be part of the regular rotation.

[Kameron Chatman](#) #3 (6'7", 210 pounds, G/F) - Kameron is the highest-ranked recruit in this class. He has already earned a starting spot, and he showed us why in the open practice. He looked "college ready".

[Aubrey Dawkins](#) #24 (6'6", 190 pounds, G/F) - Aubrey has been a nice surprise. He was another late signing by Coach Beilein, and it's hard to figure out why so few other schools were interested in him. He's got good size, a sweet shot, and great basketball IQ. The other players say that he's the best leaper and dunker on the team. He continues the recent trend of sons of former NBA players coming to UM (GR3, Tim Hardaway Jr., Jon Horford, and Jordan Dumars). Aubrey's father is Johnny Dawkins, who played at Duke and in the NBA, and now coaches Stanford.

[Ricky Doyle](#) #32 (6'9", 245 pounds, F) - Ricky is yet another big man, giving Michigan lots of depth and options at the power forward and center positions. He has a 7'2" wingspan, and

can play with his back to the basket. He looked OK in the open practice, and he'll get his chance at center. He's a "banger" underneath, where Donnal is more of a "finesse" player.

[Austin Hatch](#) #30 (6'6", 215 pounds, G) - Austin is an interesting story. He committed to Michigan on 06/15/2011, then was in a plane crash 10 days later that killed his father and stepmother, and critically injured him. He was in intensive care for a couple months, and missed a lot of high school, so he was given an extra year of high school eligibility, and moved his college commitment to 2014. He has recovered enough to play limited minutes on his high school team, but it remains to be seen if he will ever be able to play Division 1 basketball. He'll get his chance at Michigan. He had very limited participation in the open practice, and he didn't look ready to play yet. He may end up with a career-long medical redshirt.

[DJ Wilson](#) #5 (6'8", 200 pounds, F) - DJ sounds like another GR3. He's athletic, he can shoot the 3-pointer, and he runs the floor well. He was a crowd favorite at the open practice, especially when he swatted a shot in the lane, which is his specialty. He's another player with a wingspan much greater than his height: 7'3"

The key freshmen are Chatman, Donnal, and Doyle. They will need to grow up quickly.

This Season

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

Date	Opponent	Location	Time (ET)
11/10/2014 (Mon)	Wayne State (exh)	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
11/15/2014 (Sat)	Hillsdale College	Ann Arbor, MI	2:00 p.m.
Legends Classic - Ann Arbor Regional			
11/17/2014 (Mon)	Bucknell	Ann Arbor, MI	8:00 p.m.
11/20/2014 (Thu)	Detroit-Mercy	Ann Arbor, MI	6:00 p.m.
Legends Classic - Championship			
11/24/2014 (Mon)	Oregon	Brooklyn, NY	9:00 p.m.
11/25/2014 (Tue)	Villanova/Virginia Common.	Brooklyn, NY	TBA
11/29/2014 (Sat)	Nicholls State	Ann Arbor, MI	4:00 p.m.
ACC/Big Ten Challenge			
12/02/2014 (Tue)	Syracuse	Ann Arbor, MI	7:30 p.m.
12/06/2014 (Sat)	New Jersey Inst. Of Tech.	Ann Arbor, MI	12:00 p.m.
12/09/2014 (Tue)	Eastern Michigan	Ann Arbor, MI	9:00 p.m.
12/13/2014 (Sat)	Arizona	Tucson, AZ	5:15 p.m.
12/20/2014 (Sat)	SMU	Ann Arbor, MI	12:00 p.m.
12/22/2014 (Mon)	Coppin State	Ann Arbor, MI	8:00 p.m.
12/30/2014 (Tue)	Illinois	Ann Arbor, MI	3:00 p.m.
01/03/2015 (Sat)	Purdue	West Lafayette, IN	2:15 p.m.
01/06/2015 (Tue)	Penn State	State College, PA	7:00 p.m.
01/10/2015 (Sat)	Minnesota	Ann Arbor, MI	12:00/1:00 p.m.
01/13/2015 (Tue)	Ohio State	Columbus, OH	7:00 p.m.
01/17/2015 (Sat)	Northwestern	Ann Arbor, MI	8:15 p.m.
01/20/2015 (Tue)	Rutgers	Piscataway, NJ	6:30 p.m.
01/24/2015 (Sat)	Wisconsin	Ann Arbor, MI	4:00/7:00 p.m.
01/27/2015 (Tue)	Nebraska	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
02/01/2015 (Sun)	Michigan State	East Lansing, MI	1:00 p.m.
02/05/2015 (Thu)	Iowa	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
02/08/2015 (Sun)	Indiana	Bloomington, IN	1:00 p.m.
02/12/2015 (Thu)	Illinois	Champaign, IL	9:00 p.m.
02/17/2015 (Tue)	Michigan State	Ann Arbor, MI	9:00 p.m.
02/22/2015 (Sun)	Ohio State	Ann Arbor, MI	1:00/3:00/5:15
02/28/2015 (Sat)	Maryland	College Park, MD	TBA
03/03/2015 (Tue)	Northwestern	Evanston, IL	9:00 p.m.

03/07/2015 (Sat)	Rutgers	Ann Arbor, MI	12:00/2:15 p.m.
Big Ten Tournament			
03/11/2015 (Wed)	Opening Round	Indianapolis, IN	TBA
03/12/2015 (Thu)	1 st Round	Indianapolis, IN	TBA
03/13/2015 (Fri)	2 nd Round	Indianapolis, IN	TBA
03/14/2015 (Sat)	Semifinals	Indianapolis, IN	TBA
03/15/2015 (Sun)	Championship	Indianapolis, IN	3:30 p.m.

Some comments on the schedule:

- Both Villanova (#12) and Virginia Commonwealth (#15) are ranked, so the 2nd round game in Brooklyn will be a tough test.
- Syracuse is ranked #23, just ahead of Michigan, so that should be a good game.
- Arizona is ranked #2. That game, in Tucson, will be a real challenge.
- There are 2 tough stretches in the schedule:
 - The 3 games starting on 01/24: home vs. Wisconsin, home vs. Nebraska, and at MSU.
 - The 3 games starting on 02/17: home vs. MSU, home vs. OSU, and at Maryland.
- With the newly expanded Big Ten (now 14 teams, with Maryland and Rutgers), each team plays 8 teams once and 5 teams twice, for a total of 18 games. This season, Michigan plays:
 - Once: Purdue (away), Penn State (away), Minnesota (home), Wisconsin (home), Nebraska (home), Iowa (home), Indiana (away), Maryland (away).
 - Twice: Illinois, Ohio State, Northwestern, Rutgers, Michigan State.

Expectations

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

- Should Win (15) – Hillsdale, Bucknell, Detroit-Mercy, Nicholls State, NJIT, Eastern Michigan, SMU, Coppin State, Illinois (home), Penn State, Minnesota, Northwestern (home), Rutgers (away), Northwestern (away), Rutgers (home).
- Should Lose (3) – Arizona, Ohio State (away), Michigan State (away).
- Toss Up (12) – Oregon, 2nd round Legends Classic, Syracuse, Purdue, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Iowa, Indiana, Illinois (away), Michigan State (home), Ohio State (home), Maryland.

That's a lot more "Toss Up" games than usual, due to the unpredictable nature of a team that will lean on freshmen so heavily. If UM can win all 15 of the "Should Win" games, and half of the 12 "Toss Up" games, that would give them a record of 21-9 (12-6 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 tonight (Monday, 11/10/2014, 7:00 p.m., BTN Plus) vs. Wayne State. 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!