

Nothing But 'Net – Week #01 – 11/02/2015 – Season Preview

Wow! Is it college basketball season already? I guess so, since the first game is this Friday (11/06/2015) in Crisler Arena at 7:00. It's an exhibition vs. LeMoyne. Even before that, the team has an open practice tonight (Monday, 11/02/2015) in Crisler. It's on!

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 2015-2016 team going to be? The quick answer: pretty good.

Sure, I said "pretty good" last season, and that wasn't the way it worked out, but I feel pretty good about this season's team. As we'll see below ("Last Season"), the problem last season was injuries. Assuming Michigan doesn't have the same rash of catastrophic injuries to key players again this season, they should be much better. For a change, Michigan has a lot of depth and experience, after several seasons of very young and inexperienced teams. They're not ranked in the Coaches Poll, and they're picked to finish 5th or 6th in the Big Ten.

Read on for more details.

Last Season

Michigan ended last season with a record of 16-16 (8-10 in the Big Ten). They went 7-5 in non-conference play, with some good wins ([Oregon](#), in Brooklyn, and [Syracuse](#), at home), some understandable losses (vs. [#12] [Villanova](#) in Brooklyn, at [#3] [Arizona](#), and home vs. [SMU](#)), and two very disappointing losses ([NJIT](#) at home, and [Eastern Michigan](#) at home). In particular, the loss to NJIT was one of the most embarrassing and devastating losses in Michigan athletics history, right up there with the football team's loss to Appalachian State. It also directly led to Michigan's loss 3 days later to a mediocre EMU team.

We didn't realize it at the time, but the loss to Villanova was very costly to the rest of the season. Michigan's starting point guard, [Derrick Walton, Jr.](#), injured his toe in the Villanova game, and although he played in 14 more games, he was never quite the same after the injury. He finally gave up, and sat out the last 12 games of the season. He was missed.

Michigan had a tough time in Big Ten play, never winning more than 2 games in a row, and losing several heartbreakers, including 4 overtime losses (home vs. [#6] [Wisconsin](#), at [Michigan State](#), at [Illinois](#), and at [Northwestern](#)). Their only impressive Big Ten win was at home vs. [#24] [Ohio State](#).

Once again, a single game was very costly to the rest of the season. Michigan beat [Northwestern](#) at home, and on the very last play of the game, with 1 second left, the best player on the team ([Caris LeVert](#)) fell and broke a bone in his foot. He was lost for the rest of the season, 15 more games. It was the straw that broke the camel's back. Michigan just lost too much talent, and never really recovered.

They were the #9 seed in the Big Ten Tournament, and they beat the #8 seed ([Illinois](#)) before losing to the #1 seed ([Wisconsin](#)). Their 16-16 record wasn't good enough to get into the NCAA or NIT tournaments, so that was that.

Players Lost

Michigan only lost two players from last season's roster:

[Max Bielfeldt](#) – Max was a redshirt junior last season, so he could have come back for his 5th year, but he didn't. Apparently, he was willing and interested in returning, but he wasn't invited back. He graduated, so he's eligible 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 Bielfeldt is doing. He'll play this season at Indiana.

[Austin Hatch](#) – 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 had recovered enough to play limited minutes on his high school team, but it remained to be seen if he would ever be able to play Division 1 basketball. He got his chance last season at Michigan. He played in 5 games, for a total of 5 minutes, and he scored one point. After the season, he realized that he would never be able to contribute at this level, and [he voluntarily took a career-ending medical redshirt](#). He's still on the team, as an undergraduate student assistant, but he isn't eligible to play in real games.

Players Returning

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

Freshman Eligibility

[DJ Wilson](#) #5 (6'10", 240 pounds, F) - DJ injured his knee early last season, and took a medical redshirt year. He's back and healthy, and 2 inches taller and 40 pounds heavier (in a good way). He can be a big contributor on the team, with a very unique skill set. He's also got a wingspan much greater than his height: 7'3"

Sophomore Eligibility

[Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman](#) #12 (6'4", 185 pounds, G) – Rahk was pretty lightly used until the two big injuries wiped out the starting backcourt last season, then he became a key player. He did quite well, with his best game at Michigan State (18 points). He's fast and slippery, and he's excellent at driving the lane. He'll be one of the mainstream players this season.

[Kameron Chatman](#) #3 (6'8", 215 pounds, G/F) - Kameron was the highest-ranked recruit in last season's class, but he had an underwhelming freshman season. He wasn't bad, but he wasn't very effective either. He tended to just drift around out there. Let's hope he can turn things around this season.

[Aubrey Dawkins](#) #24 (6'6", 205 pounds, G/F) - Aubrey was a nice surprise last season. Once again, he was pretty lightly used until the big injury situation, then he became a very important player. Once he got his chance, he stepped up big time. His 20 points single-handedly kept UM in the home game vs. Illinois, which they won in overtime, and he and Caris LeVert were the only UM players to score more than 30 points in a game last season. He had 3 other big games, and he became a weapon towards the end of last season. He'll definitely be one of the mainstream players this season.

[Mark Donnal](#) #34 (6'9", 240 pounds, F) - Mark voluntarily redshirted his first season, so he still has sophomore eligibility. He's another player who underwhelmed last season. The hype out of practice was that he was going to be great last season, but he never really got on track. He only hit double figures once (vs. SMU), and he only averaged 3.4 points/game and 2.1 rebounds/game. He needs to be more aggressive out there, and use his height and bulk to have his way under the basket. He wants to stand out by the 3-point line and shot 3-pointers. We need another "banger".

[Ricky Doyle](#) #32 (6'9", 250 pounds, F) - Ricky started last season slowly, but once he started getting more playing time, he made the most of it. He was the only true "banger" on the team last season, and he may be the only one this season as well. He's a pretty good shooter, and good finisher, and a good rebounder. He runs the court well, and he's a good defender. He'll be the starter at center.

[Duncan Robinson](#) #22 (6'8", 210 pounds, G/F) - Duncan is a transfer from (Division III) Williams College. He sat out last season, and he has sophomore eligibility this season. He was a great scorer at Williams. We'll see how that translates to Division I basketball. The word out of practice is that he's a terrific 3-point shooter, but we'll have to see how the rest of his game is (passing, rebounding, and defending).

Junior Eligibility

[Andrew Dakich](#) #11 (6'2", 190 pounds, G) - Andrew voluntarily "burned his redshirt" late in the season last year, when the team needed him. He only played in the last 13 games, and he only took 8 shots, but he did score 5 points. He's a leader of the practice squad, and I don't know how much playing time he'll get this season, with all the depth Michigan has.

[Zak Irvin](#) #21 (6'6", 215 pounds, G/F) - Zak went from "just a shooter" as a freshman to a well-rounded player last season. It took him a while to adjust to being the "go to guy" when LeVert and Walton both suffered season-ending injuries, but once he made the adjustment, he did a great job. He should be one of the stars this season, and one of the leading scorers in most games. He made at least one 3-pointer in every game last season, which is impressive.

[Sean Lonergan](#) #20 (6'5", 210 pounds, F) - Sean was supposed to be "just a practice player" last season, but with all the injuries, he ended up playing significant minutes in important games, just to "hold the fort". He played in 17 games, but only took 2 shots. He made them both! This season, I expect to see a lot less of him.

[Derrick Walton Jr.](#) #10 (6'1", 190 pounds, G) - Derrick was having a pretty good sophomore season, then he injured his toe. He kept playing for 14 more games, he just lost some of his "pop" out there. He's all healed now, and I'm looking for big things from him. He's a very good point guard, with great speed, a nice shooting stroke, and great rebounding instincts.

Senior 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. Last season, he did a great job holding the team together when two of the main players went down to injury. He became the main point guard, and he did a respectable job at it. This season, he'll back up Walton at point guard, and chip in the occasional big 3-pointer.

[Caris LeVert](#) #23 (6'7", 205 pounds, G) - Caris was leading the team in every statistical category when he broke the bone in his foot last season. He was sorely missed. He's back, and he's ready to be a star. He's certainly the most versatile player on the team, and he should be one of the leading scorers in the Big Ten this season. He'll play in the NBA next season.

New Players

[Coach Beilein](#) brought in a very small recruiting class this season, with only one scholarship player and one preferred walk-on:

[Brent Hibbitts](#) #0 (6'8", 205 pounds, F) – Brent is a preferred walk-on, and will be part of the practice squad. He had an impressive high school career, and he might just be able to carve out a few minutes of playing time in the non-conference games.

[Moritz Wagner](#) #13 (6'10", 225 pounds, F) – Moritz is another interesting story. He is a German citizen, from Berlin. He played on a high-level club team in Berlin, and has a classic European skill set. He's more of a finesse player than a "banger", with a good 3-point shot. He'll need to continue to bulk up and learn to play against physical defenders.

This Season

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

Date	Opponent	Location	Time (ET)
11/06/2015 (Fri)	Le Moyne (exh)	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
11/13/2015 (Fri)	Northern Michigan	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
Battle 4 Atlantis – Mainland Game			
11/16/2015 (Mon)	Elon	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
Gavitt Games (Big East/Big Ten Challenge)			
11/20/2015 (Fri)	Xavier	Ann Arbor, MI	9:00 p.m.
Battle 4 Atlantis – Championship Games			
11/25/2015 (Wed)	Connecticut	Paradise Island, Bahamas	9:30 p.m.
11/26/2015 (Thu)	Charlotte/Syracuse	Paradise Island, Bahamas	3:30/9:30 p.m.
11/27/2015 (Fri)	TBA	Paradise Island, Bahamas	TBA
ACC/Big Ten Challenge			
12/01/2015 (Tue)	North Carolina State	Raleigh, NC	7:00 p.m.
12/05/2015 (Sat)	Houston Baptist	Ann Arbor, MI	2:00 p.m.
12/08/2015 (Tue)	SMU	Dallas, TX	9:00 p.m.
12/12/2015 (Sat)	Delaware State	Ann Arbor, MI	12:00 p.m.
12/15/2015 (Tue)	Northern Kentucky	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
12/19/2015 (Sat)	Youngstown State	Ann Arbor, MI	6:00 p.m.
12/23/2015 (Wed)	Bryant	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
12/30/2015 (Wed)	Illinois	Champaign, IL	3:00 p.m.
01/02/2016 (Sat)	Penn State	Ann Arbor, MI	12:00 p.m.
01/07/2016 (Thu)	Purdue	West Lafayette, IN	7:00/9:00 p.m.
01/12/2016 (Tue)	Maryland	Ann Arbor, MI	9:00 p.m.
01/17/2016 (Sun)	Iowa	Iowa City, IA	2:00/4:30 p.m.
01/20/2016 (Wed)	Minnesota	Ann Arbor, MI	8:30 p.m.
01/23/2016 (Sat)	Nebraska	Lincoln, NE	2:00 p.m.
01/27/2016 (Wed)	Rutgers	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
01/30/2016 (Sat)	Penn State	New York, NY	12:00 p.m.
02/02/2016 (Tue)	Indiana	Ann Arbor, MI	9:00 p.m.
02/06/2016 (Sat)	Michigan State	Ann Arbor, MI	2:00 p.m.
02/10/2016 (Wed)	Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN	9:00 p.m.
02/13/2016 (Sat)	Purdue	Ann Arbor, MI	2:00 p.m.
02/16/2016 (Tue)	Ohio State	Columbus, OH	7:00 p.m.
02/21/2016 (Sat)	Maryland	College Park, MD	1:00/7:30 p.m.
02/24/2016 (Wed)	Northwestern	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
02/28/2016 (Sun)	Wisconsin	Madison, WI	4:00/6:00 p.m.
03/05/2016 (Sat)	Iowa	Ann Arbor, MI	8:00 p.m.
Big Ten Tournament			
03/09/2016 (Wed)	Opening Round	Indianapolis, IN	TBA
03/10/2016 (Thu)	1 st Round	Indianapolis, IN	TBA

03/11/2016 (Fri)	2 nd Round	Indianapolis, IN	TBA
03/12/2016 (Sat)	Semifinals	Indianapolis, IN	1:00/3:30 p.m.
03/13/2016 (Sun)	Championship	Indianapolis, IN	3:30 p.m.

Some comments on the schedule:

- Xavier is going to be a tough opponent in the Gavitt Games.
- There are several good teams (Syracuse, UConn, Texas, and Gonzaga) in the Battle 4 Atlantis tournament.
- Playing at NC State in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge will be, well, a challenge.
- Playing at SMU will also be a challenge.
- The rest of the non-conference opponents are cupcakes.
- There are 2 tough stretches in the Big Ten schedule:
 - The 3 games starting on 02/02: home vs. Indiana, home vs. Michigan State, and at Minnesota.
 - 3 of the 4 games starting on 02/16: at Ohio State, at Maryland, and at Wisconsin, with a home game vs. Northwestern in there as a breather.
- Each Big Ten team plays 8 teams once and 5 teams twice, for a total of 18 games. This season, Michigan plays:
 - Once: Illinois (away), Nebraska (away), Rutgers (home), Indiana (home), Michigan State (home), Ohio State (away), Northwestern (home), Wisconsin (away).
 - Twice: Penn State, Purdue, Maryland, Iowa, Minnesota.

Expectations

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

- Should Win (14) – Northern Michigan, Elon, Houston Baptist, Delaware State, Northern Kentucky, Youngstown State, Bryant, Penn State (home), Minnesota (home), Rutgers, Penn State (neutral), Purdue (home), Northwestern (home), Iowa (home).
- Should Lose (3) – Ohio State, Maryland (away), Wisconsin.
- Toss Up (14) – Xavier, UConn, 2nd round Battle 4 Atlantis, 3rd round Battle 4 Atlantis, NC State, SMU, Illinois, Purdue (away), Maryland (home), Iowa (away), Nebraska, Indiana, Michigan State, Minnesota (away).

If UM can win all 14 of the "Should Win" games, and half of the 14 "Toss Up" games, that would give them a record of 21-10 (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 Friday (11/06/2015, 7:00 p.m., BTN Plus) vs. Le Moyne. Le Moyne is coached by John Beilein's son, Pat Beilein. 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!