

Nothing But 'Net – Week #13 – 01/25/2016 – A Pair Of Important Wins

The University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games this week, and they won both of them. [On Wednesday \(01/20/2016\), they beat Minnesota 74-69](#) in Crisler Arena, then [on Saturday \(01/23/2016\), they beat Nebraska 81-68](#) in Lincoln. The two wins raise Michigan's record to 15-5 (5-2 in the Big Ten).

These are two important wins because Michigan has to beat the "lower division" teams, in between the battles with the "upper division" teams. Michigan had previously faced three Top-25 teams in a row (at Purdue, home vs. Maryland, and at Iowa) before taking on unranked Minnesota and Nebraska. They lost two of those three tough games, so they needed to win the ones they are expected to win. Actually, they were favored by 17 points vs. Minnesota, but they were one-point underdogs in the Nebraska game. The oddsmakers liked Nebraska because of their road victory over Michigan State last week, and their great record at home. So, Michigan's 13-point win over Nebraska is a lot more impressive than it looks at first glance.

The Minnesota game was kind of frustrating. Michigan shot very poorly all game, and let an obviously inferior Minnesota team hang around. It wasn't Minnesota's defense that made Michigan shoot poorly, it was "just one of those nights". Fortunately, it was against a team that wasn't good enough to take advantage of Michigan's "off night". Michigan opened up an early 7-point lead (11-4) with 15:47 left in the 1st half. They pushed the lead up as high as 15 points (37-22, with 1:56 left), and appeared to be cruising to an easy blowout victory, when they suddenly went cold (3 missed shots and 2 turnovers), and Minnesota got hot (3-for-3, including two 3-pointers). Minnesota finished the half on an 8-0 run, to make it a much closer 7-point game at halftime, 37-30. Michigan never trailed in the 2nd half, but they never pulled away from Minnesota either. The lead got up to 10 points twice (44-34 and 48-38), but it was generally around 6-7 points. With 2:07 left in the game, Michigan went up by 9 points (62-53), and it was over. Of course, Minnesota's coach (the "JV" Pitino) had to show that he knew how to "extend the game" and try every trick, but none of it worked. It was just annoying.

The Nebraska game was another example of letting an inferior team hang around. Michigan had a tremendous run to start the 1st half (18-6, on just 9 possessions) and an even better run to start the 2nd half (21-3, also on just 9 possessions), and in between they shot decently, but turned the ball over too many times. They squandered two nice runs, and made the game closer than it needed to be. Once again, Michigan led for the entire 2nd half, but they let Nebraska get within 2 points (66-64) with 3:11, before closing the game out with a nice 15-4 run.

It was impressive that Michigan won both games without their best player, [Caris LeVert](#), who missed two more games this week with a left ankle injury. He has now missed 5 games, and is still listed as "day to day".

So, what did we learn about this season's UM team this week? We learned that Michigan can beat the "lower division" teams even when they don't play their best game.

Stats

The [stats for the Minnesota game](#) are almost embarrassing. Michigan shot very poorly overall (23-for-63 = 36.5%), they shot 3-pointers very poorly (9-for-31 = 29.0%), but they did shoot free throws well (19-for-23 = 82.6%). They tied in the rebounding battle (38-38), and they won the turnover battle (6-12). They won the game because Minnesota was pathetic shooting 3-pointers (6-for-22 = 27.3%).

The [stats for the Nebraska game](#) are much better. Michigan shot very well overall (25-for-47 = 53.2%), they shot 3-pointers very well (11-for-21 = 52.4%), and they shot free throws very well (20-for-23 = 87.0%). They won the rebounding battle (32-24), but they lost the turnover battle (14-10). Those turnovers almost cost them the game.

With LeVert still unavailable, [Coach Beilein](#) went with his new regular starting lineup: [Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman](#) (MAAR), [Mark Donnal](#), [Zak Irvin](#), [Duncan Robinson](#), and [Derrick Walton Jr.](#) Only one starter hit double figures in both games: Walton, with 22 and 19 points. He also had 12 rebounds in the Nebraska game, for a nice double-double. Three other starters hit double figures in one game: Donnal had 5 and 14 points, Irvin had 19 and 8 points, and Robinson had 9 and 21 points. Irvin had 11 rebounds in the Minnesota game, for a double-double for him, and Robinson's 21 points vs. Nebraska are a UM career-high. The fifth starter, MAAR, had 6 and 8 points.

The bench contributed a few points this week. [Aubrey Dawkins](#) had 7 and 5 points, [Ricky Doyle](#) had 2 points in each game, and [Moritz Wagner](#) had 4 points in each game. [Andrew Dakich](#) played in both games, and failed to score. [DJ Wilson](#) played in the Minnesota game, and failed to score, but didn't play in the Nebraska game. [Kameron Chatman](#) played in the Nebraska game, but failed to score, and didn't play in the Minnesota game. Michigan could really use more bench scoring.

This Week

This week, Michigan plays two more Big Ten games. On Wednesday (01/27/2016, 7:00 p.m., BTN), they play [Rutgers](#) in Crisler Arena, then on Saturday (01/30/2016, 12:00 p.m., BTN), they play a rare neutral site game vs. [Penn State](#) in [Madison Square Garden](#) (New York, NY) as part of "[Big Ten Super Saturday](#)" (UM vs. PSU in basketball at noon and hockey at 7:00 p.m.).

Rutgers is the worst major conference basketball team in the country this season, by far. They are 6-14 (0-7 in the Big Ten), with no quality wins, and several embarrassing losses (St. John's, Creighton, Seton Hall, George Washington, and Monmouth). Michigan should beat them by 30 or more.

Michigan has already played Penn State this season, in Crisler Arena on 01/02/2016), and [they crushed them 79-56](#). Since then, PSU has gone 2-3, with wins over Minnesota and Northwestern, and losses to Michigan State, Purdue, and Wisconsin. Michigan should beat them up again, probably by even more points than the first time. Although this is a neutral site game, Michigan has lots of alumni and supporters in New York City, and I expect this game to feel more like a home game for UM.

Come on down to Crisler on Wednesday, tune by on Saturday, and check back next week to see what happened, and why.

Go Blue!