

## Nothing But 'Net – Week #01 – 10/31/2016 – Season Preview

I know, it's hard to get excited about college basketball in the middle of such an exciting college football season, but it's that time. The first game is this Friday (11/04/2016) in Crisler Arena at 7:00. It's an exhibition vs. Armstrong State. In fact, the team has already had an open practice this past week (Tuesday, 10/25/2016) in Crisler. That went pretty well, and gave us a quick look at this season's team.

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](http://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](http://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 2016-2017 team going to be? The quick answer: about the same as last season.*

So, how was last season? In my preseason preview last year, I predicted "pretty good", and that was about right. Last season's team wasn't bad, but they weren't great either. I expect this season's team to be about the same. They're not ranked in the Coaches Poll, and they're picked to finish 6<sup>th</sup> or 7<sup>th</sup> in the Big Ten.

Read on for more details.

### Last Season

Michigan ended last season with a record of 23-13 (10-8 in the Big Ten). They went 10-3 in pre-conference play, with some good wins ([Texas](#), in the Bahamas, and at [N.C. State](#)), some understandable losses (at home against a good [Xavier](#) team, vs. [#18] [Connecticut](#), in the Bahamas, and at [#19] [SMU](#)), and a bunch of unsurprising wins against cupcakes.

In Big Ten play, Michigan won a couple games that they weren't supposed to win (vs. [#3] [Maryland](#) at home, and vs. [#18] [Purdue](#) at home), lost several games that they were expected to lose (at [#20] [Purdue](#), at [#16] [Iowa](#), at home vs. [#22] [Indiana](#), at home vs. [#10] [Michigan State](#), at [#6] [Maryland](#), and at home vs. [#16] [Iowa](#)), and lost a couple "toss-up" games on the road (at [Ohio State](#), and at [Wisconsin](#)). Still, they finished above 0.500 in the Big Ten, which was better than expected.

In the Big Ten Tournament, Michigan was the #8 seed, and they beat the #9 seed ([Northwestern](#)) in the 2<sup>nd</sup> round, then had their biggest win of the season, when they upset the #1 seed ([Indiana](#)) in the 3<sup>rd</sup> round. They lost to the #4 seed ([Purdue](#)) in the tournament semi-finals, but did well enough overall to get invited to the NCAA Tournament.

In the NCAA Tournament, Michigan was a #11 seed in the East Regional, and had to play a "First Four" (play-in) game vs. another #11 seed, [Tulsa](#). They won that game, but lost to the #6 seed ([Notre Dame](#)) in the next round.

### Players Lost

Michigan lost 5 players from last season's roster:

[Spike Albrecht](#) – Spike could have returned for a 5<sup>th</sup> season, since he got a medical redshirt for last season, but he wasn't invited back. Instead, [he'll be the latest Michigan player to use the "graduate transfer rule", and will be immediately eligible to play at Purdue this season](#). We'll miss him.

[Kameron Chatman](#) – It was kind of a surprise when Kameron announced at the end of last season that he [was leaving the team to transfer to University of Detroit-Mercy \(UDM\)](#), where he will have to sit out a season and have junior eligibility. The head coach at UDM is Bacari Alexander, who was an assistant coach at Michigan, and coached Chatman during his freshman season. Kameron was lightly used at Michigan, and will only be missed in a depth sense.

[Aubrey Dawkins](#) – It was also surprising when Aubrey announced at the end of last season that he [was leaving the team to transfer to University of Central Florida \(UCF\)](#) to play for his father, who is the head coach there. He will also have to sit out a season, and have junior eligibility. After a promising freshman season, I thought that Michigan could build their offense around Aubrey, but he regressed during his sophomore season, and now he's gone. He will be missed.

[Ricky Doyle](#) – Yet another (bad) surprise: [Ricky left the team at the end of the season to transfer to Florida Gulf Coast University \(FGCU\)](#), where he will be closer to home. He's another member of the promising class that finished their sophomore seasons, so he'll have junior eligibility after sitting out a year. At one point, Ricky looked like the starter at center, then he faded. Still, he will be missed, mostly in a depth sense.

[Caris LeVert](#) – Finally, a graduating senior. [Caris was selected #20 in the 1<sup>st</sup> round of the NBA draft by the Brooklyn Nets](#). He's still recovering from surgery on the foot injury that cost him huge chunks of his last 2 seasons at Michigan.

On the one hand, it looks really bad that 3 players voluntarily transferred away from Michigan, and a 4<sup>th</sup> player was forced out, but on the other hand, each of the decisions makes sense when examined individually. Chatman and Doyle had both slid way down the bench, and were getting less and less playing time, and Dawkins wanted to play for his father. Michigan will be breaking in their point guard of the future (see below), so there really wasn't much room for Albrecht. It's a shame, but it all makes sense, sort of. I would be just as happy if everyone (except LeVert, who graduated) had stayed.

## **Players Returning**

The good news is that all 5 starters from the end of last season are returning for this season. In fact, Michigan has a very talented group of players returning this season. Here they are, by class year (eligibility):

### Freshman Eligibility

[Brent Hibbitts](#) #0 (6'8", 210 pounds, F) – Brent is a preferred walk-on, and will be part of the practice squad. He voluntarily redshirted last season, so he still has freshman eligibility. We only got to see him briefly in last season's exhibition game, so we don't know much about him. He should see some playing time in "garbage time" this season.

### Sophomore Eligibility

[Moritz Wagner](#) #13 (6'11", 240 pounds, F) – Moritz is probably the most exciting player on the team this season. He played well at the beginning of last season as a true freshman, then vanished for most of the Big Ten schedule. Just as suddenly, he reappeared for the postseason games, and was Michigan's best post player. He spent the summer in Ann Arbor (Camp Sanderson) working on his conditioning, and he grew an inch and added 15 pounds of

muscle. He also added several inches to his vertical jump. If he can stay away from foul trouble, he could be a force out there this season.

[DJ Wilson](#) #5 (6'10", 240 pounds, F) - DJ injured his knee during his freshman season, and took a medical redshirt year. He played some last season, but he never really looked comfortable out there. He has been moved from center to wing, and we'll see if that revitalizes his game. He's very athletic, with the highest vertical jump on the team.

#### Junior Eligibility

[Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman](#) #12 (6'4", 190 pounds, G) - MAAR got better as the season went on last year. He was the best player at slashing to the rim, and he showed great athleticism against bigger players. He doesn't have the court vision of a point guard, and he doesn't have the 3-point touch of a shooting guard, but he is fast and fearless.

[Mark Donnal](#) #34 (6'9", 240 pounds, F) - Mark voluntarily redshirted his first season, so he has junior eligibility, even though he is listed as a senior on the official roster. He began last season as a starter, lost his spot to Doyle, and almost disappeared. When he got into the non-conference games, he didn't do much. Then the Big Ten season started, and he suddenly woke up. He had several 20+ point games in league play, and became the clear choice for the starting center. If he can start from that point this season, he could be a force in the Big Ten.

[Sean Lonergan](#) #20 (6'5", 210 pounds, F) - Sean was voluntarily redshirted last season, so he's a redshirt junior, even if he's listed as a senior on the official roster. During his sophomore season he played in 17 games, but only took 2 shots. He made them both! I'm not sure how much he will play this season, but I expect it to be mostly "garbage time".

[Duncan Robinson](#) #22 (6'8", 215 pounds, G/F) - Duncan started last season red hot from 3-point range, then cooled down as the wear-and-tear of the long Big Ten schedule ground him down. On the positive side, as his 3-point shooting cooled off, he got much better at other phases of his game, especially rebounding and driving to the basket. His defense could still use some work, and another summer of Camp Sanderson will certainly help. If he has built up his conditioning and endurance, he could be one of the elite shooters in the Big Ten (and the nation) this season.

#### Senior Eligibility

[Andrew Dakich](#) #11 (6'2", 190 pounds, G) - Andrew has voluntarily "burned his redshirt" the last two seasons, and has certainly helped the team when it needed him. He plays hard when he's in, but he's obviously a step slower and a lot less athletic than the scholarship players on the other teams. The opposing defenses get to play 5-on-4 when he's on the floor, since he refuses to shoot, even when he's wide open. Still, he provides valuable rest for the main rotation guards when he's in, and he can "hold the fort" for a few minutes.

[Zak Irvin](#) #21 (6'6", 215 pounds, G/F) - Zak had a slow start to last season as he recovered from pre-season back surgery. When both seniors (Spike Albrecht and Caris LeVert) went down to injuries, he and Derrick Walton Jr. stepped up as on-floor leaders. Zak wasn't particularly efficient, but he managed to score a lot of points when his team needed them. He played hard, and he provided good leadership. Look for more of the same this season.

[Derrick Walton Jr.](#) #10 (6'1", 190 pounds, G) - Derrick was the other on-court leader last season, once the seniors went down to injury. He played pretty well all season, but he was obviously running out of gas near the end. He was asked to carry a heavy load, due to the injuries, and it took a toll on him. He's a very good point guard, with great speed, a nice shooting stroke, and great rebounding instincts.

#### **New Players**

[Coach Beilein](#) brought in a good recruiting class this season, with four scholarship players, one preferred walk-on, and one transfer:

[Austin Davis](#) #51 (6'10", 240 pounds, F) – Austin finished as runner-up for Mr. Basketball in Michigan last season. He's an old-fashioned, back-to-the-basket, physical center. He's a good scorer, rebounder, and defender.

[Charles Matthews](#) #1 (6'6", 190 pounds, G) – [Charles is a transfer from Kentucky, where he did pretty well as a true freshman](#). He'll have to sit out for a year, then he'll have sophomore eligibility next season.

[Xavier Simpson](#) #3 (6'0", 180 pounds, G) – Xavier is a true freshman, and is the point guard of the future that I mentioned above. He will get plenty of chances to play this season, studying under Walton. Xavier was Mr. Basketball for Ohio, and while he's not very tall, he can run an offense, and he can score.

[Jon Teske](#) #15 (7'0", 245 pounds, C) – Finally! A 7-footer! Jon is a rim-protector, which Michigan hasn't had in years, and he can score. We'll see how quickly he can pick up the college game.

[Ibi Watson](#) #23 (6'5", 190 pounds, G/F) – Ibi will remind us of Caris LeVert, once he gets the hang of the college game. He's got the same tools, and the same number.

[Fred Wright-Jones](#) #14 (5'11", 170 pounds, G) – [Fred was a manager on the team last season, and was converted into a practice player after all the injuries](#). He actually dressed for one game last season, although he didn't play, and now he's on the official roster. He's going to be a practice squad player, but he might get in for some "garbage time".

The odds are good that either Davis or Teske will voluntarily redshirt this season, but it's not clear which one it will be.

## This Season

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

Date	Opponent	Location	Time (ET)
11/04/2016 (Fri)	Armstrong State (exh)	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
<a href="#">2K Classic</a> – Ann Arbor Regional			
11/11/2016 (Fri)	Howard	Ann Arbor, MI	9:00 p.m.
11/13/2016 (Sun)	IUPUI	Ann Arbor, MI	12:00 p.m.
<a href="#">2K Classic</a> – Championship Games			
11/17/2016 (Thu)	Marquette	New York, NY	9:30 p.m.
11/18/2016 (Fri)	Pittsburgh/SMU	New York, NY	4:30/6:30 p.m.
11/23/2016 (Wed)	South Carolina	Columbia, SC	5:00 p.m.
11/26/2016 (Sat)	Mount St. Mary's	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
<a href="#">ACC/Big Ten Challenge</a>			
11/30/2016 (Wed)	Virginia Tech	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
12/03/2016 (Sat)	Kennesaw State	Ann Arbor, MI	TBA
12/06/2016 (Tue)	Texas	Ann Arbor, MI	9:00 p.m.
12/10/2016 (Sat)	UCLA	Los Angeles, CA	8:00 p.m.
12/13/2016 (Tue)	Central Arkansas	Ann Arbor, MI	9:00 p.m.
12/17/2016 (Sat)	Maryland Eastern Shore	Ann Arbor, MI	3:00 p.m.
12/22/2016 (Thu)	Furman	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
01/01/2017 (Sun)	Iowa	Iowa City, IA	TBA
01/04/2017 (Wed)	Penn State	Ann Arbor, MI	8:30 p.m.
01/07/2017 (Sat)	Maryland	Ann Arbor, MI	3:15 p.m.
01/11/2017 (Wed)	Illinois	Champaign, IL	9:00 p.m.
01/14/2017 (Sat)	Nebraska	Ann Arbor, MI	2:00 p.m.

01/17/2017 (Tue)	Wisconsin	Madison, WI	9:00 p.m.
01/21/2017 (Sat)	Illinois	Ann Arbor, MI	2:15 p.m.
01/26/2017 (Thu)	Indiana	Ann Arbor, MI	9:00 p.m.
01/29/2017 (Sun)	Michigan State	East Lansing, MI	1:00 p.m.
02/04/2017 (Sat)	Ohio State	Ann Arbor, MI	6:00 p.m.
02/07/2017 (Tue)	Michigan State	Ann Arbor, MI	9:00 p.m.
02/12/2017 (Sun)	Indiana	Bloomington, IN	1:00 p.m.
02/16/2017 (Thu)	Wisconsin	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
02/19/2017 (Sun)	Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN	1:00/TBA p.m.
02/22/2017 (Wed)	Rutgers	Piscataway, NJ	6:30 p.m.
02/25/2017 (Sat)	Purdue	Ann Arbor, MI	TBA
03/01/2017 (Wed)	Northwestern	Evanston, IL	7:00 p.m.
03/05/2017 (Sun)	Nebraska	Lincoln, NE	8:00 p.m.
<b>Big Ten Tournament</b>			
03/08/2017 (Wed)	Opening Round	Washington, DC	TBA
03/09/2017 (Thu)	1 <sup>st</sup> Round	Washington, DC	TBA
03/10/2017 (Fri)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Round	Washington, DC	TBA
03/11/2017 (Sat)	Semifinals	Washington, DC	1:00/3:30 p.m.
03/12/2017 (Sun)	Championship	Washington, DC	3:30 p.m.

Some comments on the schedule:

- All three of the other teams (Marquette, Pittsburgh, and SMU) in the 2K Classic are good. It will be a challenging tournament.
- Playing at South Carolina is going to be a tough game.
- Michigan stands a good chance against Virginia Tech in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge.
- The home game against Texas is the best home non-conference opponent.
- The game at UCLA will be a big challenge.
- The rest of the non-conference opponents are cupcakes.
- The toughest stretch in the Big Ten schedule is the Indiana (home), Michigan State (away), Ohio State (home), Michigan State (home), Indiana (away), Wisconsin (home) section. If Michigan can go 3-3 for those 6 games, they should be in good shape.
- Each Big Ten team plays 8 teams once and 5 teams twice, for a total of 18 games. This season, Michigan plays:
  - Once: Iowa (away), Penn State (home), Maryland (home), Ohio State (home), Minnesota (away), Rutgers (away), Purdue (home), Northwestern (away).
  - Twice: Illinois, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Indiana, Michigan State.

### Expectations

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

- Should Win (13) – Howard, UIPUI, Mount St. Mary's, Kennesaw State, Central Arkansas, Maryland Eastern Shore, Furman, Penn State, Nebraska (both), Minnesota, Rutgers, Northwestern.
- Should Lose (6) – UCLA, Iowa, Wisconsin (away), Michigan State (both), Indiana (away).
- Toss Up (12) – Marquette, 2<sup>nd</sup> round 2K Classic, South Carolina, Virginia Tech, Texas, Maryland, Illinois (both), Indiana (home), Ohio State, Wisconsin (home), Purdue.

If UM can win all 13 of the "Should Win" games, and half of the 12 "Toss Up" games, that would give them a record of 19-12 (9-9 in the Big Ten). That might be good enough to get UM into the NCAA Tournament, depending on how they do in the Big Ten Tournament.

### This Week

As you can see in the schedule above, Michigan's first (exhibition) game is Friday (11/04/2016, 7:00 p.m., BTN Plus) vs. Armstrong State. Michigan legend Cazzie Russell is

one of the assistant coaches for Armstrong State, which is why Michigan is playing them. 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!