

## Nothing But 'Net – Week #01 – 10/29/2018 – Season Preview Q&A's

Yes, it's that time already: college basketball season. The University of Michigan men's basketball team's first game is this Friday (11/02/2018) in Crisler Arena at 7:00 p.m. It's an exhibition vs. Northwood. Also, the team has an open practice tonight (Monday, 10/29/2018, 6:00 p.m.) in Crisler.

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 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.

This season, instead of my normal season preview, it's Question & Answer Time!

Q: How good is the 2018-2019 team going to be?

A: Not quite as good as last season's team, but close. Sure, they lost a lot of talent (see below), but they also brought in a lot of talent (see further below).

Q: I thought they lost a lot of talent; how can they be good?

A: Yeah, they lost a lot of talent (Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman [MAAR], Duncan Robinson, and Jaaron Simmons all graduated, and Moe Wagner left early for the NBA), but they were all backed up by very capable players last season, and all those guys are back, a year older and better. More about them below.

Q: Who else left the team from last season?

A: Besides MAAR, Duncan Robinson, Jaaron Simmons, and Moe Wagner, a few other players left the team in the off-season: Brent Hibbitts (grad transfer to Grand Canyon University), Naji Ozier (left the team, still in school), Rico Ozuna-Harrison (switched to being a manager), and Ibi Watson (transferred to Dayton). Watson was the only scholarship player among that bunch, and he just never worked out at Michigan. The rest of them were all scout team players.

Q: OK, who is returning this season?

A: Michigan has a great core of returning players this season:

### Sophomore Eligibility

[C.J. Baird](#) #24 (6'5", 220 pounds, F) – He's a scout team player who played in 5 games last season, including both Final Four games. He scored 5 points in those 5 games, including a 3-pointer.

[Eli Brooks](#) #55 (6'1", 185 pounds, G) – He played sparingly, and not very well, last season as the backup point guard. He needs to show that he can be a solid option at point guard.

[Austin Davis](#) #51 (6'10", 245 pounds, F/C) – He's definitely the backup center. He needs to refine his game a little, and stay away from silly fouls. He showed

flashes of brilliance last season, but didn't play very much. He'll be counted on for a lot more minutes and points this season.

[Isaiah Livers](#) #4 (6'7", 235 pounds, F) – He was nominally a starter for most of last season, but he often played about 10 minutes in favor of Duncan Robinson, who played better coming off the bench. Livers needs to step up this season and play like a starter.

[Jordan Poole](#) #2 (6'5", 195 pounds, G) – If Matthews (see below) is the star of this team, Poole is almost tied with him in star power. No one will ever forget his amazing shot to win the Houston game in the NCAA Tournament last season, but he contributed a lot more than that. He also had some very forgettable games, which he needs to work on. Big things are expected of him.

[Luke Wilson](#) #32 (6'0", 170 pounds, G) – He's another scout team player. He only played in 2 games last season, and missed the only shot he took.

#### Junior Eligibility

[Charles Matthews](#) #1 (6'6", 205 pounds, G) – As mentioned above, Charles is the star of this team. He had a very good season last season, and he needs to have an even better one this season. He has all the tools, he just needs to focus better.

[Zavier Simpson](#) #3 (6'0", 190 pounds, G) – He's definitely the starting point guard, and the leader of this team. He has a reputation as a "bulldog", and he deserves it. He's very quick and very talented. He finally unleashed his outside shot in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of last season, and he needs to continue to fire away.

[Jon Teske](#) #15 (7'1", 260 pounds, C) – He's the most important player on this team. Everyone else is a good 3-point shooter, and that was Michigan's not-so-secret weapon last season: all 5 players could shoot 3-pointers, which opened up the lane for drives to the hoop. Moe Wagner is gone, and if opposing centers can leave Jon alone out top and clog the middle, that'll be a problem. He needs to develop at least a moderate threat to shoot from outside, to keep the lane open.

#### Senior Eligibility

There are no seniors on the team this season. This is a young team.

Q: Isn't this a highly-regarded incoming freshman class?

A: You bet! There are 5 incoming freshman, and they are all very talented, but don't start dreaming of another Fab Five. Instead, think of great replacements for the guys who left. Here they are:

[Ignas Brazdeikis](#) #13 (6'7", 215 pounds, F) – Call him "Iggy". I'm not looking forward to typing his last name for the next 3-4 years. He will remind you of Nik Stauskas, in a good way, but with more defense. He's a 3-point gunner, and he can drive to the rim. I expect him to be a crowd favorite.

[Colin Castleton](#) #11 (6'11", 210 pounds, F/C) – He'll remind you of a slender Moe Wagner. He can shoot from 3-point range, but maybe not as well as Moe did, and he can handle the ball, but maybe not quite as well as Moe did, but give him time. He could be just as good as Moe, some day.

[David DeJulius](#) #0 (6'0", 190 pounds, G) – The point guard of the future. He'll remind you of Derrick Walton, Jr. It takes a full season for a point guard to learn the Beilein System, but once he does, watch out.

[Brandon Johns, Jr.](#) #23 (6'8", 225 pounds, F) – He played his high school ball in East Lansing, and if you don't think Tom Izzo wanted him, you haven't been paying attention. He's got a college basketball body, he just needs to learn the system.

[Adrien Nuñez](#) #5 (6'6", 205 pounds, G) – I had to learn how to type an "ñ" in Microsoft Word for him. He's probably the best 3-point shooter in the freshman class, and maybe the best on the whole team. We'll have to wait and see.

Q: Who else is new on the team this season?

A: Besides the 5 scholarship freshmen, there is one more newcomer: [Jaron Faulds](#) (#44), a 6'10", 225 pound forward/center. He's a sophomore transfer from Columbia, and he'll have to sit out this season as a transfer. In the meantime, he'll be quite an asset on the scout team.

Q: Who will probably be the starters on this season's team?

A: With all the talent returning this season, the starting lineup is looking pretty solid:

Point guard: Simpson (backups: Brooks and DeJulius)  
Shooting guard: Poole (backups: Matthews and Nuñez)  
Small forward: Matthews (backups: Poole, Iggy, and Johns)  
Power forward: Livers (backups: Iggy and Johns)  
Center: Teske (backups: Davis and Castleton)

Q: Wait a minute: I thought Poole and Matthews were guards; what's up with "small forward"?

A: They are both very versatile and the right size to play either shooting guard or small forward. Think of them as "wings", along with Iggy and Johns.

Q: What is Michigan going to do with 3 point guards?

A: I have no idea. Simpson is definitely the starting point guard, but who's the backup? The more experienced, but slightly disappointing Brooks, or the rookie, DeJulius? It would make sense to give most of the backup minutes to DeJulius, but I guess it depends on how things go in practice and the early games.

Q: What is Michigan going to do with 3 centers?

A: This one is a little easier: it would make good sense to voluntarily redshirt Castleton, to get him a year's worth of experience and bulking up in the weight room.

Q: Who else might redshirt?

A: Maybe Nuñez, depending on how quickly he picks up the Beilein System, and how well he plays defense.

Q: What happened last season?

A: Great question, and a fun answer: Michigan made it to the [National Championship game](#) in San Antonio, and actually led 21-14 with 10:59 to go in the 1<sup>st</sup> half, before Villanova woke up and crushed them. Michigan's last lead was 21-20 at the 7:32 mark, before Villanova pulled away for good. But, despite the lopsided loss (79-62) in the championship game, it was a magical season for Michigan, including a 2<sup>nd</sup> consecutive Big Ten Tournament championship and a 14-game winning streak to take them to the final game. There were a few

disheartening losses early in the season, but Michigan played very well down the stretch, and was definitely the 2<sup>nd</sup> best team in the nation last season.

Q: What does the schedule look like this season?

A: After the exhibition game (Northwood [Fri 11/02/2018]) and a couple easy "warm up" games (Norfolk State [Tue 11/06/2018] and Holy Cross [Sat 11/10/2018]), Michigan gets a rematch against (gulp) Villanova on their home court (Wed 11/14/2018). This is a "Gavitt Game" (the Big East/Big Ten Challenge).

As usual, Michigan is playing in a Thanksgiving tournament, this time the Naismith Memorial Basketball Hall Of Fame Tip-Off Tournament, in Uncasville, Connecticut. The other 3 teams don't look very scary: George Washington (Sat 11/17/2018), and either Providence or South Carolina (Sun 11/18/2018).

Michigan returns home to play an easy game (Chattanooga [Fri 11/23/2018]) and a very hard game (North Carolina [Wed 11/28/2018]). The UNC game is part of the "ACC/Big Ten Challenge".

The Big Ten schedule has been expanded from 18 games last season to 20 games this season, so every Big Ten team has to play 2 conference games in early December. For Michigan, this means a home game vs. Purdue (Sat 12/01/2018) and a game at Northwestern (Tue 12/04/2018). This is Week #01 of the Big Ten schedule.

The rest of December is made up of 4 non-conference games, all at home, and all on weekends: South Carolina (Sat 12/08/2018), Western Michigan (Sat 12/15/2018), Air Force (Sat 12/22/2018), and Binghamton (Sun 12/30/2018).

Once 2019 starts, the next 18 games are all conference games, generally 2 per week (one weekday and one weekend-ish), and generally alternating between home and away:

Week #02: Penn State (home, Thu 01/03/2019) and Indiana (home, Sun 01/06/2019)  
Week #03: Illinois (away, Thu 01/10/2019) and Northwestern (home, Sun 01/13/2019)  
Week #04: Wisconsin (away, Sat 01/19/2019) [Bye week #1]  
Week #05: Minnesota (home, Tue 01/22/2019) and Indiana (away, Fri 01/25/2019)  
Week #06: Ohio State (home, Tue 01/29/2019) and Iowa (away, Fri 02/01/2019)  
Week #07: Rutgers (away, Tue 02/05/2019) and Wisconsin (home, Sat 02/09/2019)  
Week #08: Penn State (away, Tue 02/12/2019) and Maryland (home, Sat 02/16/2019)  
Week #09: Minnesota (away, Thu 02/21/2019) and Michigan State (home, Sun 02/24/2019)  
Week #10: Nebraska (home, Thu 02/28/2019) and Maryland (away, Sun 03/03/2019)  
Week #11: Michigan State (away, Sat 03/09/2019) [Bye week #2]

The Big Ten Tournament this year is in Chicago from Wednesday 03/13/2019 until Sunday 03/17/2019.

The NCAA Tournament this year starts on Tuesday 03/19/2019 (First Four) and ends on Monday 04/08/2019 in Minneapolis.

Q: Whew, that was a long one. Which games look the toughest?

A: Obviously, at Villanova and home vs. North Carolina in the non-conference, and both games against MSU. Purdue and Nebraska (?) are also supposed to be good this season, and Michigan is fortunate to only play them each once, both in Ann Arbor. The other games are the obvious easy home "guarantee" games or "toss-up" games.

Incidentally, Michigan's other "single plays" are Ohio State at home, and Illinois, Iowa, and Rutgers on the road.

Q: Any final thoughts?

A: After their amazing finish last season, it's important to be patient with this young team this season. They may not look very polished early in the year, but once they've got some games under their belt, and [Coach Beilein](#) has had some time to work with them, watch out. I expect them to be much better in March than they are in November.

Go Blue!