

Nothing But 'Net – Week #01 – 10/28/2019 – Season Preview

Yes, it's that time already: college basketball season. The University of Michigan men's basketball team's first game is this Friday (11/01/2019) in Crisler Arena at 7:00 p.m. It's an exhibition vs. Saginaw Valley State. Also, the team has an [open practice tonight \(Monday, 10/28/2019, 6:00 p.m.\) 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](#). 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, 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 is a special season for me, since this is my 20th season writing for UMGoBlue.com. My first article was posted on 12/04/1999, describing Michigan's victory over Chattanooga. I'll post a special article on 12/04/2019, looking back on the last 20 years in Michigan basketball.

In the meantime, there's a LOT to talk about. It was a very busy off-season, with lots of surprises and changes. Let's get to it.

Executive Summary

The big question: how good is Michigan going to be this season?

The big answer: it's hard to guess, with all the changes (see below), but I'm going to say "not as good as last year, but not bad".

What's New?

Wow, there's so much to talk about:

- A new head coach
- Several new assistant coaches
- Several semi-unexpected player departures
- One unexpected incoming freshman de-commitment
- One unexpected incoming freshman commitment

Head Coach

Unless you've been hiding under a rock for the last 5 months, I'm sure you've already heard that Michigan's former coach, John Beilein, suddenly [announced on 05/13/2019 that he was leaving his job at UM to coach the Cleveland Cavaliers in the NBA](#). It was a huge surprise, and no one saw it coming. Even though it was a big, shocking surprise, he left the University on good terms, and I'm sure most fans will join me in wishing him well. I know that I'm going to miss him. He did things the right way, and he represented the University with honor and class.

It didn't take Michigan long to find a very interesting replacement for Beilein: [on 05/22/2019, former Michigan player Juwan Howard was hired as the new head coach](#). Juwan was a member of the famous "Fab Five" teams from 1991-1994, before playing for 19 seasons in the NBA, then working as an assistant coach in the NBA for 5 seasons. Even though he has never been a head coach at any level, I'm expecting him to do very well as Michigan's new head coach.

Assistant Coaches

When you get a new head coach, [you usually get some new assistant coaches, and that's what happened this off-season](#). [Coach Howard](#) hung onto [Saddi Washington](#), but he lost DeAndre Haynes and Luke Yaklich, replacing them with [Phil Martelli](#) and [Howard Eisley](#). Martelli was the head coach at St. Joseph's for the last 24 years, and Eisley has 10 years of assistant coaching experience in the NBA. I'm sure they'll both do a fine job.

Player Departures

This is what I hate most about college basketball: the coaches work hard to evaluate hundreds of high school players, sometimes even abroad, and carefully pick out the players that they think will work out the best for their team. They spend years chasing these players, and finally get them on the team. They teach them and develop them, and finally get them to perform at an elite level, and "poof", off they go to the NBA Draft with 1-3 years of eligibility left. I hate that. Beilein was the best coach I've ever seen at finding underappreciated talent and developing it, and he was rewarded over and over again by players leaving school early for the NBA. I'm sure that was one of the reasons he finally left college basketball for the NBA.

So, who left early this off-season? Well, Charles Matthews, but that was expected. The two other players who left early were not particularly expected: [Iggy Brazdeikis and Jordan Poole](#). Iggy was the first "one and done" in a long time at Michigan, and Poole still had two years of eligibility left. If Iggy and Poole had come back for the 2019-2020 season, Michigan would be a Big Ten and national contender. Without them? Not so much.

De-Commitment

When Beilein announced that he was leaving for Cleveland, one of the two players committed to Michigan for the 2019-2020 season de-committed: Jalen Wilson. [He eventually chose Kansas](#), where he will probably sit and watch the postseason if the Jayhawks are banned from postseason play.

Commitment

The only good news in the off-season was [the surprise signing of Moe Wagner's younger brother, Franz, as an incoming freshman for the 2019-2020 season](#). He may or may not be as good as Jalen Wilson, but he's going to be pretty good, so we'll just have to wait and see.

Who's Coming Back?

After all the talk about who left, it's time to talk about who's coming back. Michigan has the core of a very good team, but much will depend on the development of the returning role players. The Wolverines are all set at point guard (Zavier Simpson), center (Jon Teske), and power forward (Isaiah Livers), but the other two positions (shooting guard and small forward) are up in the air. There are good candidates for both positions, and decent backups for all five spots, but the key this season is going to be the incoming sophomores. Other than Iggy, they didn't contribute very much very consistently, and they need to step up now.

Let's look at the returning players on the team:

Sophomore Eligibility

[Colin Castleton](#) #11 (6'11", 235 pounds, F/C) – Colin played in 19 games last season, and scored 21 points. He hit double figures once (11 points vs. Nebraska), and missed all 3 of his 3-point shots. He looked like he was starting to "get it", then he

regressed back to "lost freshman" mode. He really needs to step up this season. With Teske graduating after this season, Colin is going to be the starting center next season, and he needs to get ready. Hopefully, with a former center (Juwan Howard) as a coach, he'll develop into a solid Big Ten center.

[David DeJulius](#) #0 (6'0", 190 pounds, G) – David played in 25 games last season, and scored 14 points. He only scored more than 2 points once (4 points vs. Villanova), and shot 1-for-15 from 3-point range. He looked fairly comfortable out there, but he never did anything impressive, he just filled up space. Just like Castleton, he needs to step up this season, because he's going to be the starting point guard next season. A lot will depend on how quickly he can pick up Coach Howard's new offensive system.

[Brandon Johns, Jr.](#) #23 (6'8", 235 pounds, F) – Brandon played in 28 games last season, and scored 22 points. He had one good game (8 points vs. Indiana), and shot 1-for-3 from 3-point range. Like Castleton, he looked like he was starting to "get it", then he regressed back to "lost freshman" mode. He was supposed to be the second most "college-ready" of the freshmen, after Iggy. He'll get another chance this season. With his height, he's more of a small forward than a center.

[Adrien Nuñez](#) #5 (6'6", 210 pounds, G) – Adrien played in 20 games last season, and scored 3 points. His only points were vs. Indiana, on a 3-pointer. He was supposed to be the best 3-point shooter in the freshman class, but he shot 1-for-13 from deep. He needs to be a dependable shooter or he's going to slide to the end of the bench.

Junior Eligibility

[C.J. Baird](#) #24 (6'5", 225 pounds, F) – C.J. played in 13 games last season, and scored 9 points, all on 3-pointers. He shot 3-for-8 from deep. He's on the scout team, and will only play in "garbage time".

[Eli Brooks](#) #55 (6'1", 185 pounds, G) – Eli started last season as the most pleasant surprise of the season, but he really tailed off once the Big Ten season started. He played in all 37 games, and scored 91 points (2.5 points/game). He shot pretty well (37.8% overall, 29.2% from 3-point range), but he had way too many 0-point games.

[Austin Davis](#) #51 (6'10", 250 pounds, F/C) – Austin started last season slow, and went downhill from there. He played in 25 games, and scored 25 points, with a high game of 6 points vs. Chattanooga. He did shoot a nice percentage for the season (12-for-19 = 63.2%), but he had problems with committing silly fouls, and seemed a step slow out there. He was supposed to be a solid backup for Teske at center, but he was passed by a pair of true freshmen (Castleton and Johns) and Isaiah Livers on the depth chart.

[Isaiah Livers](#) #4 (6'7", 235 pounds, F) – Last season, Isaiah was a big contributor to Michigan's success. He played in 35 games, and started 3 of them, but he was really Michigan's sixth man, and he usually sparked the team when he came in. He played center much of the time, which allowed Michigan to play "small ball" and push the tempo a little more. He scored 278 points (7.9 points/game), and had the best 3-point shooting percentage on the team (52-for-122 = 42.6%).

[Rico Ozuna-Harrison](#) #14 (5'11", 175 pounds, G) – Rico didn't play in the 2018 portion of last season, and he only played in 2 games, took 1 shot, and missed it. He's on the scout team, and will only play in "garbage time".

[Luke Wilson](#) #32 (6'0", 175 pounds, G) – Luke only played in 10 games last season, took 3 shots, and missed them all. He's on the scout team, and will only play in "garbage time".

Senior Eligibility

[Zavier Simpson](#) #3 (6'0", 190 pounds, G) – Last season, Zavier didn't score much (8.8 points/game), and his shooting percentages weren't very good (43.4% overall, 30.8% from deep), but he did have the most assists (244) and steals (53) on the team by far. He does a great job running the offense, and he is tenacious on defense. This is his team, and his leadership will determine how they do.

[Jon Teske](#) #15 (7'1", 260 pounds, C) – Last season, Jon did a good job taking over as the starting center, and he does some things very well, but he's not a complete player. He was the 4th leading scorer on the team (9.5 points/game), and he shot very well overall (52.1%) and pretty well from 3-point range (29.9%). He led the team in rebounds (259) and blocks (75). On the other hand, he's not as quick or nimble as Isaiah Livers, and he had trouble defending smaller, more agile "stretch 5s". Still, it's nice to have a 7'1" guy out there protecting the rim. He's the other "leadership guy" on the team.

Who's New?

Michigan brought in two scholarship freshman (Cole Bajema and Franz Wagner), and gets the services of a transfer player who sat out last season (Jaron Faulds):

[Cole Bajema](#) #22 (6'7", 175 pounds, G) – Cole is a 4-star forward from Lynden, WA. He's got a sweet 3-point shot, and he can score in bunches. At 175 pounds, he needs some time in the weight room to play in the Big Ten.

[Jaron Faulds](#) #44 (6'10", 240 pounds, F) – Jaron had to sit out last season as a transfer player from Columbia. He played one season at Columbia, so he'll have sophomore eligibility. He is a preferred walk on, not a scholarship player, and he's on the scout team, and will probably only play in "garbage time".

[Franz Wagner](#) #21 (6'8", 205 pounds, G) – Franz is the younger brother of Moe Wagner, and he's got Moe's "basketball IQ", but not Moe's body or skillset. He's a different kind of player, more perimeter-oriented, with a nice 3-point shot. We'll have to see how quickly he can adapt to US college basketball. Unfortunately, [Franz broke his wrist](#) in preseason practice, so he'll miss the first 4-6 weeks of the season. Maybe he'll be ready by early December.

Starting Lineup/Depth Chart

As I mentioned above, three of the positions are pretty solid, with two up in the air. My guess:

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

Last Season

From last season's Wrap-Up article:

Michigan started strong, winning their first 17 games, a new program record. Along the way, they won some big games impressively: [at \(#8\) Villanova 73-46, vs. Providence 66-47 on a neutral court, at home vs. \(#11\) North Carolina 84-67, at home vs. \(#19\) Purdue 76-57, and at home vs. \(#21\) Indiana 74-63](#). Villanova, UNC, and Purdue all went on to have good seasons, so these wins held up as impressive.

On the surface, the hot start looks like a big accomplishment, but when you dig a little deeper, you can see that it cost UM dearly in the long run. Instead of building up Michigan's confidence, the 17-game winning streak really messed with their heads. The pressure got to them, and they started playing "not to lose", instead of "playing to win". It all came crashing down when [they went into Madison and looked terrible against a so-so Wisconsin team, losing 64-54](#). They were still shaken the next game, barely [beating an even less talented Minnesota squad 59-57 in Ann Arbor](#). They looked a little better the next two games, [beating Indiana on the road 69-46](#), and [Ohio State in Ann Arbor 65-49](#), but that was their last 3-game winning streak. The rest of the season they went L-W-W, five times:

- [Lost at Iowa 74-59, won at Rutgers 77-65, won at home vs. \(#19\) Wisconsin 61-52.](#)
- [Lost at Penn State 75-69, won at home vs. \(#24\) Maryland 65-52, won at Minnesota 69-60.](#)
- [Lost at home to \(#10\) Michigan State 77-70, won at home vs. Nebraska 82-53, won at \(#17\) Maryland 69-62.](#)
- [Lost at \(#9\) Michigan State 75-63, beat Iowa on a neutral court 74-53, beat Minnesota on a neutral court 76-49.](#)
- [Lost to \(#6\) Michigan State on a neutral court 65-60, beat Montana on a neutral court 74-55, beat Florida on a neutral court 64-49.](#)

That takes us to [the Sweet Sixteen loss vs. Texas Tech](#). Michigan just couldn't get any momentum going after the loss at Wisconsin. The win in Ann Arbor over Wisconsin was satisfying, and the wins over Maryland (twice) and Iowa were impressive, but the loss at Penn State was devastating, and the three losses in three weeks to MSU were very deflating.

This Season

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

Date	Opponent	Location	Time (ET)
11/01/2019 (Fri)	Saginaw Valley State (exh)	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
11/05/2019 (Tue)	Appalachian State	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
Gavitt Tipoff Games – Big East/Big Ten Challenge			
11/12/2019 (Tue)	Creighton	Ann Arbor, MI	6:30 p.m.
Battle 4 Atlantis – Mainland Bracket			
11/15/2019 (Fri)	Elon	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
11/22/2019 (Fri)	Houston Baptist	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
Battle 4 Atlantis – Championship Games			
11/27/2019 (Wed)	Iowa State	Paradise Island, Bahamas	12:00 p.m.
11/28/2019 (Thu)	Alabama/North Carolina	Paradise Island, Bahamas	1:30/6:30 p.m.
11/29/2019 (Fri)	Finals/Consolation	Paradise Island, Bahamas	TBA
ACC/Big Ten Challenge			
12/03/2019 (Tue)	Louisville	Louisville, KY	7:00/7:30 p.m.
12/06/2019 (Fri)	Iowa	Ann Arbor, MI	6:30 p.m.
12/11/2019 (Wed)	Illinois	Champaign, IL	9:00 p.m.
12/14/2019 (Sat)	Oregon	Ann Arbor, MI	12:00 p.m.
12/21/2019 (Sat)	Presbyterian	Ann Arbor, MI	12:00 p.m.
12/29/2019 (Sun)	UMass-Lowell	Ann Arbor, MI	2:00 p.m.
01/05/2020 (Sun)	Michigan State	East Lansing, MI	1:30/4:30 p.m.
01/09/2020 (Thu)	Purdue	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
01/12/2020 (Sun)	Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN	1:00 p.m.
01/17/2020 (Fri)	Iowa	Iowa City, IA	9:00 p.m.
01/22/2020 (Wed)	Penn State	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
01/25/2020 (Sat)	Illinois	Ann Arbor, MI	12:00 p.m.
01/28/2020 (Tue)	Nebraska	Lincoln, NE	7:00 p.m.
02/01/2020 (Sat)	Rutgers	New York, NY	4:30 p.m.
02/04/2020 (Tue)	Ohio State	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.

02/08/2020 (Sat)	Michigan State	Ann Arbor, MI	12:00 p.m.
02/12/2020 (Wed)	Northwestern	Evanston, IL	9:00 p.m.
02/16/2020 (Sun)	Indiana	Ann Arbor, MI	1:00 p.m.
02/19/2020 (Wed)	Rutgers	Piscataway, NJ	7:00 p.m.
02/22/2020 (Sat)	Purdue	West Lafayette, IN	2:00 p.m.
02/27/2020 (Thu)	Wisconsin	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
03/01/2020 (Sun)	Ohio State	Columbus, OH	4:00 p.m.
03/05/2020 (Thu)	Nebraska	Ann Arbor, MI	6:30 p.m.
03/08/2020 (Sun)	Maryland	College Park, MD	12:00 p.m.
Big Ten Tournament			
03/11/2020 (Wed)	1 st Round	Indianapolis, IN	TBA
03/12/2020 (Thu)	2 nd Round	Indianapolis, IN	TBA
03/13/2020 (Fri)	Quarterfinals	Indianapolis, IN	TBA
03/14/2020 (Sat)	Semifinals	Indianapolis, IN	TBA
03/15/2020 (Sun)	Championship	Indianapolis, IN	TBA

Some comments on the schedule:

- There are several good teams in the Battle 4 Atlantis: Iowa State, North Carolina, Gonzaga, and Oregon. It will be a challenging tournament.
- Playing at Louisville in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge is going to be extremely challenging.
- The two Big Ten games (Iowa and Illinois) early in December are a result of a 20-game Big Ten schedule.
- The home game against Oregon is the best home non-conference opponent. It will also be a challenging game.
- The rest of the non-conference opponents are cupcakes.
- The toughest stretch in the Big Ten schedule is the Michigan State (away), Purdue (home), Minnesota (away), Iowa (away) section, the first four games of 2020. If Michigan can win 3 of those 4 games, they should be in good shape.
- Each Big Ten team plays 6 teams once (3 home/3 away) and 7 teams twice, for a total of 20 games. This season, Michigan plays:
 - Once: Minnesota (away), Penn State (home), Northwestern (away), Indiana (home), Wisconsin (home), Maryland (away).
 - Twice: Iowa, Illinois, Michigan State, Purdue, Nebraska, Rutgers, Ohio State.

Expectations

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

- Should Win (12) – Appalachian State, Creighton, Elon, Houston Baptist, Presbyterian, UMass-Lowell, Penn State, Illinois (home), Nebraska (twice), Rutgers (twice).
- Should Lose (4) – Louisville, Michigan State (twice), Purdue (away).
- Toss Up (15) – Iowa State, Atlantis 2nd round, Atlantis 3rd round, Iowa (twice), Illinois (away), Oregon, Purdue (home), Minnesota, Ohio State (twice), Northwestern, Indiana, Wisconsin, Maryland.

If UM can win all 12 of the "Should Win" games, and just over half (8) of the 15 "Toss Up" games, that would give them a record of 20-11 (12-8 in the Big Ten). That should 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 (11/01/2019, 7:00 p.m., BTN Plus) vs. Saginaw Valley 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!