

Nothing But 'Net – Week #12 – 01/15/2024 – At Least We Have Football

The University of Michigan men's basketball team played one game this past week, and they lost it. [On Thursday \(01/11/2024\), they lost at Maryland 64-57](#). The loss lowers Michigan's record to 6-10 (1-4 in Big Ten). Michigan has now lost 5 games in a row.

What Happened?

At least we have football. The football team had a magical season, going undefeated (15-0) and winning the [2023 College Football Playoff \(CFP\) National Championship](#). I may be the "basketball guy" at UMGobBlue.com, but I'm also a big UM football fan. I've had season tickets for 50 years now, starting when I was a freshman in fall 1974. It was an amazing season. Go Blue!

That's in sharp contrast to the UM men's basketball team, which is having one of the worst seasons in their history, certainly the worst since I've been a fan. Sure, they still have a lot of games left to play, and they could still salvage a successful season, but watching them play, they stand little chance of getting anywhere near respectability. They stood a decent chance for a rare win vs. Maryland, but they threw the game away with both hands. It's very demoralizing.

Game Flow

The game was close in the early going, with both teams having trouble scoring. Michigan was up 7-6 at the first media timeout, with 14:40 to go in the 1st half. The score was still 7-6 at the next media timeout, with 11:54 to go. Michigan finally broke the long scoring drought by both teams, and managed to slowly extend their lead to 10-6 at the 10:38 mark. In less than a minute, Maryland tied it up, 10-10, with 9:48 to go. The game was tied at 12-12, 13-13, and 15-15, at the 7:02 mark. Suddenly, Michigan woke up and went on a quick 10-0 run, to make it 25-15 with 4:51 left. They hit a 3-pointer with 9 seconds left in the half, and led by 12 points (33-21) at halftime.

Remember the Penn State game last week? Remember how Michigan clawed their way to a nice lead at halftime (10 points), then threw it away as fast as they could at the start of the 2nd half? Déjà vu! They did it again. The 2nd half was a disaster. Their nice 12-point lead was down to 6 points (35-29) at the 17:45 mark, then 3 points (39-36) at the 14:42 mark. It was down to one point (43-42) with 11:37 to go, and all gone by the 10:00 mark, 44-44. The lead went back and forth for a couple minutes, with Michigan clinging to their last lead of the game (50-49) with 7:34 left. Maryland went ahead, and pushed their lead as high as 7 points (58-51) with 4:49 to go. Michigan got as close as one point (58-57) with 2:38 left, but that was their last points. Maryland made 6 free throws in the last 2:38, and Michigan couldn't buy a basket. They missed four 2-point shots, one 3-point shot, and one free throw. Horrible.

Stats

[The game stats](#) were miserable. Michigan shot very poorly overall (21-for-53 = 39.6%), they shot 3-pointers reasonably well, but not enough (5-for-15 = 33.3%), and they shot free throws poorly (10-for-15 = 66.7%). They lost the rebounding battle (35-32), but they did win the turnover battle (11-12). They lost this game with poor shooting and rebounding.

Who Started?

The starters were [Nimari Burnett](#), [Jaelin Llewellyn](#), [Olivier Nkamhoua](#), [Tarris Reed, Jr.](#), and [Terrance Williams II](#). Llewellyn started in place of [Dug McDaniel](#).

McDaniel is the regular starting point guard, but he didn't even make the trip. He is serving an indefinite (he says "6 game") "road game suspension". He is staying back in Ann Arbor when the team travels, so he can work on his academic issues. He isn't academically ineligible, he just isn't performing up to expectations academically, so he is missing road

games to give him more time to work on it. On the one hand, he's easily the most important and most valuable player on the team, and his absence is a huge problem. On the other hand, academics are important, and he can't let them slide. This is the right thing to do, but it sure hurts a team that doesn't need any help to underachieve.

Who Looked Good?

Nkamhoua was the leading scorer, with 18 points. He was also the leading rebounder, with 7. He did his best.

Williams was the only other Michigan player in double figures, with 10 points. He was OK, but not as effective as he's been lately.

Llewellyn almost hit double figures, with 9 points. He ran the offense fairly well, with 3 assists, but he also had 3 turnovers. He shot poorly (3-for-11 overall), and he had a tough time bringing the ball up court against pressure.

Reed also got close to double figures, with 8 points. He shot fairly well (3-for-5), but right there you can see the problem: only 5 shots in the paint. In all Michigan's losses, they've had trouble getting the ball into the post to Reed, and when they do, opponents almost always double- or even triple-team him. When that happens, things usually don't go well. Often, he just turns it over. If he gets a shot off, it's often blocked, or he misses. If he tries to find an open man to pass it out to, he often throws the ball away or the pass is intercepted. It seldom turns into a basket for Michigan. After 3 seasons of being able to get the ball in to Hunter Dickinson down low and having him either convert or get fouled, it's a big change not having a dominant post player. Reed is a good player, and he tries really hard, but the opposing teams have figured out that he doesn't handle a double- or triple-team well, and that's why Michigan is having trouble in their half-court offense.

Burnett also got close to double figures, with 7 points. He also shot poorly: 2-for-9 overall, 1-for-5 from deep. That shows another problem with Michigan's offense this season: poor outside shooting. As we saw in Reed's discussion, Michigan doesn't have a dominant post player, so their best hope for scoring some points is outside shooting. Unfortunately, they don't have any really deadly outside shooters either. That's a bad combination.

[Will Tschetter](#) had 5 points off the bench. That's all the bench scoring. There's Michigan's third big problem: a very short, very weak bench. The starters are being asked to play almost all the minutes and score all the points, and it's obviously wearing them down as the long season grinds on.

Who Looked Not-So-Good?

[Youssef Khayat](#) played for 7 minutes, and didn't attempt a shot. That's forgivable when Michigan is at full strength, but they were missing two key players (McDaniel and Jackson [see below]) and they needed some bench scoring. You can't score if you don't even attempt a shot.

[George Washington III](#) played for 9 minutes, and didn't attempt a shot. See Khayat's notes above. Washington's supposed to be a good shooter, and now is when he needs to start shooting and scoring.

Who Else Played?

No one else played. No one else was available to play. Michigan's bench is very thin.

Who Didn't Play?

None of the Scout Team players played in either game: [Ian Burns](#), [Harrison Hochberg](#), [Jackson Selvala](#), and [Cooper Smith](#). Smith is currently injured.

[Jace Howard](#) is still recovering from a knee injury, and is not playing yet. He's expected back "sometime in the next week".

[Tray Jackson](#) wasn't available to play, since he was in the "concussion protocol" after being injured in the Penn State game last week. He should be available going forward.

What Does It Mean?

It's hard to win a game on the road in the Big Ten. I understand that. Maryland isn't very good this year, but they're still not easy to beat at home. I get it. Still, this was one of the few winnable games left on Michigan's schedule, and they played well enough in the 1st half to win, then they just collapsed. They haven't won a close game all season. It's looking like they may not win another game this season.

What's Next?

This week, Michigan plays two games. On Monday (01/15/2024, 12:00 p.m., FOX), they play Ohio State, then on Thursday (01/18/2024, 8:30 p.m., FS1), they play (#10) Illinois. Both games are in Crisler Arena.

That isn't a typo above: Michigan is really playing a home game against a Big Ten opponent at noon on a weekday. Yes, it's MLK Day, and yes, schools and some (very few) businesses have the day off, but what kind of crowd can we expect at noon on a weekday? We shall see. The game is officially listed as a sell-out, but I expect to see a lot of empty seats. Since I post my articles around 10:30 on Monday mornings, by the time you read these words, the game might already have started or even been completed.

[Ohio State](#) is currently 12-4 (2-3 in Big Ten), with impressive wins over (#17) Alabama, Minnesota, and UCLA, and unimpressive losses to Penn State and Indiana. They don't have any noteworthy players, and they don't have much height: a 6'10" guy and a 6'11" guy. Can Michigan beat the Buckeyes? Sure, but not the way they've been playing lately. If OSU has any lead in the final 3 minutes, they're going to beat Michigan.

[Illinois](#) is currently 12-4 (3-2 in Big Ten), with impressive wins over (#11) Florida Atlantic, Missouri, Northwestern (by 30 points), and Michigan State, and an unimpressive loss to Maryland. They have one noteworthy player (Terrence Shannon Jr.), but not much height: one 6'10" guy. This is a game where I expect Michigan to get blasted. If they can stay close, that will be a moral victory in a season that is desperate for any sort of victory.

Check back next week to find out what happened and why.

Go Blue!