

Nothing But 'Net – Week #22 – 03/25/2024 – Season Wrap-Up, Final Grades, And Looking Ahead

The University of Michigan men's basketball 2023-2024 season is over. They finished the season with a record of 8-24 (3-17 in Big Ten). They lost in the first round of the Big Ten Tournament, and, for obvious reasons, didn't play in a postseason tournament.

Season Wrap-Up

There's no way to sugarcoat it: this was a terrible season for Michigan, possibly their worst ever. It was certainly the worst season I've witnessed in my 50 years of following Michigan basketball. That leads to a trivia question:

This season, Michigan's football team won 15 games, and the men's basketball team only won 8 games. When was the last time the Michigan football team had more wins in their season than the men's basketball team? The answer is at the end of the article.

Michigan started the season with 3 wins, and it looked like they might be better than expected. Then the losing started, and they never looked promising again. They started out losing close games, within a couple points in the final 2 minutes. Then they started a different trend: building up a nice double-digit lead, then blowing the game in the 2nd half. Finally, they just got blown out and never stood a chance. Here are the three trends:

- Losing the close games: Long Beach State, Memphis, Oregon, Indiana, Florida.
- Building up a decent lead, then blowing the game in the 2nd half: Minnesota, Penn State, Maryland (away), Iowa (away), Michigan State (away), Rutgers (home).
- Getting blown out: Illinois (home and away), Purdue (home and away), Nebraska (home and away), Rutgers (away), Ohio State (away).

There were a few good games among the 8 wins:

- The best win was against [\(#11\) Wisconsin \(72-68\) on 02/07/2024](#). It was Michigan's only win against a ranked opponent.
- The win against [Ohio State \(73-65\) on 01/15/2024](#) was very satisfying. The rivalry isn't as big in basketball, but it's still great to beat OSU in anything.
- The win against [St. John's \(89-73\) on 11/13/2023](#) in Madison Square Garden as part of the Gavitt Tipoff Games was very impressive. St. John's ended up being a "bubble team" for the Big Dance, although they didn't get in.

There were too many "bad losses" to list them.

So, what went wrong? Several things, but the biggest problem was an undersized roster with not enough talent. I don't think John Wooden himself could have coached this roster to a 0.500 record. When I evaluate a roster, I start at both ends: point guard and center. The guards, wings, and forwards are all important, but without a solid point guard and center, they don't matter that much. Michigan had a solid point guard in [Dug McDaniel](#), but the starting center ([Tarris Reed, Jr.](#)) was undersized and playing out of position. Reed would be a good-but-not-great power forward, but he's not a Big Ten center. Worse news: Michigan didn't really have a backup center this season. Other Big Ten teams had a 7-footer or two, with a couple 6'10" or 6'11" guys to back them up. Michigan had Reed and ... crickets. [Will Tschetter](#) tried his hand at center, but he's not tall enough or big enough to play against the big boys. Before he missed the last six games of the season with an injury, [Olivier Nkamhoua](#) also took a turn at center, but he's also not tall enough for the role. He is big enough to bang in there, but he routinely gave up 4-6 inches in height. So, Michigan's opponents saw that the middle wasn't guarded very well, and they drove to the hoop more often than I've ever seen, and it worked.

What about guards/wings/forwards? Once again, Michigan was constrained by a lack of talent. There was no one on the roster that was the "go to" player. There was no one who you could

count on to make the clutch shot. There was no one who was a consistent threat from 3-point range. All of the starters had some good games, and when a couple of them had good games at the same time, Michigan got one of their rare wins, but it didn't happen nearly often enough.

The final piece in the roster disaster was the bench. Michigan got very little bench scoring in many of their games, and so the starters played lots of minutes, which got them tired out in the 2nd half of the games, and wore them down as the season droned on.

What about coaching? Well, I'm sure coaching played a part in the dismal failure of the season, but I still think most of it was due to an undersized and undertalented roster. Regardless, (now former) head coach [Juwan Howard](#) was [fired on 03/15/2024](#). Now, you can certainly blame part of the roster disaster on Howard, but only part of it. When it came to roster construction, Howard was working with one hand tied behind his back. With the way the infamous Transfer Portal works these days, recruiting has taken a back seat to building a team from the portal. Unfortunately, Michigan isn't in the top tier for NIL (Name, Image, and Likeness) opportunities, and Michigan's admission policies have led a few talented transfers to look elsewhere.

Howard was actually a pretty good recruiter, but his most talented recruits either left for the NBA Draft or transferred to another school after 1-2 years. The recruiting class for this season was one incoming freshman ([George Washington III](#)), and he didn't work out. Howard brought in three players from the Transfer Portal for this season ([Nimari Burnett](#), [Olivier Nkamhoua](#), and [Tray Jackson](#)), and they were decent, but they weren't enough.

Final Grades

Here are my final grades, with the mid-term grades listed first:

Freshman Eligibility

- [Harrison Hochberg](#) (Inc./Inc.) – Harrison was on the Scout Team, and didn't play much: 20 minutes in 10 games. He missed his only shot attempt, but did score one point on 1-for-5 free throw shooting.
- [George Washington III](#) (C-/C-) – George was a major disappointment. He had his chances, and he didn't take advantage of them. He played 146 minutes in 22 games, and he scored 26 points on terrible shooting: 5-for-27 (18.5%) overall, 4-for-18 (22.2%) from deep. He has entered the Transfer Portal. He may be a valuable player somewhere else in the future, but he was worthless this year at Michigan. He won't be missed.

Sophomore Eligibility

- [Nimari Burnett](#) (B-/B-) – Nimari was the only player to play in all 32 of Michigan's games. He had some good games and some bad games, more bad than good. He averaged 9.6 points/game on decent shooting: 105-for-263 (39.9%) overall, 52-for-150 (34.7%) from deep. He has 2 years of eligibility remaining, but he has said that he hasn't decided whether he will keep playing or where. It would be nice if he came back for (at least) another year at Michigan, but that doesn't look very likely.
- [Youssef Khayat](#) (C+/C) – Youssef played 97 minutes in 17 games, and he scored 24 points on lousy shooting: 7-for-23 overall (30.4%), 2-for-9 from deep (22.2%). He has entered the Transfer Portal. He never really caught on at Michigan, but he has the potential to be a decent player somewhere else. He won't be missed.
- [Dug McDaniel](#) (A/A-) – Here it is: the only "A" in this batch of grades. Dug played his heart out every minute of every game. He's fast, he's a great dribbler, he shot well, and he ran the offense pretty well. He shot 41.0% overall (151-for-368) and 36.8% from deep (56-for-152). He led the team in scoring (16.3 points/game), assists (121), and

steals (29). He was a warrior out there. Unfortunately, we was suspended for 6 road games during the Big Ten portion of the schedule, due to academic shortcomings. He has entered the Transfer Portal, and I expect him to be snapped up by a good program, and to do well there. It's a shame to lose him.

- [Tarris Reed, Jr.](#) (B/B) – Tarris had some good games and just as many bad games. When he was "on" he was a weapon, but there were other games when he was barely playable. His shooting percentage was good (111-for-214 = 51.9%), but he didn't take enough shots. Michigan had trouble getting the ball in to him at the post, and when they did, he often turned it over (71 turnovers). He averaged 9.0 points/game. He led the team in rebounding, with 230 rebounds (7.2 per game). He has entered the Transfer Portal, and I hope he ends up somewhere where he can play power forward instead of center. He will be missed.
- [Jackson Selvala](#) (Inc./Inc.) – Jackson was on the Scout Team, and didn't play much: 29 minutes in 13 games. He scored 6 points, on 1-for-4 shooting overall (0-for-3 from deep) and 4-for-4 shooting from the free throw line.
- [Cooper Smith](#) (Inc./Inc.) – Cooper was on the Scout Team, and didn't play much: 18 minutes in 10 games. He has scored 9 points, on 4-for-6 shooting overall (1-for-3 from deep).
- [Will Tschetter](#) (B+/B+) – Will was probably the most improved player on the team this season. He didn't do much his freshman season, but this season he averaged 6.8 points/game on good shooting: 78-for-134 overall (58.2%) and 24-for-58 from deep (51.9%). He played small forward, power forward, and even (small) center, and he did pretty well.

Junior Eligibility

- [Ian Burns](#) (Inc./Inc.) – Ian was on the Scout Team, and didn't play much: 24 minutes in 11 games. He scored 3 points on 3-for-5 free throw shooting. He attempted 7 shots, all 3-pointers, and he missed them all.
- [Jace Howard](#) (Inc./C) – Jace missed the first 16 games with a foot injury that took forever to heal, and he missed a few more games due to illness, so he only played in 10 games. He was used mostly as a defensive player, only scoring 26 points on mediocre shooting: 8-for-27 overall (29.6%), 4-for-15 from deep (26.7%). He announced that he was planning on coming back for another season, but that was before his father was fired as head coach. He hasn't made any comment since that happened.

Senior Eligibility

- [Jaelin Llewellyn](#) (Inc./B-) – Jaelin missed the first 7 games with a knee injury, and he missed a few more games due to illness, so he only played in 20 games. He started in place of McDaniel during McDaniel's 6-game road suspension, and those were some of Llewellyn's best games. He averaged 5.2 points/game on pretty good shooting: 35-for-92 overall (38.0%) and 19-for-47 from deep (40.4%). He had more turnovers (31) than assists (23), which is not good for a point guard. He is out of eligibility.
- [Tray Jackson](#) (B-/C+) – Tray provided some scoring and rebounding off the bench, but he only showed flashes of what he was capable of, then he disappeared. He averaged 5.0 points/game on decent shooting: 45-for-113 overall (39.8%) and 9-for-37 from deep (24.3%). He is out of eligibility.
- [Olivier Nkamhoua](#) (A-/B+) – Olivier was the second most valuable player on the team, after McDaniel. He played a lot of power forward and a bit of (small) center. He played hard in every game, and he delivered. Unfortunately, he injured his left (non-shooting) wrist in early January, and played hurt for the next 13 games, finally giving up and

missing the last 6 games. Still, he ended up second on the team in scoring average (14.8 points/game), and second in rebounding (7.1 rebounds/game). He shot well: 154-for-301 (51.2%) overall, 27-for-81 (33.3%) from deep. He did lead the team in turnovers, with 73. He is out of eligibility.

- [Terrance Williams II](#) (B+/B+) – Terrance saved his best season for last. He ended up as the third leading scorer on the team (12.4 points/game) with nice shooting numbers: 125-for-289 (43.3%) overall, 52-for-131 (39.7%) from deep. Most importantly, he cut his fouls and turnovers way down from his career averages. He has announced that he won't be back next season, although he does have one more year of eligibility, due to COVID.

Awards

It's awkward giving out awards to such an underachieving team, but here we go:

- Most Valuable Player: Dug McDaniel
- Most Improved Player: Will Tschetter
- Best Defensive Player: Olivier Nkamhoua
- Sixth Man: Will Tschetter

Looking Ahead

I wish I could be more optimistic, but the future of Michigan basketball is not looking very promising. There is a lot of bad news:

- Several players graduating/using up their eligibility: Nkamhoua, Williams, Llewellyn, and Jackson.
- Several players entering the Transfer Portal: McDaniel, Reed, Khayat, and Washington.
- A few players who haven't announced their intentions: Burnett, Tschetter, and Howard.
- One of the three incoming freshmen decommitting: Khani Rooths.
- The head coach being fired

Now, the three players who haven't announced their intentions could all come back for next season, but that isn't likely. Burnett has been very non-committal on the subject, and Howard is the son of the head coach who was just fired. That leaves Tschetter. Maybe he'll return, but he's hardly an elite player.

The loss of Rooths is a big deal. He was the highest ranked prospect in Michigan's recruiting class, and now he's gone.

There is some good news:

There are still two promising incoming freshmen in the recruiting class:

- Christian Anderson (5'11", 155 pounds, G) – Christian is a point guard, and he might well be the starting point guard as a true freshman, since all the other point guards left. He's a 4-star recruit.
- Durrall Brooks (6'2", 180 pounds, G) – Durrall was named "Mr. Basketball" for the state of Michigan, and he should bring some much-needed outside firepower to Michigan. He's a 3-star recruit.

Hopefully, these two recruits will stick with Michigan.

The best news is that [Michigan has hired a new head coach: Dusty May from Florida Atlantic University \(FAU\)](#). I think this is a good hire, and that Coach May will do his best to revive Michigan basketball, but I think it's going to take a lot longer than most people expect. I just hope that the Athletic Director and (more importantly) the public cut him some slack for the first couple seasons. This is a "total rebuild", from the ground up, not a "reload". The

cupboard is bare. I'm confident that Coach May will work hard to bring in the right mix of players from the Transfer Portal to at least be competitive "soon".

What's Next?

Check back in late October for the next season of Michigan basketball.

Go Blue!

Oh yeah, the trivia answer:

In 1981 the football team went 9-3, while the 1981-1982 basketball team went 7-20.