

Nothing But 'Net – Week #01 – 10/14/2024 – Season Preview

Yeah, it's time for college basketball again. Basketball games start this week. Let's check out this season's team.

Here's my traditional 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 my 25th year writing this column, and I can easily say that this season is the hardest to predict. I've never seen so much change in so many places! New coach and coaching staff, almost entirely new team, and four more teams in the Big Ten conference, all at the same time. Yikes!

Executive Summary

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

The big answer: who knows? There have been way too many changes to make a decent prediction. My hunch is that Michigan will be better than last season (not too hard to do), and probably middle of the pack in the new Big Ten, but that's just a guess.

What's New?

A better question is: "What isn't new?" As I mentioned above, a new coach and coaching staff, almost entirely new roster, and four new teams in the Big Ten. Let's take them in that order.

New Coach And Coaching Staff

When I wrote my last article (03/25/2024), Michigan had fired Juwan Howard and hired [Dusty May](#). At that time, I said that I thought this was a good hire, and based on what he's accomplished since he was hired, I think this is a very good hire. He has worked very hard to build what looks like a solid, competitive roster (more about that below) and hire a promising staff of assistant coaches. They are:

- [Mike Boynton Jr.](#)
- [Justin Joyner](#)
- [Akeem Miskdeen](#)

Almost Entirely New Roster

There are lots of changes to the roster from last season:

- Players Leaving:
 - 4 seniors/grad students graduated
 - 6 players transferred
- Players Arriving:
 - 4 incoming freshman
 - 7 incoming transfer players

Graduating Seniors/Grad Students

Four players from last season “graduated”. Three of them were grad transfers/grad students:

- Tray Jackson – 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 won’t be missed much.
- Jaelin Llewellyn – 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 won’t be missed much.
- Olivier Nkamhoua – Olivier was the second most valuable player on the team, after Dug 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 will definitely be missed.

The only true senior on the team was Jackson Selvala, and he was a lightly used member of the Scout Team.

Players Who Transferred

Six players transferred to other schools after last season. They are:

- Dug McDaniel – Dug was probably the most valuable player on Michigan’s roster last season. He’s fast, he’s a great dribbler, he shot well, and he ran the offense pretty well. He was a warrior out there. He will be sorely missed. [He transferred to Kansas State](#), where I expect him to be a star. He will be sorely missed.
- Terrance Williams II – Terrance was very inconsistent for his first 3 years at Michigan, but he had his best season as a senior. [He transferred to USC](#) for his “COVID year”. He will be missed.
- Youssef Khayat – Youssef showed occasional flashes of competence, surrounded by long stretches of mediocrity. [He transferred to Bowling Green](#). He probably won’t be missed.
- Tarris Reed Jr. – Tarris was the closest thing Michigan had to a center last season, but he is really a power forward who was forced to play center. He did a decent job, but for every game where he was effective, there was a game where he was unplayable. [He transferred to \(defending National Champion\) Connecticut](#), where I expect him to do well, especially if they let him play power forward. He will be missed.
- George Washington III – George had a rough freshman season at Michigan. He didn’t play very much, and he played poorly when he got his chances. [He transferred to Richmond](#), where he might turn into a useful player. He won’t be missed.
- Cooper Smith – Cooper was on the Scout Team, and he didn’t play much. [He transferred to Eastern Michigan](#). He won’t be missed.

Incoming Freshmen

At the end of last season, only one freshman (Durrel "Phat Phat" Brooks) was planning to play at Michigan this season, but Coach May rounded up three more. Now, there are four freshmen on the roster:

- [L.J. Cason](#) #2 (6'2", 190 pounds, G) – L.J. previously committed to Florida Atlantic and Coach May. When Coach May was hired by Michigan, L.J. followed him. He's a 3-star point guard, a good ball-handler, a decent defender, and a good shooter and scorer. With several other (more experienced) point guards on the team, he won't play much this season, but he will learn and grow.
- [Howard Eisley Jr.](#) #5 (6'0", 195 pounds, G) – Howard is a walk-on, with very little information about him on the web. We do know that his father (Howard Eisley) was an assistant coach at Michigan under Juwan Howard, so there are obviously no hard feelings about the coaching change. As a walk-on, Howard will undoubtedly be on the Scout Team.
- [Durrel "Phat Phat" Brooks](#) #8 (6'2", 190 pounds, G) – Phat Phat was Mr. Basketball for the state of Michigan last year. He's a 3-star combo guard, a good defender, and a good shooter and scorer. With many other point guards on the team, he will play mostly shooting guard this season. With many other shooting guards on the team, he may not play that much this season. We'll have to wait and see.
- [Justin Pippen](#) #10 (6'3", 180 pounds, G) – Justin is indeed the younger son of Hall Of Fame NBA player Scottie Pippen. He's a 4-star combo guard, a decent defender, and a pretty good shooter and scorer. Once again, with all the other point guards on the team, he will be used mainly as a shooting guard. Also once again, with all the other shooting guards on the team, he may not play that much this season.

Incoming Transfer Players

With ten players leaving the team (four to graduation, six to the Transfer Portal), and only four incoming freshmen, Coach May had to work the Transfer Portal hard to fill out the roster. He was very successful, getting seven players:

- [Danny Wolf](#) #1 (7'0", 250 pounds, F/C) – Danny transferred to Michigan from Yale, where he played for two seasons, leaving him with two seasons of eligibility. He was all-league at Yale, where he averaged 9.5 points/game and 6.7 rebounds/game. He will be the backup center, behind Vlad Goldin (below), but he might also play power forward alongside Goldin, giving Michigan an imposing Twin Towers look.
- [Tre Donaldson](#) #3 (6'3", 195 pounds, G) – Tre transferred to Michigan from Auburn, where he played for two seasons, leaving him with two seasons of eligibility. He will probably be the starting point guard. He's not much of a scorer, but he's a pretty good shooter when he does take a shot. He's a good defender, and a good ball-handler.
- [Roddy Gayle Jr.](#) #11 (6'5", 205 pounds, G) – Roddy transferred to Michigan from Ohio State (seriously?), where he played for two seasons, leaving him with two seasons of eligibility. He was a starter at OSU last season, averaging 13.5 points/game and 4.6 rebounds/game. He will probably play quite a bit, mostly as a shooting guard, with some time at backup point guard.
- [Charlie May](#) #12 (6'5", 190 pounds, G) – Charlie transferred to Michigan from Central Florida (UCF), where he played for one season (after voluntarily redshirting his freshman year), leaving him with three seasons of eligibility. He is indeed the younger son of Michigan head coach Dusty May. He didn't play much in his one season at UCF, where he started his career as a walk-on. I suspect he will be on the Scout Team, at least this season.

- [Rubin Jones](#) #15 (6'5", 190 pounds, G) – Rubin transferred to Michigan from North Texas, where he played for four seasons and graduated, leaving him with one (COVID) season of eligibility. He averaged 12.1 points/game and 3.6 rebounds/game his senior year at North Texas. He's good defender, a pretty good shooter, and he can even play some point guard. He will probably play quite a bit, mostly as a shooting guard, with some time at backup point guard.
- [Sam Walters](#) #24 (6'10", 200 pounds, F) – Sam transferred to Michigan from Alabama, where he played for one season, leaving him with three seasons of eligibility. He played quite a bit at Alabama for a true freshman, and averaged 5.4 points/game on pretty good shooting. On a team with two 7-foot-plus centers and a bunch of 6'2" guards, he's one of the few true forwards. He's a little light for a 6'10" forward in the Big Ten, and I expect him to get pushed around inside, but I expect him to figure that out and adapt.
- [Vladislav Goldin](#) #50 (7'1", 250 pounds, C) – Vlad transferred to Michigan from Florida Atlantic, where he played for Michigan head coach Dusty May. He played one season at Texas Tech, then three seasons at Florida Atlantic, leaving him with one (COVID) season of eligibility. He is the player I'm the most excited about on the team. Regular readers of this column will know how much I value a 7-foot-plus center. He may not be the second coming of Hunter Dickinson, but he is a battle-tested solid player, and I think he's going to do just fine in the bruising Big Ten.

Who's Coming Back?

Along with all the subtractions and additions to the team listed above, there are actually five players returning from last season's team:

Sophomore Eligibility

- [Harrison Hochberg](#) #13 (6'7", 220 pounds, F) – Harrison was on the Scout Team last season, and he didn't play much. I expect more of the same this season. Note: He switched his number from last season (31) to this season (13).

Junior Eligibility

- [Nimari Burnett](#) #4 (6'5", 200 pounds, G) – Nimari transferred to Michigan from Alabama last season, and decided to come back this season. He has two seasons of eligibility left (one regular and one COVID). He's a combo guard, but he probably won't play much point guard with all the other point guards on the team.
- [Will Tschetter](#) #42 (6'8", 230 pounds, F) – Will was probably the most improved player on last season's team. He didn't do much his freshman season, but last season he averaged 6.8 points/game on good shooting. He's one of the few forwards on the roster.

Senior Eligibility

- [Ian Burns](#) #14 (6'6", 205 pounds, G) – Ian is on the Scout Team. He played in 2 games as a freshman, 3 games as a sophomore, and 11 games as a junior. He has attempted nine shots, but hasn't made one yet. He does have 3 points on free throws.
- [Jace Howard](#) #7 (6'8", 225 pounds, G) – Jace has played for 4 seasons, but thanks to the COVID-19 rule he still has one year of eligibility. He is another example of "no hard feelings" about the coaching change, since his father is Juwan Howard. He has played a lot, but hasn't scored much. He's mostly a defensive specialist. He's one of the few forwards on the roster. Note: He switched his number from last season (25) to this season (7).

Starting Lineup/Depth Chart

This is really tricky this season, with all the new players. My guess:

Point guard: Donaldson (backups: Gayle, Jones, Burnett, and Cason)
Shooting guard: Gayle (backups: Jones, Donaldson, Burnett, Brooks, and Pippen)
Small forward: Jones (backups: Tschetter and Howard)
Power forward: Walters (backups: Wolf, Tschetter, and Howard)
Center: Goldin (backup: Wolf)

I've never seen a roster with so many point guards and shooting guards! On the other hand, Michigan really needs another small forward/wing or two. The power forward and center positions look solid.

Four New Teams In The Big Ten

Why is it even called the Big Ten any more? It's the Big Eighteen now. With the addition of four more teams, all from the old Pac-12, the Big Ten is even more competitive in all sports, including men's basketball. The new teams are: Oregon, Washington, UCLA, and USC.

Last Season

From last season's Wrap-Up article (lightly edited):

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.

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.

This Season

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

Date	Opponent	Location	Time (ET)
10/20/2024 (Sun)	Oakland (exhibition)	Detroit, MI	5:00 p.m.
10/25/2024 (Fri)	Toledo (exhibition)	Ann Arbor, MI	7:30 p.m.
11/04/2024 (Mon)	Cleveland State	Ann Arbor, MI	8:00 p.m.
Deacon-Wolverine Challenge			
11/10/2024 (Sun)	Wake Forest	Greensboro, NC	1:00 p.m.
11/15/2024 (Fri)	TCU	Ann Arbor, MI	6:00 p.m.
11/18/2024 (Fri)	Miami (OH)	Ann Arbor, MI	6:00 p.m.
11/21/2024 (Thu)	Tarleton State	Ann Arbor, MI	8:30 p.m.
Fort Myers Tip-Off			
11/25/2024 (Mon)	Virginia Tech	Fort Myers, FL	6:00 p.m.
11/27/2024 (Wed)	South Carolina/Xavier	Fort Myers, FL	6:00 p.m./8:30 p.m.
12/03/2024 (Tue)	Wisconsin	Madison, WI	9:00 p.m.
12/07/2024 (Sat)	Iowa	Ann Arbor, MI	2:00 p.m.
Jimmy V Classic			
12/10/2024 (Tue)	Arkansas	New York, NY	9:00 p.m.
Jumpman Invitational			
12/18/2024 (Wed)	Oklahoma	Charlotte, NC	9:00 p.m.
12/22/2024 (Sun)	Purdue-Fort Wayne	Ann Arbor, MI	1:00 p.m.
12/29/2025 (Sun)	Western Kentucky	Ann Arbor, MI	8:00 p.m.

01/04/2025 (Sun)	USC	Los Angeles, CA	8:00 p.m.
01/07/2025 (Tue)	UCLA	Los Angeles, CA	10:00 p.m.
01/12/2025 (Sun)	Washington	Ann Arbor, MI	2:00 p.m.
01/16/2025 (Thu)	Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN	7:00 p.m.
01/19/2025 (Sun)	Northwestern	Ann Arbor, MI	2:00 p.m.
01/24/2025 (Fri)	Purdue	West Lafayette, IN	8:00 p.m.
01/27/2025 (Mon)	Penn State	Ann Arbor, MI	6:30 p.m.
02/01/2025 (Sat)	Rutgers	Piscataway, NJ	3:30 p.m.
02/05/2025 (Wed)	Oregon	Ann Arbor, MI	6:30 p.m.
02/08/2025 (Sat)	Indiana	Bloomington, IN	1:00 p.m.
02/11/2025 (Tue)	Purdue	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 p.m.
02/16/2025 (Sun)	Ohio State	Columbus, OH	1:00 p.m.
02/21/2025 (Fri)	Michigan State	Ann Arbor, MI	8:00 p.m.
02/24/2025 (Mon)	Nebraska	Lincoln, NE	8:00 p.m.
02/27/2025 (Thu)	Rutgers	Ann Arbor, MI	9:00 p.m.
03/02/2025 (Sun)	Illinois	Ann Arbor, MI	3:45 p.m.
03/05/2025 (Wed)	Maryland	Ann Arbor, MI	6:30 p.m.
03/09/2025 (Sun)	Michigan State	East Lansing, MI	12:00 p.m.
Big Ten Tournament			
03/12/2025 (Wed)	1 st Round	Indianapolis, IN	TBA
03/13/2025 (Thu)	2 nd Round	Indianapolis, IN	TBA
03/14/2025 (Fri)	Quarterfinals	Indianapolis, IN	TBA
03/15/2025 (Sat)	Semifinals	Indianapolis, IN	TBA
03/16/2025 (Sun)	Championship	Indianapolis, IN	TBA

Some comments on the schedule:

- This is a much tougher non-conference schedule than usual, with several big-name opponents: Wake Forest, TCU, Virginia Tech, South Carolina/Xavier, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. Michigan will be doing well to go 3-3 in these games.
- The other non-conference games (Cleveland State, Miami-OH, Tarleton State, Purdue-Fort Wayne, and Western Kentucky) all look winnable.
- The first two games of 2025 are out in LA vs. USC and UCLA. I'm impressed that the Big Ten scheduled these two games together, so Michigan can fly out once and play both games. The other two West Coast teams are both coming to Ann Arbor this season.
- Each Big Ten team plays 14 teams once (7 home/7 away) and 3 teams twice, for a total of 20 games. This season, Michigan plays:
 - Once: Wisconsin (away), Iowa (home), USC (away), UCLA (away), Washington (home), Minnesota (away), Northwestern (home), Penn State (home), Oregon (home), Indiana (away), Ohio State (away), Nebraska (away), Illinois (home), Maryland (home).
 - Twice: Purdue, Rutgers, Michigan State.
- Given the preseason predictions, Michigan should be happy about playing Iowa, Illinois, and Maryland at home.
- Given the preseason predictions, Michigan should be unhappy about:
 - Playing Purdue, Rutgers, and Michigan State twice. They're all predicted to finish in the top 4 in the Big Ten this season.
 - Playing away games vs. UCLA, Indiana, and Ohio State.

Expectations

Normally, I like to divide the games up into 3 categories ("Should Win", "Should Lose", and "Toss Up"), but with all the roster changes, I have no idea any more. Looking at the schedule, I hope that Michigan wins all 5 of their "less challenging" non-conference games, goes 3-3 in their "more challenging" non-conference games, and goes 10-10 in the Big Ten. That would work out to a final regular season record of 18-13, which might be enough to get them into the NCAA Tournament. I think the ceiling for this team is 21-12, and the floor is 13-18.

This Week

This week, Michigan only plays one game. On Sunday (10/20/2025, 5:00 p.m., BTN+) they play Oakland in Little Caesars Arena in Detroit. This is an exhibition game.

[Oakland](#) was 24-12 (15-5 in the Horizon League) last season. They won the Horizon League Tournament, and went to the NCAA Tournament, where they upset the #3 seed, Kentucky. They lost to the #11 seed, NC State, in the next round, but still... They don't have any noteworthy players, and they don't have much height: one 6'9" guy. This should be a very challenging exhibition game.

Check back next week to find out what happened and why. My article might be a couple days late, since I'm expecting to be away from Internet coverage for a few days.

Go Blue!