

## **Nothing But 'Net – Week #09 – 12/09/2024 – A Perfect Start To League Play**

The University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games this past week, and they won both of them. [On Tuesday \(12/03/2024\), they beat \(#11\) Wisconsin 67-64](#) in Madison, then [on Saturday \(12/07/2024\), they beat Iowa 85-83](#) in Crisler Arena. Michigan's record is now 8-1 (2-0 in Big Ten), and they've won 7 games in a row.

### **A Field Trip Report**

Before we get to the game results, a quick field trip report. As I mentioned last week, my wife (Cindy) and I went to Madison to visit our son (Eric) for Thanksgiving, and we stayed a couple extra days so we could go to the Michigan/Wisconsin game on Tuesday night. I don't get to many away games, so it was fun and exciting to go to this one.

The Kohl Center is a nice facility, in a nice neighborhood, with expensive parking a few blocks away. It's a modern building, with lots of seating (capacity 17,071) and good sightlines, at least in section 103. It's also boxier than Crisler Arena, with more exposed concrete, so sounds echo and sound louder. There was a decent crowd for a weeknight game (announced at 12,280), with a large, enthusiastic student section behind the south basket. Our tickets were in a section that was 99% Wisconsin fans, and they were friendly and polite, but not very pleased with the officiating.

The game-day experience was pretty similar to a Michigan home game, with blaring rap music during the warmups, silly games during the timeouts, and standard announcements over the PA system. The event staff (ushers) were not as numerous or attentive as the Event Team Members (ETMs) in Crisler, I was proud to discover.

All in all, it was a comfortable place to see a game, not at all scary or intimidating. I was thrilled to get out of there with a "W".

### **What Happened?**

Starting with the 2017-2018 season, the Big Ten has scheduled two Big Ten games for each team in early December, one home and one away. This season, Michigan's two early Big Ten games were: at Wisconsin, and home vs. Iowa. Michigan won both of these early Big Ten games, for a perfect start to league play. The rest of the month is non-conference action, with the rest of the Big Ten schedule starting up in January.

These were two huge wins for Michigan. UM (and everyone else) has had a tough time winning in the Kohl Center in Madison, where Wisconsin is close to unbeatable. Wisconsin was undefeated (8-0) and ranked (#11) coming into the game, and it looked like a recipe for disaster. Fortunately, Michigan didn't let the pressure get to them, and they hung around with Wisconsin and won the game in the final minute. It was very exciting.

The win over Wisconsin was huge, but it would have been wasted if Michigan had followed it up with a loss at home to Iowa. Iowa came into the game with the same record as Michigan, and they had won their game vs. Northwestern on Tuesday with a buzzer-beater, so they were fired up. It was another tense game, but Michigan handled the pressure well and won in the final seconds.

### **Game Flow**

Wisconsin led for most of the 1<sup>st</sup> half, and it looked like they might run away with the game at the beginning. After a close start, UW pulled ahead 17-8 at the 11:52 mark. Michigan hung in, and crept back, finally pulling ahead (20-18) with 7:42 to go. UW promptly went on an 11-0 run, to go ahead 29-20 with 2:40 left in the half. Michigan managed to finish the half strong, cutting the deficit to 6 points (32-26) at halftime.

Michigan started the 2<sup>nd</sup> half with a 5-0 run to cut the deficit to just 1 point (32-31) at the 18:56 mark, but UW hung onto the lead. Michigan got as close as 1 point (39-38) with 16:25 to go, then they finally went ahead for the first time in a while (40-39) at the 15:45 mark. The lead went back and forth for the next 10 minutes, with neither team getting more than 3 or 4 points ahead, and lots of lead changes and ties. With 4:30 to go, Michigan led 61-59, but UW went on a 5-0 run to lead 64-61 with 2:37 left. Things looked grim, but check out the final score: 67-64. Yes, Michigan outscored Wisconsin 6-0 in the last 2:37 to win the game, although Wisconsin almost hit a half-court buzzer-beater to send the game to overtime. In that stretch, UW missed one 2-point shot, two 3-point shots, one free throw, and had one turnover and two fouls. During the same stretch, Michigan missed one free throw, had one turnover and three fouls, BUT they also shot 3-for-3 on 2-point shots. That was the difference.

The Iowa game was a win that felt like a loss. Why? Because Michigan had a fabulous start, racing out to a 20-4 lead at the 12:48 mark, then let Iowa back in the game and faced a dogfight for the rest of the game. The crowd kept waiting for the team that had cruised to a 16 point lead to show back up and do it again, but Iowa never gave up, and kept the game close the rest of the way. That 16-point lead was down to 2 points at the 4:33 mark, 28-26. Yes, Iowa outscored UM 22-8 in those 8 minutes. Ugh. Iowa tied it up (35-35) with 1:10 to go, and again (37-37) with 0:36 left. Michigan managed to scratch out a small lead (40-37) at halftime.

Michigan managed to hang onto the lead for the first few minutes of the 2<sup>nd</sup> half, but Iowa went ahead for the first time in the game (45-44) at the 16:48 mark. The lead went back and forth for the next few minutes, with UM finally getting a little breathing room (58-53) with 13:04 left. They kept the lead in the 3-5 point range for a while, pushing it up to 11 points (74-63) with 7:16 to go. Michigan kept the lead in the 7-9 point range for a few more minutes, and still led by 8 points (81-73) at the 2:29 mark. Iowa came charging back, and tied the game (83-83) with 0:20 left. Fortunately, Michigan had the ball for the last shot, and they made it with 3 seconds left. Iowa got off a buzzer-beater attempt, but it missed. Whew. As I said, it was a win that felt like a loss. All those leads, squandered. Sigh.

### **Stats**

The [stats for the Wisconsin game](#) were not very good. Michigan shot decently overall (23-for-59 = 39.0%), they shot 3-pointers very poorly (6-for-25 = 24.0%), and they shot free throws decently (15-for-21 = 71.4%). They just barely won the rebounding battle (43-42), and they just barely lost the turnover battle (12-10). They won this game with slightly better overall shooting. The rest of the stats were almost dead even.

The [stats for the Iowa game](#) were just so-so. Michigan shot well overall (32-for-58 = 55.2%), they shot 3-pointers terribly (4-for-20 = 20.0%), and they shot free throws pretty well (17-for-22 = 77.3%). They won the rebounding battle handily (45-30), but they lost the turnover battle badly (17-4). They won this game with slightly better overall shooting and dominating rebounding. They almost lost it with way too many silly turnovers.

### **Who Started?**

The starters for both games were [Nimari Burnett](#), [Tre Donaldson](#), [Roddy Gayle Jr.](#), [Vladislav Goldin](#), and [Danny Wolf](#).

### **Who Looked Good?**

Goldin was the high scorer in both games, with 24 and 20 points. He also had 11 rebounds in the Iowa game, for a nice double-double. He had several impressive dunks in the Wisconsin game, mostly off the pick-and-roll (see below).

Wolf was the co-star of the Wisconsin game, with 20 points, 7 rebounds, and 5 assists, mostly to Goldin. The two big men worked very well together in the Wisconsin game, running the

pick-and-roll several times, with Wisconsin powerless to stop it. Iowa saw the film and figured out how to disrupt the big-man pick-and-roll, but Wolf still had 13 points and 14 rebounds, for a solid double-double.

Did Donaldson look good this week? Yes and no. He was absolutely terrible in the Wisconsin game, with 0 points on 0-for-7 overall shooting (0-for-3 from deep). He was very good in the Iowa game, with 18 points on 6-for-10 overall shooting (2-for-3 from deep). He needs to avoid those scoreless games...

Gayle hit double figures (17 points) vs. Iowa, and almost got there vs. Wisconsin (9 points).

Burnett almost hit double figures in the Wisconsin game (8 points), but he only had 2 points vs. Iowa. He isn't scoring much, but he's grabbing rebounds (7 and 5) and not turning the ball over (1 and 0).

[Will Tschetter](#) was the only bench player to hit double figures, with 13 points vs. Iowa. He only had 5 points vs. Wisconsin.

### **Who Looked Not-So-Good?**

Other than Tschetter, the bench didn't contribute much in the way of scoring this week.

[Phat Phat Brooks](#) played for a few seconds in the Wisconsin game, but didn't attempt a shot.

[L.J. Cason](#) played in both games, but went scoreless in both games on 0-for-4 combined shooting. After a promising start, he has all but disappeared.

[Rubin Jones](#) had 1 and 2 points. Ladies and gentlemen, that's all the bench scoring this week besides Tschetter.

[Justin Pippen](#) played in the Iowa game, and missed his only shot attempt.

[Sam Walters](#) played in both games, but went scoreless in both games on 0-for-4 combined shooting. After a promising start, he has all but disappeared.

### **Who Else Played?**

No one else played in either game.

### **Who Didn't Play?**

The Scout team didn't get in either game: [Ian Burns](#), [Howard Eisley Jr.](#), [Harrison Hochberg](#), [Jace Howard](#), and [Charlie May](#).

### **What Does It Mean?**

As I mentioned above, these were two huge wins for Michigan. The Big Ten portion of their schedule doesn't resume until January, but they'll start with a nice 2-0 record. Not all the Big Ten teams have played both of their early-December games yet, but at this point there are only 5 teams with 0 losses in league play: Michigan (2-0), UCLA (2-0), Michigan State (2-0), Penn State (1-0), and Indiana (0-0).

### **What's Next?**

This week, Michigan only plays one game, but it's a big one. On Tuesday (12/10/2024, 9:00 p.m., ESPN), they play Arkansas in Madison Square Garden, in New York City. This game is part of the annual [Jimmy V Classic](#) doubleheader.

[Arkansas](#) is currently 7-2, with an impressive win over Miami (FL), and a loss to Illinois. They don't have any noteworthy players, but they do have some height: a 7'2" guy, a 6'11" guy, and two 6'10" guys. They also have a noteworthy coach: John Calipari, in his first season after a long career at Kentucky. This is going to be Michigan's toughest game so far, right up there with Wisconsin, and a notch tougher than Wake Forest and Xavier. Michigan can win this game, but they need to find their outside touch again (24% and 20% this week, that won't do) and get the turnover problem back under control (17 vs. Iowa, that won't do).

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

Go Blue!