

Nothing But 'Net – Week #08 – 12/01/2025 – Players Era Festival Champions!

The (#7) University of Michigan men's basketball team played three games this past week, in the [Players Era Festival](#) tournament in Las Vegas, and they won all three of them, which made them tournament champions. [On Monday \(11/24/2025\), they beat San Diego State 94-54, on Tuesday \(11/25/2025\), they beat \(#21\) Auburn 102-72, then on Wednesday \(11/26/2025\), they beat \(#12\) Gonzaga 101-61.](#) Michigan's record improves to 7-0.

What Happened?

Wow, what a tournament! Michigan didn't just win three games in three days, they won all three in blowout fashion, two of them against ranked opponents. Because they won the first two games by the maximum score differential in the tournament scoring system, they got to play in the championship game on the third day, and they won that one convincingly. They were obviously the best team there, and they deserved to win the Players Era Festival Championship.

As a huge bonus, they got \$1 million in NIL money for playing in the tournament, and they got another \$1 million for winning it. I'm not a big fan of the NIL system, but it's the current reality, and I'm glad Michigan is doing it right.

Game Flow

All three games had a similar flow: Michigan got ahead early, built up a comfortable lead by halftime, then poured it on in the 2nd half to win in blowout fashion. Look at those winning margins: 40, 30, and 40 points. That's domination.

Michigan started out a little slow in the SDSU game. SDSU led 5-0, Michigan tied it 5-5, SDSU went ahead 7-5, then Michigan got going. Michigan tied it up 7-7 at the 16:56 mark, and that was the last time they were tied or trailed. They went on a 10-0 run to lead 17-7 at the 14:10 mark, and they pushed the lead up as high as 17 points (32-15 with 7:22 to go in the half). However, SDSU hung around. They got back within 9 points a few times, but Michigan still led by 12 points (45-33) at halftime.

The 2nd half was beautiful. Michigan went on an 8-0 run to push their lead up to 20 points (53-33) at the 17:19 mark, and that was the game. SDSU never got closer than 16 points, and the lead kept growing. It hit 30 points (73-43) with 9:27 to go, and 42 points (94-52) with 1:26 left, before ending with a 40 point margin of victory.

Beating unranked SDSU was one thing, but playing (#21) Auburn was something else. Auburn was a #1 seed in last season's NCAA Tournament, and they knocked Michigan out of the tournament in the Sweet 16. Everyone expected a close, tense game, but Michigan blew them away. Auburn led 2-0 and 2-1, but Michigan went ahead 3-2 at the 18:31 mark, and Auburn never led again. Michigan pushed their lead up to 12 points (16-4) with 15:01 to go in the half. At that point, Auburn had missed their first 8 shots, getting all 4 points from the free throw line. They finally started making some shots, and they got within 6 points (16-10) at the 14:16 mark, but Michigan kept the lead in the 8-10 point range for the next few minutes. The turning point was at the 9:01 mark, when Auburn was within 8 points (28-20). Michigan went on a nice 20-4 run, which pushed their lead up to 24 points, 48-24, with 3:22 to go. Michigan added 4 more points to their lead, and the led by 28 points (59-31) at halftime.

The 2nd half consisted of Michigan keeping their lead between 25-30 points. It got as high as 35 points (100-65) at the 2:39 mark, ending at 30 points (102-72). It was a beautiful, dominant victory.

OK, beating SDSU was expected, and Michigan was a slight favorite vs. Auburn, but (#12) Gonzaga was ranked even higher than Auburn, and they were a slight favorite vs. Michigan. Michigan had time to prepare for SDSU and Auburn, but they didn't know who they would be playing on Wednesday night until late Tuesday night. Were they tired from two fast-paced,

high-scoring games? Could they play at the same pace for three days in a row? Vegas didn't think so, and neither did the ESPN game analytics (72-28 in favor of Gonzaga).

So, what did Michigan do? They played their best game of the three vs. Gonzaga. They never trailed, leading 3-0, 5-0, then 13-3. They forced Gonzaga to call a "momentum" timeout before the first media timeout, at the 16:49 mark. That's huge. Michigan kept building on the lead, pushing it up to 19 points (33-14) with 10:44 to go in the half. They kept it between 17-19 points for a while, but they let Gonzaga creep a little closer (13 points: 39-26) at the 5:08 mark. That just woke Michigan up, and they went on a 14-3 run to end the half, up 24 points (53-29). When was the last time Gonzaga was down 24 points at halftime?

The 2nd half was a thing of beauty. Michigan pushed the lead up to 30 points (65-35) at the 14:29 mark, then 40 points (83-43) at the 9:20 mark. When was the last time Gonzaga was down 40 points? Michigan got the lead as high as 46 points a couple times, settling for a 40-point victory.

Stats

The [stats for the SDSU game](#) were solid. Michigan shot well overall ($34/68 = 50.0\%$), they shot 3-pointers pretty well ($11/33 = 33.3\%$), and they shot free throws decently ($15/22 = 68.2\%$). They crushed SDSU on the boards (49-34), and they even won the turnover battle (13-17). They won this game with solid shooting and dominant rebounding. Cutting down the number of turnovers sure helped as well.

The [stats for the Auburn game](#) were pretty good. Michigan shot well overall ($35/68 = 51.5\%$), they shot 3-pointers well ($14/35 = 40.0\%$), and they shot free throws well ($18/22 = 81.8\%$). They crushed Auburn on the boards (51-35), but they barely lost the turnover battle (9-8). They won this game with good shooting and dominant rebounding. They even cut down the number of turnovers from the previous game.

The [stats for the Gonzaga game](#) were very good. Michigan shot very well overall ($36/60 = 60.0\%$), they shot 3-pointers very well ($13/27 = 48.1\%$), and they shot free throws decently ($16/25 = 64.0\%$). They won the rebounding battle (44-38), but lost the turnover battle (14-11). They won this game with great shooting and good rebounding.

Look at those stats, especially the 3-point shooting and the rebounding. If Michigan can keep that up, they're going to win a lot of games.

Who Started?

The starters for all three games were [Nimari Burnett](#), [Elliot Cadeau](#), [Morez Johnson Jr.](#), [Yaxel Lendeborg](#), and [Aday Mara](#).

Who Looked Good?

It was the Yaxel Lendeborg show, again. He was the leading scorer in all three games, with 15, 17, and 20 points. He was also the tournament MVP. Just for good measure, he had 11 rebounds vs. Gonzaga, for another "double-double". He was brilliant, again.

Johnson also had a great tournament, with 13, 15, and 11 points. He shot very well: 4/8, 6/7, and 5/6, for a total of 15/21 (71.4%).

Burnett also hit double figures in all three games: 11, 15, and 14 points. He shot well: 3/8 overall (2/6 from deep), 5/7 overall (1/2 from deep), and 4/5 overall (4/4 from deep). That works out to 12/20 (60.0%) overall, and 7/12 (58.3%) from deep.

[Roddy Gayle Jr.](#) had a good tournament, coming off the bench. He hit double figures in two of the three games: 11, 17, and 9 points. He shot very well in two of the games, and pretty well

in the third: 5/6 overall (0/0 from deep), 6/13 (3/6 from deep), and 3/3 overall (0/0 from deep). That works out to 14/22 (63.6%) overall, and 3/6 (50.0%) from deep.

[Trey McKenney](#) also had a good tournament, coming off the bench. He also hit double figures in two of the three games: 6, 11, and 17 points. He shot pretty well: 2/6 overall (2/5 from deep), 3/6 overall (3/6 from deep), and 6/9 overall (3/5 from deep). That works out to 11/21 (52.4%) overall, and 8/16 (50.0%) from deep.

Cadeau only hit double figures in one game (13, 3, and 5 points), but he did an excellent job running the offense and playing tough defense. He had a season-high 13 assists in the Gonzaga game.

Mara also only hit double figures in one game (7, 5, and 13 points), but he was a force under the basket, with rebounds (8, 8, and 4) and blocked shots (3, 2, and 2). Besides all the shots he blocked, he forced many of the opponents to change or reconsider their shots when they got near the basket.

[L.J. Cason](#) hit double figures in one of the three games off the bench, with 6, 10, and 2 points.

[Will Tschetter](#) chipped in 10, 4, and 6 points off the bench.

Who Looked Not-So-Good?

All of the mainstream players looked good this week.

Who Else Played?

Since all three games were blowouts, some of the non-mainstream players got to play more than usual.

[Oscar Goodman](#) played in all three games, for significant minutes (5, 8, and 7). He scored 2 points each in the SDSU and Auburn games, on 1/2 shooting in each game. He didn't attempt a shot in the Gonzaga game. He had a career-highlight "poster" dunk near the end of the Auburn game.

[Winters Grady](#) played in all three games, for significant minutes (4, 7, and 7). He shot 0/1 vs. SDSU, 1/3 (all from deep) vs. Auburn, and 1/5 (all from deep) vs. Gonzaga. These were the first points of his career.

[Malick Kordel](#) played in all three games, for significant minutes (4, 4, and 6). He shot 0/1 in all three games.

[Charlie May](#) played in the Auburn game (0/1 shooting) and the Gonzaga game (1 point on a free throw).

Who Didn't Play?

The only scholarship player who didn't play was [Ricky Liburd](#). I don't know if he's injured, being redshirted, or just not good enough to play in a 40-point blowout.

The Scout Team players who didn't play were: [Howard Fisley Jr.](#) and [Harrison Hochberg](#).

What Does It Mean?

Winning this tournament is a Big Deal, and winning it by 40-30-40 points is a Really Big Deal. All three of these games will look excellent on Michigan's tournament resume in March. If Michigan can maintain this level of performance, they can beat anyone and everyone on their schedule.

I would argue that this was the best 3-day period in Michigan basketball history, even better than when they won the Battle 4 Atlantis tournament in 2019. Even better than when they won the 2017 Big Ten Tournament as the #8 seed (of course, that was 4 wins in 4 days). Even better than when they won the 2018 Big Ten Tournament (another 4 wins in 4 days). Even better than when they won the 2025 Big Ten Tournament. None of those wins was by 30 or 40 points.

This Week

This week, Michigan only plays one game. On Saturday (12/06/2025, 4:00 p.m., BTN), they play Rutgers in Crisler Arena.

[Rutgers](#) is currently 5-3, with a win over UNLV in the Players Era Festival. They don't have any noteworthy players (their two best players from last season hit the NBA Draft), but they do have a little height: a 6'10" player and a 6'11" player. Rutgers is several notches below Auburn and Gonzaga, so if Michigan can play their game, they should handle them.

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

Go Blue!