

Nothing But 'Net – Week #17 – 02/02/2026 – Running The Gauntlet

The (#3) University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games this past week, and they won both of them. [On Tuesday \(01/27/2026\), they beat \(#5\) Nebraska 75-72](#) in Crisler Arena, then [on Friday \(01/30/2026\), they won at \(#7\) Michigan State 83-71](#). Michigan's record improves to 20-1 (10-1 in Big Ten).

What Happened?

The Gauntlet: two games in four days against two Top-10 teams. Undefeated Nebraska (20-0 coming into the game), ranked #5 in the AP Poll. Michigan State (19-2 coming into the game), ranked #7 in the AP Poll. Could Michigan beat both these teams in such a short time period, especially when the MSU game was in Breslin, where Michigan hasn't won since 2018? The answer is a resounding "YES". Both games felt like Sweet 16/Final Four games, and Michigan had to come from behind in both games, but they did it. They passed the tests. They ran the gauntlet.

Game Flow

The Nebraska game was nerve-wracking. Nebraska led for almost the entire game, never by too much, but enough to be worrisome. Fortunately, Michigan came from behind and won the game in crunch time. Nebraska led 2-0 and 2-1, before Michigan got their only lead (3-2 at the 18:38 mark) until late in game. Nebraska pulled ahead again, but not very far, and Michigan tied the game up (10-10) with 14:08 to go in the half. Nebraska pulled away again, this time by up to 11 points (31-20 at the 10:19 mark). They kept the lead in the 6-8 point range for a while, but Michigan got within 2 points (44-42) with 2:59 left in the half. Nebraska pushed their lead back to 8 points, but Michigan trimmed it back to 2 points at halftime, 50-48.

I need to pause here for some context:

- Last season, Michigan beat Nebraska in Lincoln 49-46. It was one of the ugliest wins in recent Michigan basketball history. It was also less points than Michigan and Nebraska scored in the first half of this season's game.
- Michigan is not used to playing from behind. In most of their games this season, Michigan has led for the entire game, often by 20-30 points for most of the game. Even in the close games, Michigan has usually been ahead for most of the game, just not very far ahead.
- Michigan is not used to being behind at halftime, even just 2 points down.

On to the 2nd half: Michigan stayed close for the first 6 minutes of the 2nd half, although they never tied it up or went ahead. They were still within 2 points (54-52) at the 14:09 mark, when Nebraska started to pull away. They got their lead up to 9 points (63-54) with 11:25 to go, and kept it in the 6-8 point range for a while. They were still up 6 points (66-60) at the 7:37 mark, when Michigan finally made their move. They got within 2 points again (66-64) with 7:12 to go, then tied it up (72-72) with 2:16 left. Look at the final score (75-72); Michigan held Nebraska scoreless the rest of the game, to win by 3 points. It was very exciting.

The MSU game was very different from the Nebraska game. Michigan went out in front early (2-0), MSU tied it up (2-2), then Michigan went ahead for the next 30 minutes. They were up 10-2 at the 15:01 mark, before MSU finally scored again. Yes, MSU only scored 2 points in the first 5:23. Michigan kept the pressure on, and stretched their lead to 20-7 with 8:52 to go. Yes, MSU only scored 7 points in the first 11:20. State finally started scoring, and the game settled down a little. Michigan kept the lead in the 8-10 point range for a while, until a key moment in the 1st half: Michigan was up 8 points (29-21) at the 2:53 mark. They missed a corner 3-pointer, and [Yaxel Lendeborg](#) was called for a foul on the scramble for the rebound. The refs missed a clear hook-and-hold (a Flagrant 1 foul) on the MSU player battling for the rebound, so [Coach May](#) used his Head Coach's Challenge to get them to look at it again. When they did, they saw the flagrant foul on MSU, reversed the foul on Lendeborg, and gave

him 2 free throws (which he made) and gave Michigan the ball. On the inbounds play, Lendeborg got the inbounds pass, made a layup through contact, and drew the "and one" foul. He made that free throw as well, for a personal 5-point play. That made the score 34-21 at the 2:28 mark, and that opened the floodgates. Michigan pushed the lead up to 18 points (40-22) with 47 seconds left, settling for a 16-point lead (42-26) at halftime.

Hey, a 16-point lead at halftime on the road is great, right? Michigan has been strong in the first 4 minutes of the 2nd half all season, right? Well, someone forgot to tell MSU. They came out blazing to start the 2nd half, and they quickly cut Michigan's lead down to 10 points (42-32) at the 18:12 mark, then 3 points (48-45) with 13:11 to go. Michigan kept the lead in the 2-4 point range for a bit, but MSU finally tied the game (55-55) at the 7:57 mark, and went ahead (57-55) with 7:27 to go. Michigan tied it up again (57-57), but MSU went back on top for the last time (59-57) at the 6:55 mark. A Michigan 3-pointer with 6:39 left put Michigan back on top for good, 60-59. State hung around for a couple minutes, but another Michigan 3-pointer at the 3:08 mark pushed the lead up to 6 points (69-63), and that was the game. Michigan pushed the lead as high as 14 points, winning by 12. It was a glorious victory.

Stats

[The stats for the Nebraska game](#) were decent. Michigan shot pretty well overall (25/53 = 47.2%), they didn't shoot 3-pointers very well (6/26 = 23.1%), and they shot free throws very well (19/23 = 82.6%). They won the rebounding battle handily (35-23), but lost the turnover battle badly (19-11). They won this game with free throws and rebounding, but almost lost it with all those turnovers.

[The stats for the Michigan State game](#) were mediocre. Michigan didn't shoot very well overall (26/59 = 44.1%), they shot 3-pointers pretty well (8/21 = 38.1%), and they shot free throws very well (23/26 = 88.5%). The rebounding battle was a tie (36-36), and Michigan barely won the turnover battle (13-14). Michigan won this game with good 3-point shooting and tough defense.

Who Started?

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

Who Looked Good?

Lendeborg had a very good week, with 10 and 26 points. His 26 points were the team-high for Michigan in the MSU game. He also had 12 rebounds vs. MSU, for an impressive double-double. The only downside for him this week: 3-point shooting. He was 0/6 vs. Nebraska, and 1/4 vs. MSU.

Johnson also had a good week, with 17 and 12 points. His 17 points were the team-high for Michigan in the Nebraska game. He also had 12 rebounds vs. Nebraska, for an impressive double-double.

[Trey McKenney](#) was the only other player to hit double figures in both games this week, with 11 and 10 points, off the bench. He has become a very valuable 6th man for Michigan.

Mara almost had double figures in both games, with 10 and 8 points. He did a nice job at rim protection.

Cadeau had one decent game (7 points vs. Nebraska) and one very good game (17 points vs. MSU). He also had 7 and 6 assists.

[Will Tschetter](#) had a very productive week off the bench, with 7 and 5 points. He hit a big 3-pointer in each game.

Who Looked Not-So-Good?

Burnett had a quiet week, with 9 points vs. Nebraska, but 0 points vs. MSU. He was 0/1 in 12:30 of "action" vs. MSU. Michigan needs a lot more from him.

[Roddy Gayle Jr.](#) also had a quiet week off the bench, with 2 points in each game.

[L.J. Cason](#) also had a quiet week off the bench, with 2 and 3 points.

Who Else Played?

No one else played.

Who Didn't Play?

The scholarship players who didn't play were: [Oscar Goodman](#), [Winters Grady](#), and [Malick Kordel](#).

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

What Does It Mean?

These were two very important wins, especially in the race for the Big Ten regular season championship. Michigan is now in 1st place, tied with Illinois at 10-1. All the other teams have at least 2 losses in Big Ten play. Since Michigan still plays Illinois in a couple weeks, they control their own destiny. There are still a lot of games left to play, and Michigan has several significant challenges ahead: at Ohio State, home vs. UCLA, at Purdue, Duke (neutral court), at Illinois, at Iowa, and home vs. MSU.

The other reason these were important games is that it showed the Michigan team that they can overcome adversity against top-level competition. They were behind for most of the Nebraska game, and came back to win in crunch time. They lost a good-sized lead (16 points) vs. MSU, and came from behind to win that game in a hostile arena. Those are important lessons.

This Week

This week, Michigan plays 2 games. On Thursday (02/05/2026, 6:30 p.m., FS1), they play Penn State in Crisler Arena, then on Sunday (02/08/2026, 1:00 p.m., CBS), they play at Ohio State. It's "Replay Week", since Michigan has already played (and beaten) both of these teams this season. Each Big Ten team plays 14 teams once and 3 teams twice. The 3 teams that Michigan plays twice this season are the 3 "State" teams: Michigan State, Ohio State, and Penn State.

[Penn State](#) is currently 9-12 (0-10 in Big Ten), with 6 more sad losses since Michigan beat them in Happy Valley on 01/06/2026. This is the ultimate "trap" game: they're 0-10, Michigan beat them on the road, and the game is in Crisler. Looks like an easy win, right? That's what we thought in 2019, when (#6) Michigan lost to an 0-11 PSU team. On paper, Michigan should handle them easily, but the game is played on the court, not on paper.

[Ohio State](#) is currently 14-7 (6-5 in Big Ten), with a win and a loss since Michigan beat them 2 weeks ago. You can bet that they weren't happy losing to Michigan in Ann Arbor, and it's going to be a lot more challenging to beat them in Columbus. Once again, on paper, Michigan should be able to get by them, but it's going to take a solid performance.

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

Go Blue!

