Nothing But 'Net – Week #19 – 02/16/2026 – A Few Scary Moments

The (#2) University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games this past week, and they won both of them. On Wednesday (02/11/2026), they won at Northwestern 87-75, then on Saturday (02/14/2026), they beat UCLA 86-56 in Crisler Arena. Michigan's record improves to 24-1 (14-1 in Big Ten). Michigan is still all alone in 1st place in the Big Ten.

What Happened?

Michigan had a few scary moments this week. They were behind for much of the Northwestern game, and they gave up most of the lead they had built up against UCLA in the first 18 minutes during a scary last 2 minutes of the half. Fortunately, Michigan kept their composure and finished strong in both games, winning by 12 and 30 points.

The Northwestern game was ugly, until it wasn't. Northwestern led for most of the game, and Michigan seemed powerless to catch them. When the Michigan defense managed to stop Northwestern, the Michigan offense squandered the opportunity to score and cut into the deficit. When the Michigan offense stopped shooting themselves in the foot, the Michigan defense would let Northwestern score easily to neutralize the offensive output. It was very frustrating. Once Michigan stopped throwing away their opportunities, they did fine, but it took 26 minutes for the tide to turn.

The UCLA game was much less uncomfortable. Michigan never trailed, and except for a miserable 2-minute period just before halftime, they were in control of the game. They were very sharp in the 2nd half, and blew the game wide open.

Game Flow

Michigan actually led Northwestern early, up 3-0 and 5-0. Northwestern promptly went on an 8-0 run to take the lead (8-5) at the 17:37 mark. Michigan fought back, and went ahead for the last time in a long while, 10-8, with 16:24 left. Northwestern went ahead, but Michigan managed to tie it up (17-17) at the 14:22 mark. This is one of the turning points in the game: Michigan had 4 stops in a row, along with 3 offensive rebounds, but they wasted all 4 of these opportunities with 2 turnovers, 2 missed 2-point shots, and 3 missed 3-point shots. Finally, with 12:28 left, Northwestern scored again (a 3-pointer), and the floodgates opened. In the next 2 minutes, Northwestern shot 2/3 from 2-point range, 2/3 from 3-point range, and 2/2 from the free throw line. At the same time, Michigan missed one 2-point shot, two 3-point shots, and committed a turnover. The end result was a 12-0 run for Northwestern in a little over 2 minutes, and the game was suddenly out of hand at the 10:05 mark. Northwestern kept the lead in the 9-11 point range for the rest of the half, up 9 points (44-35) at halftime.

Michigan has only been behind at halftime a handful of times this season, and this was the biggest deficit so far. Michigan usually wins the first 4 minutes of the 2nd half, but not in this game. By the 1st media timeout, at the 15:51 mark, Northwestern had increased their lead to 13 points, 54-41. Things were looking grim. Coming out of the timeout, Northwestern pushed their lead to a new high: 16 points (58-42) at the 14:22 mark. That's where the game finally turned around. Michigan combined some stops with some offense, and started chipping away at the deficit. By the 12:49 mark, they had it down to 11 points (58-47), then they went on an 11-2 run to get within 2 points (60-58) with 9:38 left. Northwestern pushed their lead back up to 7 points (67-60) at the 8:42 mark, but Michigan went on an 8-0 run to go ahead for the first time in a long time, 68-67, with 7:14 to go. Northwestern led one more time, 69-68, at the 6:39 mark, and then the game was tied up (69-69) at the 6:34 mark. The rest of the way was all Michigan. They went on a 6-0 run to go up 75-69, then another 8-2 run to push their lead up to 12 points (83-71) with 2:01 left. Northwestern got within 8 points (83-75) at the 1:02 mark, but Michigan scored the last 4 points to win by 12. It was a gutty, gritty, ugly win.

As I mentioned above, Michigan never trailed in the UCLA game. They were up 5-0 at the 17:54 mark, then 10-3 with 15:31 left. They kept the lead in the 7-9 point range for a while,

and finally got it up to 10 (22-12) at the 11:14 mark. UCLA hung around, and Michigan just kept the lead in the 7-9 point range for most of the rest of the half, until the ugly last 2 minutes. With 2:39 left, Michigan had their biggest lead of the game, 39-28, and then things got out of hand for a few minutes. UCLA hit a 3-pointer, Michigan made 1 of 2 free throws, and the score was 40-31 at the 2:04 mark. UCLA made a 2-pointer, Michigan threw the ball away, then fouled. UCLA made 1 of 2 free throws, Michigan missed a 3-pointer, and UCLA made another 2-pointer with 27 seconds left. Michigan played for the last shot, but threw the ball away (again), and UCLA made another 2-pointer at the buzzer. Michigan's nice 11-point lead was down to 2 points at halftime, 40-38.

At the start of the 2nd half, it took Michigan 6 minutes to finally get their lead back up to 10 points (54-44) again. It took them another 6 minutes to push the lead up over 20 points (68-47) at the 8:17 mark, and that was the game. They held off UCLA the rest of the way, pushing the lead to 30 points in the last 20 seconds. Look at the halftime score (40-38), then look at the final score (86-56). Michigan held UCLA to 18 points in the 2nd half, while scoring 46. Total domination, at least for a half.

Stats

The stats for the Northwestern game were mediocre. Michigan shot poorly overall (30/69 = 43.5%), they shot 3-pointers poorly (8/29 = 27.6%), and they shot free throws decently (19/27 = 70.4%). They won the rebounding battle handily (47-30), but they lost the turnover battle (12-8). They won this game with rebounding, but almost lost it with poor shooting and turnovers.

The stats for the UCLA game were pretty good. Michigan shot very well overall (31/50 = 62.0%), they shot 3-pointers well (7/19 = 36.8%), and they shot free throws decently (17/26 = 65.4%). They were behind in rebounds almost the entire game, but they managed to eke out a narrow win in the rebounding battle (30-29), and they won the turnover battle (9-13). They won this game with good shooting and great (2nd half) defense.

Who Started?

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

Who Looked Good?

L.J. Cason had a great week. He was the leading scorer for Michigan in the Northwestern game, with 18 points, and he followed it up with a solid game against UCLA, scoring 13 points. He provided the spark that brought Michigan back in the Northwestern game.

Lendeborg had a solid week, with 15 and 17 points. He also had 12 and 8 rebounds, giving him a double-double in the Northwestern game.

Johnson had a good week, with 12 and 15 points.

Cadeau also had a good week, scoring 9 points in each game. He also had 7 and 5 assists.

Mara had a decent week, with 12 and 9 points. You could tell that he was trying so hard (maybe too hard) in the UCLA game, playing against his former team. He managed to score a decent number of points, and he had 8 rebounds and 3 blocked shots.

Burnett had a decent week, with 6 and 12 points.

Trey McKenney chipped in 12 and 2 points off the bench. His 2-point performance vs. UCLA ended a streak of 7 games in a row where he had scored in double figures.

Who Looked Not-So-Good?

Roddy Gayle Jr. had a quiet week, scoring 3 and 5 points off the bench.

Will Tschetter also had a quiet week, scoring 0 and 4 points off the bench.

Who Else Played?

Oscar Goodman played in the last 3 minutes of the UCLA game, but didn't attempt a shot.

Who Didn't Play?

The only scholarship player who didn't play was Malick Kordel. Winters Grady is out with an injury.

None of the Scout Team players (Howard Eisley Jr., Harrison Hochberg and Charlie May) got to play this week.

What Does It Mean?

These were very important wins for several reasons:

- They keep Michigan all alone in 1st place in the Big Ten, now with a 2-game lead on Illinois, Purdue, and Nebraska.
- They keep Michigan in line for a #1 seed in the NCAA Tournament.
- They will probably help boost Michigan up to the #1 spot in this week's AP Poll. The current #1 team (Arizona) lost this past week, twice in fact. Being ranked #1 doesn't really mean much, but it's a great recruiting and publicity tool.

This Week

This week, Michigan plays 2 very challenging games. On Tuesday (02/17/2026, 6:30 p.m., Peacock), they play at (#13) Purdue, then on Saturday (02/21/2026, 6:30 p.m., ESPN), they play (#4) Duke in Capital One Arena in Washington (DC) in a game billed as "Duel In The District". It's also billed as "The Edward Jones Capital Showcase Presented By Bad Boy Mowers". That's a lot of names and sponsors.

Purdue is currently 21-4 (11-3 in Big Ten), with impressive wins over (#8) Alabama, (#15) Texas Tech, (#21) Auburn, Wisconsin, and (#7) Nebraska, and unimpressive losses to (#10) Iowa State (by 23 points at home), UCLA, and Indiana. They have several noteworthy players (Fletcher Loyer, Braden Smith, and Trey Kaufman-Renn), and plenty of height: two 6'11" players and a 7'4" player. Yes, another player taller than Mara. Smith has been a terror against Michigan for his whole career, especially in West Lafayette. This will be a very challenging game for Michigan, but they can win it if they play their "A" game.

Duke is currently 23-2 (12-1 in ACC), with impressive wins over Texas, (#24) Kansas, (#22) Arkansas, (#15) Florida, (#7) Michigan State, (#20) Louisville (twice), (#24) SMU, and (#20) Clemson. They have no unimpressive losses. They certainly do have a noteworthy player: Cameron Boozer, the megastar freshman who will probably be one of the top 3 NBA Draft picks this spring. They don't have a lot of height, only two 6'11" players. This will be the most challenging game Michigan has played all season. The result won't affect the Big Ten race, but it will have major implications on the AP Poll and NCAA Tournament seedings. Michigan can win this game, but it will take their best effort of the season. They can't afford to make many mistakes.

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

Go Blue!