

Nothing But 'Net – Week #20 – 02/23/2026 – Number 1, But Just For A Week

The (#1) University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games this past week, and they won one and lost the other. [On Tuesday \(02/17/2026\), they won at \(#7\) Purdue 91-80](#), then [on Saturday \(02/21/2026\), they lost to \(#3\) Duke 68-63](#) in Washington, DC. Michigan's record is now 25-2 (15-1 in Big Ten). Michigan is still all alone in 1st place in the Big Ten.

What Happened?

It was great that Michigan finally got the #1 ranking in the AP Poll, but they only got to enjoy it for one week. With the loss to Duke, Michigan will undoubtedly drop out of the #1 spot, hopefully no further than #3 or #4. Since (#2) Houston also lost, Duke will probably be #1 this week.

Michigan played very well on Tuesday against Purdue, but they were flat and "off" against Duke. Duke is a very good team, but if Michigan had played their "A" game, they would have beaten them.

Trivia Question: Prior to this season, when was the last time Michigan beat Michigan State in East Lansing and Purdue in West Lafayette in the same season? The answer is at the end of the article.

Game Flow

The Purdue game started out as a back-and-forth affair, with Purdue going ahead 5-0 and 7-2, before Michigan went ahead 8-7 at the 14:58 mark. Purdue had their last lead of the game (11-10) with 13:36 left, then Michigan started to pull away. Michigan went on a beautiful 16-0 run over the next 4 minutes, and suddenly it was 26-11 at the 9:28 mark. Purdue finally scored again, but Michigan kept building their lead, pushing it up to 20 points (42-22) at the 4:23 mark. The lead was still 20 points (48-28) with 1:55 to go, but Purdue managed to trim 4 points off their deficit before halftime, making the score 48-32.

The 2nd half was just a matter of Michigan trading time for points. They let Purdue chip away at the lead, but very slowly. At the 19:27 mark, Michigan had actually extended their lead to 19 points (51-32), and it was still 16 points (69-53) with 9:25 to go. Purdue got as close as 11 points (74-63) with 5:11 left, but Michigan pushed it back up to 16 points (79-63) at the 4:22 mark. So, at this point, Purdue hadn't taken a single point off their halftime deficit in 15:38. In the final 4:22 they managed to get as close as 8 points a few times: 81-73 with 2:05 left, 83-75 with 1:30 left, and 86-78 with 0:53 left, but that was as close as they could get. Michigan got the stops and made their free throws down the stretch, winning by 11.

The Duke game was close the whole way, with neither team ever getting a double-digit lead. The 1st half was a seesaw battle, with 5 ties and 13 lead changes. Michigan led more often than Duke, but never by more than 5 points. The key moment for the entire game came in the last 3 minutes of the half. Michigan was up by 4 points (33-29) at the 3:11 mark, when they let Duke go on a 6-0 run to end the half up by 2 points, 35-33. Michigan never led or tied again. The really frustrating part was that Michigan had the ball with the shot clock off and the score tied (33-33), and they took the last shot with 4 seconds left. It missed, but Michigan fouled a Duke player on the rebound with 0.8 seconds left, and he made 2 free throws to give Duke a lead they never surrendered. Michigan could have been 2-3 points ahead at halftime, but instead they were 2 points behind, and never recovered.

The 2nd half was one long frustrating mess. Duke never trailed, but Michigan stayed close, and got within one point a couple times, the last one being 58-57 with 3:49 to go. The rest of the way, Michigan just couldn't get the stops they needed or make the shots they needed, and Duke kept them at arm's length.

Stats

[The stats for the Purdue game](#) were very impressive. Michigan shot pretty well overall (30/57 = 52.6%), they shot 3-pointers very well (13/23 = 56.5%), and they shot free throws well (18/23 = 78.3%). They won the rebounding battle (39-31), but lost the turnover battle badly (14-6). They won this game with great shooting and good rebounding.

[The stats for the Duke game](#) were sad. Michigan shot poorly overall (22/55 = 40.0%), they shot 3-pointers terribly (6/25 = 24.0%), and they shot free throws decently (13/18 = 72.2%). They lost the rebounding battle badly (41-28), but won the turnover battle (7-11). They lost this game with miserable shooting and terrible rebounding. This is one of the few games this season where Michigan has been out-rebounded.

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 good week, with 13 and 21 points. He was the high scorer for Michigan in the Duke game, and he was the main reason the game was close.

Johnson also had a good week, with 12 and 13 points. He also had 11 rebounds in the Purdue game, for a solid double-double.

Mara had 10 points in each game, and 11 rebounds in the Purdue game, for another double-double. He was hampered by foul trouble in the Duke game, which really limited Michigan's inside offense.

Cadeau had one good game (17 points vs. Purdue) and one decent game (8 points vs. Duke). He had the worst shooting of all the Michigan players in the Duke game: 1/8 overall, 1/6 from deep. He scored most of his points on free throws (5/6).

[L.J. Cason](#) had a good week off the bench, with 13 and 7 points.

[Trey McKenney](#) had one good game (13 points vs. Purdue) and one quiet game (2 points vs. Duke) this week off the bench.

Who Looked Not-So-Good?

Burnett was almost non-existent this week, with 5 and 0 points.

[Roddy Gayle Jr.](#) had a quiet week off the bench, with 5 and 2 points.

[Will Tschetter](#) was almost worthless this week off the bench, with 3 and 0 points.

Who Else Played?

No one else played.

Who Didn't Play?

The scholarship players who didn't play were [Oscar Goodman](#) and [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?

The win over Purdue was huge, especially in Michigan's quest to win the Big Ten regular season championship. The Duke loss was a mixed bag: on the one hand, it will certainly knock Michigan out of the top spot in the AP Poll. On the other hand, it won't have any effect on the Big Ten race. It also showed that Michigan can play with "the big boys", since it was a close game on a night when Michigan didn't play close to their best game.

Hopefully, when the AP Poll comes out on Monday afternoon, Michigan will still be in the top 4, which should keep them in line for a #1 seed in the NCAA Tournament. Michigan still has 4 regular season Big Ten games left, 2 at home (Minnesota and Michigan State) and 2 on the road (Illinois and Iowa). If Michigan wins 1 of these 4 games, they would clinch at least a tie for the Big Ten title. A 2nd win would clinch the title outright. However, they really need to win all 4 of them to help their cause for a #1 seed in the Big Dance.

This Week

This week, Michigan plays 2 games. On Tuesday (02/24/2026, 8:30 p.m., BTN), they play Minnesota in Crisler Arena, then on Friday (02/27/2026, 8:00 p.m. EST, FOX), they play at (#10) Illinois.

[Minnesota](#) is currently 13-14 (6-10 in Big Ten), with impressive wins over (#22) Indiana, (#19) Iowa, and (#10) Michigan State, and unimpressive losses to Missouri, San Francisco, Stanford, Santa Clara, USC, Ohio State, Penn State, Maryland, and Washington. They don't have any noteworthy players, and they don't have much height: one 6'10" player. This is a game that Michigan should win handily, which is why it is the ultimate "trap" game. After playing a bunch of Top-25 teams away from Crisler, Michigan could feel overconfident playing a lower-division team at home. They need to take Minnesota seriously. The Gophers have beaten some good teams this season.

[Illinois](#) is currently 22-6 (13-4 in Big Ten), with impressive wins over (#11) Texas Tech, (#13) Tennessee, (#19) Iowa, (#4) Purdue, and (#5) Nebraska, and an unimpressive loss to UCLA. They have a very noteworthy player: Keaton Wagler, the likely Big Ten Freshman of the Year. He is averaging 18.2 points/game, with a 46-point game vs. Purdue, and a 34-point game vs. Wisconsin, along with 6 other games of 20+ points. He will be a handful. Illinois has plenty of height, with a 6'10" player, a 7'1" player, and a 7'2" player. This will be a very challenging game for Michigan, especially in the State Farm Center, where Michigan hasn't won since 01/10/2019 (4 games). In fact, Illinois has won the last 9 games in the series. Michigan can beat Illinois, but they will need to play their "A" game.

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

Go Blue!

Trivia Answer: The last time Michigan won at MSU and Purdue in the same season was 1994.