02/10/2003 - Week #15 – Back In First Place

The University of Michigan men's basketball team got back on the winning track again on Saturday (02/08/2003), beating Iowa 70-62 in Crisler Arena. This was their only game this week. The win raises Michigan's record to 14-8 overall, 7-2 in the Big Ten, and boosts Michigan into a tie with Purdue for 1st place in the conference standings.

The Iowa game was very exciting, with lots of runs and lead-changes. The key run was a 10-0 run by UM with about 8:00 left in the game. That gave them enough of a lead to bring it home. Once again, they played well in "crunch time", and showed good poise and mental toughness. This is an amazing turnaround from the last few years, and even from the start of this year. This mental toughness has made a big difference, and allowed the Wolverines to win several games that would have been losses in previous years. As long as they can keep it up, they can play with anybody in the conference.

As far as individual performances in the Iowa game, it was the "Big Three" again, along with Lester Abram. Actually, Abram had a better game than LaVell Blanchard. Bernard Robinson, Jr. led all scorers with 21 points and 6 rebounds, many of them fierce. Daniel Horton had 16 points (including his first career dunk!), and Blanchard just squeaked into double figures with 10 points. Blanchard did help the team a lot with 12 rebounds. Abram had 14 points, to go with a career-high 9 rebounds. The only other players to score were the two freshman centers: Graham Brown had 5 points, and Chris Hunter had 4 points. The rest of the bench only attempted one shot: Chuck Bailey went 0-for-1.

Michigan played good defense against Iowa, holding the Hawkeyes to 37% shooting (22-for-59). As a team, UM shot pretty well from the floor: 28-for-58 (48%). They out-rebounded Iowa (39-35), and committed a lot less fouls (10-20). They had less turnovers (13-16), and more steals (10-3). About the only significant negative for Michigan was the free-throw shooting: they only shot 50% (10-for-20), while Iowa shot 92% (11-for-12). But since Iowa didn't get to the line much, it wasn't a factor in the game.

At 7-2 in the conference, Michigan has shown that it wasn't just a lucky streak that got them off to a 6-0 start in the league. They've played most of the Big Ten teams now (except Purdue and Indiana), and they've beaten most of them at least once (they split with Minnesota), and they hung close with the only one they haven't beaten (Illinois). They still have a chance to beat Illinois when they play them in Ann Arbor on Saturday, March 1st. Based on what I've seen in Big Ten play, I wouldn't be surprised if Michigan won their last 3 home games. The big question mark is how well they can play on the road. Here's the schedule:

Wed., Feb. 12	at Indiana
Sat., Feb. 15	Ohio State
Wed., Feb. 19	at Purdue
Wed., Feb. 26	at Wisconsin
Sat., Mar. 1	Illinois
Wed., Mar. 5	at Penn State
Sat., Mar. 8	Purdue

Indiana, Purdue, and Wisconsin are all tough places to play, although Michigan State did beat Indiana in Bloomington over the weekend. The Michigan game at Purdue could well be for 1st place, so that will be an intense battle. Wisconsin probably feels that they were robbed when they lost to Michigan in Ann Arbor a few weeks ago, after they blew a 15-point lead in the last 6 minutes of the game, so they'll be trying to prove something when

Michigan comes to town. Only the Penn State game looks relatively easy, but it's always tough to play on the road.

As you can see above, Michigan plays two games this week. On Wednesday (02/12/2003), they play at Indiana, then on Saturday (02/08/2003), they play Ohio State in Ann Arbor. This is the first time this season that UM has had a "split" week in the Big Ten. Previously, they've played all their games for the week either at home or on the road. It will be interesting to see how the team responds to the unusual travel schedule.

The Ohio State game on Saturday is at 3:00. Come on out to Crisler and cheer the Wolverines on. The crowd support has been growing each game, and it really helps the team get fired up to play their best. The Maize Rage has been getting better and better every game, and they're starting to be a force to be reckoned with. Join the excitement!

Drop by again next week to see how it went, and why.