03/10/2003 - Week #19 – A Disappointing Finish to the Regular Season

The University of Michigan men's basketball team had mixed results this week, winning on the road at Penn State (78-62) on Wednesday (03/05/2003), then losing at home against Purdue (69-61) on Saturday (03/08/2003). These were Michigan's final 2 games of the regular season, and the Wolverines ended up with an overall record of 17-12, 10-6 in the Big Ten. Wisconsin won the Big Ten title outright, at 12-4. Illinois finished 2nd at 11-5, and Michigan ended up tied for 3rd place with Purdue and (ugh) Michigan State. The Wolverines lost 3 out of their last 4 games, and 6 out of their last 10 games, after a 6-0 start. It's a disappointing finish to a season that showed such promise 2 weeks ago. On the other hand, it's a huge improvement over last year's 11-18 (5-11 in the Big Ten) record, and a lot better than most "experts" (including me) predicted for them.

Michigan looked good in the game at Penn State, especially coming after the disappointing loss to Illinois last Saturday (03/01/2003). They played well, and kept the game firmly in control for the entire 2nd half. The road win gave UM a 4-4 record in Big Ten away games, which is very impressive. Michigan went 6-2 at home in the Big Ten, but unfortunately, the 2 losses were in the last 2 home games, against Illinois and Purdue.

Michigan never really got untracked against Purdue. They shot poorly the whole game, and were behind almost the whole time. After they pulled within 1 point, at 13-12, Purdue went on a 14-1 run, and that was the ball game. UM cut the lead down to 5 a couple times in the 2nd half, but that was as close as they got, then Purdue pulled away. The big story in this game was Willie Deane of Purdue: he scored 36 points, 19 in the 1st half and 17 in the 2nd half. He was the difference in the game.

As far as individual performances for the week, LaVell Blanchard, Daniel Horton, and Lester Abram all scored in double figures in both games. Blanchard had 16 points at Penn State, and 11 points vs. Purdue. Unfortunately, he sprained his ankle in the 1st half of the Penn State game, and was shutout in the 2nd half. Because of his ankle, he was slowed down in the Purdue game. Horton had 12 points at PSU, and 15 points against Purdue. Unfortunately, he shot poorly (5-for-15) against Purdue, and couldn't come up with the big baskets when UM needed them, the way he has for most of the season. Abram had 14 points against Penn State, and 15 points in the Purdue game. He's become a lot more consistent scorer in the 2nd half of the Big Ten season.

The other "starters" (not counting Rotolu Adebiyi and Gavin Groninger, who started against Purdue since it was Senior Day) did OK. Bernard Robinson, Jr. had 17 points to lead all scorers in the game at Penn State, but he only had 5 points against Purdue. Graham Brown did pretty well in both games, with 4 points at Penn State and 8 points against Purdue.

The bench scoring was a little better than usual. Chris Hunter is developing into a good "6th man", especially since he's playing out of position. He's a natural power forward, but he's being asked to play center this season, since the team is very thin at this position. Next year, with 2 more big men coming in, he'll probably play a lot more at forward. He had a great game at Penn State, scoring 12 points on 6-for-6 shooting. He didn't do as well against Purdue, scoring 4 points on 1-for-6 shooting. Sherrod Harrell chipped in 3 points at PSU, and 2 points vs. Purdue. Groninger also scored 3 points in his final home game, against Purdue.

The regular season is over, and due to the self-imposed sanctions, Michigan's season will be over once they're done with the Big Ten Tournament, which starts on Thursday (03/13/2003). Michigan is seeded 3rd, and plays in the quarterfinals on Friday

(03/14/2003) against the winner of the (6th seed) Indiana vs. (11th seed) Penn State game, which will be played on Thursday. If they win that game, they'll play in the semifinals on Saturday (03/15/2003) against the winner of one of the other quarterfinal games, which is (2nd seed) Illinois vs. the winner of the (7th seed) Minnesota vs. (10th seed) Northwestern game. If they win that one, they play in finals. Even if they win that one, they're done for the season. It's a shame, since they have a good enough record to get into the NCAA tournament this year, but they'll be back next year, even better than this year.

Michigan could realistically win the Big Ten Tournament, but they'll have to play better than they've been playing the last 2 weeks. Out of the 10 other teams in the tournament, they've beaten 8 of them at least once:

Seed	Team	Michigan's Record
1	Wisconsin	1-1
2	Illinois	0-2
4	Purdue	1-1
5	Michigan State	1-0
6	Indiana	0-1
7	Minnesota	1-1
8	Ohio State	2-0
9	Iowa	1-0
10	Northwestern	2-0
11	Penn State	2-0

They could have beaten Illinois in either game against them, but they didn't look good against Indiana.

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