01/12/2004 – Week #10 – The Start of the Big Ten Schedule

It was a mixed week for the University of Michigan men's basketball team. They played two Big Ten games last week, and they won the first one and lost the second. On Wednesday (01/03/2004), they beat Northwestern 78-54 in Crisler Arena. Unfortunately, they couldn't follow it up with a second Big Ten win, and lost to Indiana in Crisler Arena on Sunday (01/11/2004), 59-57. The win and the loss leave UM with a Big Ten record of 1-1, and an overall record of 10-3, which is still pretty good. I know, I predicted that Michigan would win all 8 Big Ten games at home, and they should have won the Indiana game. They played pretty poorly against IU, and they deserved to lose, even though they came back well in the last minutes of the game, and had a good shot at either sending the game into overtime, or winning it outright. It's a real shame they didn't play better, since Phil Hubbard's jersey was retired at halftime of the Indiana game. There was a big, loud crowd, led by a great job by the Maize Rage. All that was missing was the win.

For the 3rd week in a row, it was like watching two completely different teams this week. As good as Michigan looked in beating Northwestern, that's how bad they looked for most of the game against Indiana. They need to put 2 good games together in the same week, then start putting together a couple good weeks in a row. They have the talent to win just about every game on their schedule, if they can just play consistently. In the Northwestern game, UM looked very good, and played 2 good halves. They had a huge 45-26 lead at halftime, and they built on the lead in the second half, winning by 24 points. They outrebounded Northwestern 31-18, and had a very reasonable number of turnovers (13). They shot an excellent percentage in the 1st half (16-for-21, 76%), and a very good percentage in the 2nd half (12-for-22, 55%), for an overall percentage of 65% (28-for-43).

The Indiana game is a whole different story. This was the "perfect storm" that Indiana needed to beat Michigan in Ann Arbor: Michigan's worst game of the season, Indiana's best game of the season, and a terrible officiating crew. UM opened up a 6-1 lead with about 4 minutes gone, and looked in control. The Indiana players were missing everything, and the UM players were hustling. However, once Indiana found their aim from 3-point range, the roof fell in. It started raining 3-pointers, and only one of them was by Michigan. Indiana led by 10 (29-19) at halftime, and pushed the lead up to 16 points with 16 minutes left in the game. From that point on, Michigan played much better, and steadily closed the gap. They got it down to 2 points in the last 30 seconds, and had the ball for several last shots, but couldn't get any of them to fall.

The stats from the Indiana game are disgusting. Michigan shot 9-for-32 (28%) in the 1st half, and 26-for-68 (38%) for the game. It was a lot worse from 3-point range: 1-for-7 (14%) in the 1st half, and 3-for-18 (17%) for the game. It was a low foul game, with UM shooting 2-for-3 from the free throw line, and IU shooting 3-for-4. IU barely won the rebounding battle, 37-35, and UM had an incredibly low 5 turnovers in the game. It was really the shooting, especially the 3-point shooting, that killed them.

The main culprit in the shooting department against Indiana was Daniel Horton, who missed his first 10 shots (including 6 3-pointers), before hitting his last 3. He ended up with 7 points, but he really hurt the team with all his misses. He had a lousy week in general, with only 3 points (on 1-for-5 shooting) against Northwestern, also at the end of the game. Lester Abram also had a lousy shooting game against IU, going 4-for-10, for 7 points. However, he had a career night against Northwestern, shooting 7-for-8 from the floor and 10-for-10 from the free throw line, for a career-high 27 points. Among the starters, only Bernard Robinson, Jr. had 2 good games this week. He scored 18 points (on 9-for-11 shooting) against Northwestern, and followed it up with 16 points (on 8-for-18 shooting)

against Indiana. Courtney Sims wasn't a factor in the scoring in either game, getting 2 points in each contest, and Graham Brown didn't do much better, with 4 points against Northwestern, and 2 against IU. Michigan needs much more production from the post players.

The bench players contributed quite well this week, which is encouraging. The bench scored 25 points against Northwestern, and 21 against Indiana. The big star off the bench continues to be Dion Harris, who scored 13 points against Northwestern, and 15 points against Indiana. That gives him 3 games in a row with double-figures, including 13 against Fairfield. He's also playing a lot of minutes (29 against Northwestern, and 31 in the Indiana game). Once again, J.C. Mathis played very well off the bench, scoring 7 points against Northwestern, and 4 against Indiana. More importantly, when he's in the game he provides some muscle underneath, he plays good, solid defense, he gets key rebounds, he dives for loose balls, and he hustles. Brent Petway played in both games, and he scored 2 points in each. Against Northwestern, he had another great dunk, and he had a 1-foot jumper against Indiana. The jumper against Indiana is the longest shot he's made this season; he's scored 15 baskets, and 13 of them have been dunks, 1 was a layup, and one was a 1-footer. He hasn't shown much shooting range yet. The only other bench player to score this week was Dani Wohl, who got his first 2 career points against Northwestern. Sherrod Harrell, Amadou Ba, and Colin Dill all got in against Northwestern, but didn't score. Finally, Chris Hunter got back into action again, in the Indiana game. He's back from his knee surgery, and he looked OK out there. He only played 7 minutes, and he didn't score, but he did run and jump well, and he seemed to be pain-free. It will help to have him back and available.

The Indiana loss is disappointing, and but it's still very early in the Big Ten season. It's a long season, and Michigan can't afford to dwell on this one loss for very long. They have most of the week off, with only one game, but it's a big one. On Saturday (01/17/2004), they play Michigan State in East Lansing, at 3:45 on TV (CBS). This is going to be a tough game, despite MSU's poor record (0-1 in the Big Ten, 5-7 overall). Michigan can win, but they'll have to play very well. In particular, they need a good game from Horton, and they need more production from the big men (Brown, Sims, Mathis, and Hunter). Robinson needs to continue his strong play, and Harris needs to keep chipping in off the bench. Probably the biggest factor will be how well Sims, Brown, and Mathis can contain MSU's Paul Davis, who has been carrying State on his back. If Davis scores more than 20 points, it's going to be really tough for Michigan to win. Stopping Davis is the key to victory.

I'll be back next week to tell you all how it went, and why.

Go Blue!