02/02/2004 – Week #13 – Another Mixed Week

It was another mixed week for the University of Michigan men's basketball team. They played two Big Ten games last week, and they won the first and lost the second. On Wednesday (01/28/2004), they beat Iowa, 90-84, in Crisler Arena. On Saturday (01/31/2004), the lost to Illinois, 67-52, on the road. The win and the loss leave UM with a 3-4 record in the Big Ten, and an overall record of 12-6. Once again, these are still pretty good numbers. With 4 losses in the Big Ten, Michigan is probably out of the race for the title, but conventional wisdom says that they probably need to win 18 games to make it into the NCAA Tournament, so they have to win 6 out of their next 9 games. 5 of those 9 games are in Crisler Arena, although a couple of them are going to be tough (Wisconsin and Michigan State). They also have road games at Minnesota and Northwestern, which they should win. Michigan has had terrible luck playing at Minnesota, but Minnesota is down this year, so it might happen.

The win against Iowa was an important victory, and Michigan played well. It was a fast-paced, high-scoring game, with lots of big runs for both teams. It was a toss-up game going in, and it was a game that UM really needed to win, and they did. Statistically, Michigan shot well from the field (31-for-58, 53%), and from 3-point range (10-for-22, 46%), but not from the free-throw line (18-for-29, 62%). They had 14 turnovers, which isn't as good as the 9 they had in each of the previous 2 games, but is still acceptable. They also out-rebounded Iowa, 30-27.

The loss at Illinois wasn't very surprising, and it was encouraging that Michigan played pretty well again. Even though they didn't win the game, they played well enough to stay with Illinois for most of the game, which is important. Michigan got within 6 points (50-44) with about 6 minutes left, but that was as close as they could get. The 2 big differences in the game were the turnovers (18 for Michigan, but only 9 for Illinois), and the shooting percentages (35% [18-for-51] from the floor, 17% [3-for-18] from 3-point range, and 59% [13-for-22] from the foul line). It's hard to win a game with those kind of numbers. The most encouraging statistic was that UM out-rebounded Illinois by a wide margin, 41-24.

Individually, Lester Abram and Bernard Robinson, Jr. were the only starters to hit double-figures in both games this week. Abram had a game-high 24 points against Iowa (on 8-for-12 shooting), and 12 points against Illinois. Unfortunately, he only shot 4-for-15 against Illinois. He did have a team- and career-high 9 rebounds against the Illini, which is impressive. Robinson had 10 points against Iowa, and a team-high 14 points against Illinois. He and Brent Petway tied for team-high in rebounds against Iowa, with 7 each.

The other 3 starters all had good games against Iowa, and mediocre games against Illinois. Courtney Sims had a career-high 16 points against Iowa, but only 4 points against Illinois. Daniel Horton scored 15 and 6 points in the 2 games, and Graham Brown had 8 and 4 points. Horton in particular had a tough time shooting in the Illinois game, going 2-for-7. Combined with Abram's 4-for-15, you can see why the team only shot 35% from the floor.

The bench contributed fairly well in both games, with 17 points against Iowa, and 12 in the Illinois game. Dion Harris had a poor shooting week, going 4-for-11 against Iowa, then 0-for-5 against Illinois. He did manage to score 10 points in the Iowa game, but he only had 3 points, all on free throws, in the Illinois game. Petway had a good week, with 5 points against Iowa, and 6 points against Illinois. He also had 7 and 6 rebounds, respectively. J.C. Mathis chipped in a couple points in each game: 2 vs. Iowa, and 3 at Illinois. Sherrod Harrell was the only other bench player to play this week, and he got in both games, but he didn't score. Chris Hunter sat out the Iowa game because of his knee, but didn't even travel

with the team to Illinois due to a broken nose he suffered in practice on Friday. It isn't clear at this point when he will return to action.

Let's take a look at the current Big Ten standings, after 4 full weeks:

Teams	Big Ten			Overall		
	Wins	Losses	Percentage	Wins	Losses	Percentage
Wisconsin	5	1	0.833	14	3	0.824
Indiana	5	2	0.714	11	7	0.611
Michigan State	5	2	0.714	10	8	0.556
Illinois	4	3	0.571	13	5	0.722
Purdue	4	3	0.571	14	6	0.700
Iowa	4	3	0.571	11	7	0.611
Michigan	3	4	0.429	12	6	0.667
Penn State	3	4	0.429	9	9	0.500
Northwestern	3	4	0.429	8	10	0.444
Ohio State	2	5	0.286	10	10	0.500
Minnesota	0	7	0.000	8	11	0.421

There were a few more surprises this week in the Big Ten:

- Even though MSU beat Indiana in East Lansing, the Hoosiers continue to stay in the hunt for the league title.
- Penn State and Northwestern continue to exceed expectations. They're currently tied with Michigan, which is amazing.
- Minnesota remains winless, with 2 more losses this week. I expected them to be a middle-of-the-pack team this season, not the league doormat.

Now, let's look at Michigan's remaining schedule, and my predictions:

Date	**Opponent**	**Site**	**Prediction**	**Record**	
				Big Ten	**Overall**
Sat., Feb. 7	Purdue	Ann Arbor	W	4-4	13-6
Wed., Feb. 11	Minnesota	Minneapolis, Minn.	W	5-4	14-6
Sat., Feb. 14	Iowa	Iowa City, Iowa	L	5-5	14-7
Wed., Feb. 18	Penn State	Ann Arbor	W	6-5	15-7
Sun., Feb. 22	Wisconsin	Ann Arbor	W	7-5	16-7
Tue., Feb. 24	Michigan State	Ann Arbor	W	8-5	17-7
Sun., Feb. 29	Ohio State	Ann Arbor	W	9-5	18-7
Mar. 2-3	Indiana	Bloomington, Ind.	L	9-6	18-8
Mar. 6-7	Northwestern	Evanston, Ill.	W	10-6	19-8

Now that I've seen Iowa play, I'm changing my predictions from last week. I now think that UM will beat Minnesota in Minneapolis, but lose to Iowa in Iowa City. If they can win all 4 of the home games they have in a row after the next road trip, they'll be in good shape before they end the regular season on the road.

Michigan only has 1 game this week: home vs. Purdue on Saturday (02/07/2004), at noon. They stand a good chance of beating Purdue in Crisler Arena, but it's still a toss-up game. Come on down to Crisler Arena and cheer Michigan on. The crowds have been getting better and better as the season has gone on, and every voice helps.

Go Blue!