02/09/2004 – Week #14 – A Big, Last-Second Home Victory

The University of Michigan men's basketball team only played one Big Ten game last week, and it was a very exciting, last-second victory in a sold-out Crisler Arena. On Saturday (02/07/2004), they beat Purdue, 64-63, on a putback with 1.4 seconds left. The win raises UM's Big Ten record to 4-4, and their overall record to 13-6. This was a big, important win for the team, since it keeps their dreams of getting into the NCAA Tournament alive. It's also their first win over a team that has been ranked since they beat N.C. State back in early December. Purdue isn't in the Top 25 any more, but they were earlier, and they have a quality win over #1 Duke on the road, so they're a very capable team.

The good news was: Michigan beat Purdue, they played well when things were tense in the last minute of the game, and they managed to win despite some of the worst officiating we've seen in a few seasons. The bad news is: Michigan had a nice 16-point lead with 13 minutes left in the 2nd half, and then they managed to lose it. Just when it looked like they were going to run the Boilermakers right out of the building and win by 30, the offense disappeared. UM went 10:50 without a basket, and only made 3 free throws during that span, as Purdue used a 19-3 run to tie the game up at 57 with 2 minutes remaining. The teams traded baskets the rest of the way, and Purdue went up by 1 with 7 seconds left, but Courtney Sims managed to score with 1.4 seconds left, and Purdue couldn't get a shot off as time ran out.

Once again, it was like watching 2 different teams. The Wolverines looked great in building up their 16-point lead, then they just went flat. As Jim Carty wrote in the "Ann Arbor News":

> "They've got so much talent they can beat anybody in the Big Ten, and so much youth they could lose to last-place Minnesota when they travel to Minneapolis on Wednesday."

The stats from the game tell the story: it was a close one. Neither team shot well from the field, but Purdue did a little better (43% vs. 36%). Once again, UM shot a terrible percentage (23%, on 5-for-22 shooting) from 3-point range. However, Michigan won the game at the free-throw line: Purdue was 7-for-11 (64%), but Michigan was 15-for-20 (75%). Those 8 extra points really helped. UM barely won the rebounding battle (40-39), but definitely won the turnover battle (15-10). After throwing the ball away more than 20 times in several games earlier this season, it's encouraging that Michigan has held their turnovers around 10 a lot more often lately.

Individually, the star of the game was Sims, even though Daniel Horton was the high scorer. Sims not only had the game-winning basket (on a nice offense rebound of his own miss, which was on an offensive rebound of Horton's missed shot), but he scored 11 points, and had an amazing 15 rebounds, for the first double-double of his career. He also had 5 blocked shots. Bernard Robinson, Jr. also had a double-double, with 11 points and 10 rebounds. Horton led all scorers with 19 points, including a long 3-pointer to end UM's scoring drought when Purdue tied the game. He had another clutch basket in the last minute of the game, but he did miss the front end of a one-and-one that would have helped seal the win, and he did shoot an air-ball on a 5-foot jumper with 4 seconds left in the game. Fortunately, Sims grabbed the ball and put it back up. It rimmed off, but he grabbed it again, and put it in.

The other 2 starters didn't do much. Lester Abram had 7 points, but only shot 1-for-3 from the floor, making a 3-pointer. He did shoot 4-for-4 from the free-throw line. Graham Brown

had a sore hand, and he only played 8 minutes. He missed all 3 of his shots, and finished with 0 points. Fortunately, Sims, Brent Petway, and J.C. Mathis helped pick up the slack for him. Petway had 4 points, on 4-for-4 shooting from the free-throw line, but he didn't even attempt a shot from the field. Mathis had 5 points. The only other bench player who played was Dion Harris, who had 7 points on 3-for-12 shooting (1-for-8 from 3-point range). Harris needs to get his stroke back. Chris Hunter sat out the game again, although it isn't clear if it was because of his knee or his broken nose. He has a face mask, and he has been practicing, so he might start playing again this week.

Let's take a look at the current Big Ten standings, after 5 full weeks:

Teams	Big Ten			Overall		
	Wins	Losses	Percentage	Wins	Losses	Percentage
Michigan State	7	2	0.778	12	8	0.600
Wisconsin	6	2	0.750	15	4	0.789
Illinois	6	3	0.667	15	5	0.750
Purdue	5	4	0.556	15	7	0.682
Iowa	5	4	0.556	12	8	0.600
Indiana	5	4	0.556	11	9	0.550
Michigan	4	4	0.500	13	6	0.684
Northwestern	4	5	0.444	9	11	0.450
Penn State	3	5	0.375	9	10	0.474
Ohio State	3	6	0.333	11	11	0.500
Minnesota	0	9	0.000	8	13	0.381

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

- The biggest surprise was Northwestern crushing Wisconsin by 18 points, in Evanston.
- Michigan State kept winning, and they're now in 1st place by themselves.
- Indiana lost both of their games this week, and dropped way down in the standings.
- Minnesota remains winless, with 2 more losses this week. Let's just hope that they don't finally break into the win column on Wednesday against Michigan.

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

Date	**Opponent**	**Site**	**Prediction**	**Record**	
				Big Ten	**Overall**
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

Michigan is at the halfway point in the Big Ten season, with 8 games played and 8 games left to go. As I mentioned last week, 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 5 out of their last 8 games. 4 of those 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.

As you can see above, Michigan has 2 games this week, both on the road. Michigan hasn't had very much success on the road this year, so these are crucial games. On Wednesday (02/11/2004), they travel to Minneapolis to play Minnesota. It's going to be a tough game, and so will the game on Saturday (02/14/2004) at Iowa. If Michigan can manage to win both of them, they'll be in good shape for getting into "The Big Dance" in March. A split wouldn't be a total disaster. 2 losses would be.

Check back next week to see how things went, and why.

Go Blue!