03/01/2004 – Week #17 – One That Got Away, And One That Didn't

The University of Michigan men's basketball team played two Big Ten games last week at home, and they lost the first and won the second. Unfortunately, the one that they lost was a big game to archrival Michigan State, and it was a game that they could have and should have won. On Tuesday (02/24/2004), they lost to MSU, 72-69, then on Sunday (02/29/2004), they beat Ohio State, 75-64. The loss and the win leave UM's Big Ten record at 7-7, and their overall record at 16-9. These were the last 2 home games of the season, and the end of a 4-game homestand. Michigan won 3 of the 4 home games, including a huge win over Wisconsin last Sunday (02/22/2004), but they couldn't quite pull off the biggest win, against MSU. Some questionable officiating in that game didn't help any. Neither did the one-day turnaround between the Wisconsin game on Sunday, and the MSU game on Tuesday.

Both games followed the same script as the 2 games from the previous week, to a point. In all 4 games in this homestand, UM built up a nice halftime lead (34-26 vs. MSU, 40-31 vs. OSU), and maintained it for most of the 2nd half. The big difference was in the last 10 minutes of the MSU game. In the other 3 games, Michigan played tough in the last 10 minutes, and managed to hold off their opponents when they made comeback attempts. Not against MSU. Michigan had a nice 12-point lead (52-40) with about 10 minutes to go, then they fell apart. Once the momentum turned in favor of State, it was all over. The key play in the game was when Bernard Robinson, Jr. got called for a 5-second violation, with UM up by 7. MSU came right down and hit a 3-pointer, and that was the ballgame. State was full of confidence, and UM played scared, and the result was a heartbreaking loss.

The Ohio State game was much more encouraging. Once again, Michigan controlled the game for most of the 1st half, and managed to hold of OSU for most of the 2nd half. When Ohio State tried to make a move in the last 10 minutes of the game, Michigan was able to fight them off, despite foul trouble for 3 of the 4 centers (Courtney Sims, Graham Brown, and Chris Hunter). Only Brent Petway managed to stay out of foul trouble.

Since the OSU game was the final home game of the season, it was Senior Day, and the two seniors on the team were honored before the game. One was Robinson, and the other was Colin Dill, one of the team captains. Coach Amaker did the classy thing and started Dill, in place of Lester Abram, and left him in for a couple minutes. Dill also got in for the last 2 minutes of the game. It was a nice way to recognize all his hard work over the last 4 years.

Let's look at the stats for the games, starting with the Michigan State game. Michigan shot well from the floor (25-for-52, 48%), they shot well from 3-point range (8-for-18, 44%), and they shot OK from the free-throw line (11-for-16, 69%), including 9-for-10 in the 2nd half. The rebounding battle was a draw (25-25), and UM had fewer turnovers (11-12). The big difference was MSU's 3-point shooting: 9-for-15, 60%.

The stats for the Ohio State game were pretty similar to the stats for the MSU game. The Wolverines shot about the same from the floor, hitting 49% (26-for-53), and they hit a respectable 38% (6-for-16) from 3-point range. The biggest improvement was from the free-throw line, where they shot an impressive 90% (17-for-19). Michigan also out-rebounded OSU, 36-28.

Individually, it's a little confusing, since Dill started in place of Abram. Even if you count Abram as a starter in both games, only 1 of the 5 starters hit double figures in both games. Sims (19 points, a new career-high) and Robinson (15 points) were the only Michigan

players to score in double figures against MSU, and Robinson (13 points), Abram (20 points), and Daniel Horton (10 points) were the only UM starters to hit double figures against Ohio State. After being the leading scorer for Michigan in the previous 4 games, Abram had a disappointing game against MSU, scoring only 7 points on 3-for-8 shooting. He came back in the OSU game, and was the leading scorer again. Horton also had a disappointing game against MSU, scoring 8 points on 3-for-11 shooting. Michigan really needed good games from both Abram and Horton to beat MSU, and they didn't get them. The 5th starter, Brown, had a truly miserable game against MSU, with 0 points on 0 shots in 22 minutes of action. He did a little better against OSU, scoring 6 points.

Once again, the bench players contributed this week, although maybe not as much as in some other weeks. Dion Harris had a mediocre week scoring, after hitting double figures in 7 of the first 10 Big Ten games. He scored 9 points against Michigan State, and 6 against Ohio State. He continues to struggle with his shot, hitting 3-for-9 and 2-for-8, respectively. Brent Petway had a good week, with 6 and 12 points respectively. He was 3-for-3 shooting against MSU, and 5-for-7 shooting against OSU, and he also shot 2-for-2 from the free-throw line in the OSU game. Chris Hunter had a decent game against Michigan State, with 5 points, but he didn't even take a shot in 6 minutes of action against Ohio State. Sherrod Harrell played 1 minute in each game, but didn't take any shots. After being a major contributor off the bench for most of the season, J.C. Mathis has all but disappeared recently. He didn't play at all against MSU, and he only played for 2 minutes against OSU, without taking a shot. John Andrews, Ashtyn Bell, and Dani Wohl, all got into the last minute of the Ohio State game, but none of them scored.

Michigan only has 1 week left in the regular season. Here's their remaining schedule, and my predictions:

Date	Opponent	Site	Prediction	Record	
				Big Ten	Overall
Wed., Mar. 3	Indiana	Bloomington, Ind.	L	7-8	16-10
Sat., Mar. 6	Northwestern	Evanston, Ill.	W	8-8	17-10

If they can win their last 2 games, and do well (win twice) in the Big Ten Tournament, they still stand a decent chance of getting into the NCAA Tournament. Unfortunately, UM hasn't done well on the road this season, and I don't think they stand much chance in the game at Indiana, but I would love to be pleasantly surprised.

Stop back again next week to see what happened, and why.

Go Blue!