12/06/2004 – Week #05 – A Lopsided Loss, A Stirring Victory, And Bad News

The Week In Review

Remember what I said at the beginning of my column last week? "Sometimes, the difference between winning and losing a big basketball game can come down to one shot, one defensive stand, playing tough for 10 more seconds. If you can be tough for those 10 seconds, all your hard work up to that point is worth it. Falter, and it's all for nothing." Well, it happened again this week, but this time Michigan was on the winning side. On Saturday (12/04/2004), UM played tough defense in the last 10 seconds (4.9 seconds, actually) of the game, and preserved a big 61-60 win over (#19) Notre Dame in Crisler Arena, on national TV (ESPN). Ironically, that was the same score that they lost their close game to another Top-25 team (Arizona) last week, but this time Michigan pulled the big upset. It was a very exciting game, with a decent Michigan lead in the 1st half, a tie at halftime (30-30), a decent Notre Dame lead midway through the 2nd half, and a dramatic finish. Daniel Horton stole the ball with 29 seconds left, drove to the basket, made the layup to tie the game at 60-60, was fouled, and made the free-throw to give UM the final margin of victory, 61-60. Brent Petway preserved the win with an amazing blocked shot at the buzzer, on Notre Dame's last-gasp shot to win it.

The other game this week was not such good news. On Tuesday (11/30/2004), Michigan played at (#3) Georgia Tech in Atlanta, as part of the Big Ten-ACC Challenge, and they got their butts spanked, 99-68. GT was much faster, and played with much more poise than UM, and when they went on a 20-0 run early in the first half, the game was essentially over. It wasn't too surprising that Michigan lost to an undefeated ACC team ranked in the Top 5 at their place, but it would have been much more encouraging if they had made it more of a game.

The loss and the win leave Michigan with a record of 4-3, which isn't great, but isn't too surprising, given the tough schedule they've played. So far this season, the Wolverines have only played one bad game (Georgia Tech), and one uninspired half (the 2nd half against Providence). In their other loss (Arizona), they played very well, but they just couldn't seal the deal at the end.

However, the biggest news this past week wasn't about wins and losses, it was about injuries. Things were starting to look up in the Notre Dame game, when Lester Abram checked in about halfway through the 1st half, after missing the previous 4 games. He ended up playing for a total of 9 minutes, and he snagged 2 rebounds, but he didn't take any shots, or even raise his sore left (shooting) arm over his head. It was encouraging that he was finally able to play again. Then came the bad news: today (Sunday, 12/05/2004), the team announced that Abram is going to have surgery on his shoulder, and he'll miss the rest of the season. The only silver lining to this dark cloud is that he didn't play enough games this season to cost him a year of eligibility, so he'll get a medical redshirt year. That injury news was bad enough, but it gets worse: also today, the team announced that Graham Brown will miss 4-6 weeks after undergoing hernia surgery.

The Big Picture

The combined loss of Abram, last year's leading scorer, and Brown, will leave Michigan with 40% of their regular starting lineup missing for at least 4 weeks. In the next 4 weeks, Michigan only has one really tough game (at UCLA, on Saturday 12/18/2004), so they might be able to "hold the fort" until Brown is back. If his rehabilitation goes 5 weeks, then he's

likely to miss the game at Iowa on Wednesday 01/05/2005. If it takes the full 6 weeks, he'll miss the home game vs. Northwestern on Wednesday 01/12/2005.

Based on this new information, I need to revise my predictions for the remaining games a little, to reflect the loss of Abram and Brown. So far, my predictions have been pretty accurate. The only game I got wrong was the consolation game (Providence) in the Preseason National Invitation Tournament (NIT). I thought UM would win that one, and they lost. Here are my revised predictions, starting with their current record:

Date	Opponent	Site	Prediction	Out of 10	Record
12/07 (Tue)	High Point	Ann Arbor	W	7	5-3
12/11 (Sat)	South Florida	Ann Arbor	W	7	6-3
12/14 (Tue)	Boston University	Ann Arbor	W	6	7-3
12/18 (Sat)	UCLA	Los Angeles, Calif.	L	3	7-4
12/29 (Wed)	Delaware State	Ann Arbor	W	8	8-4
12/31 (Fri)	North Carolina-Asheville	Ann Arbor	W	6	9-4
01/05 (Wed)	Iowa	Iowa City, Iowa	L	3	9-5 (0-1)
01/08 (Sat)	Fairfield	Ann Arbor	W	8	10-5
01/12 (Wed)	Northwestern	Ann Arbor	W	7	11-5 (1-1)
01/15 (Sat)	Penn State	State College, Pa.	W	7	12-5 (2-1)
01/19 (Wed)	Indiana	Bloomington, Ind.	L	4	12-6 (2-2)
01/22 (Sat)	Wisconsin	Ann Arbor	L	4	12-7 (2-3)
01/27 (Thu)	Michigan State	East Lansing, Mich.	L	2	12-8 (2-4)
01/30 (Sun)	Purdue	West Lafayette, Ind.	L	3	12-9 (2-5)
02/02 (Wed)	Minnesota	Ann Arbor	W	7	13-9 (3-5)
02/05 (Sat)	Ohio State	Columbus, Ohio	W	7	14-9 (4-5)
02/08 (Tue)	Illinois	Ann Arbor	L	3	14-10 (4-6)
02/12 (Sat)	Michigan State	Ann Arbor	W	4	15-10 (5-6)
02/16 (Wed)	Wisconsin	Madison, Wis.	L	2	15-11 (5-7)
02/20 (Sun)	Indiana	Ann Arbor	W	6	16-11 (6-7)
02/23 (Wed)	Penn State	Ann Arbor	W	8	17-11 (7-7)
02/26 (Sat)	Northwestern	Evanston, Ill.	W	6	18-11 (8-7)
03/05 or 03/06	Iowa	Ann Arbor	W	6	19-11 (9-7)
Big Ten Tournament					
03/10 (Thu)	First Round	Chicago, Ill.	W	7	20-11
03/11 (Fri)	Quarterfinals	Chicago, Ill.	L	4	20-12

As you can see, things aren't looking as promising as they were when I originally predicted that UM would finish with a 25-8 record. That 4-game stretch from 01/19/2005 through 01/30/2005 looks particularly brutal, and I'm afraid that Michigan could lose all 4 of those games. However, a 20-12 record should still get them into the NCAA Tournament, with a respectable seed.

Game Statistics

Enough worrying about the future, let's look at the stats from the 2 games last week. The stats for the Georgia Tech game are truly depressing, especially the turnovers: Michigan had 18 turnovers, compared to only 9 for GT. The steals reflect that: UM had 3, GT had 11. The other non-shooting stats are equally bad: GT had 28 assists, UM had 11. GT blocked 6 shots, UM blocked 4. Georgia Tech also won the rebounding battle, 40-32.

The shooting stats show why the game was a blowout: Georgia Tech shot an amazing 56.5% (13-for-23) from 3-point range. Michigan shot 3-pointers decently (4-for-15, 26.7%), but there was no way they could match GT's shooting. Overall, Georgia Tech shot 54.2% (39-for-72), which is very good. Once again, UM didn't shoot too badly (25-for-61, 41.0%), but they couldn't keep up with GT. The only stat that Michigan won was free-throw

shooting percentage. UM shot a blistering 14-for-16 (87.5%), while GT shot an ordinary 66.7% (8-for-12). Georgia Tech didn't need free throws to win the game.

The stats for the Notre Dame game were a lot closer, which makes sense since it was such a close game. Michigan shot better (45.5%, on 25-for-55 shooting) than ND (39.3%, 24-for-61), and they shot better from 3-point range as well (UM = 35.3% [6-for-17], ND = 31.6% [6-for-19]). Both teams shot free throws pretty poorly: UM shot 55.6% (5-for-9), while ND shot 60.0% (6-for-10). The non-shooting stats were also pretty close. Once again, UM got out-rebounded, which is a disturbing trend. This time it was 38-32. ND had more assists (16-10), and more steals (7-6), but Michigan had fewer turnovers (14-16), and more blocked shots (5-3).

Individual Statistics

Individually, no one had two good games this week, but several players had one good game. With Abram injured, Coach Amaker has tried several different starting lineups, and he used the same one in both games this week: Dion Harris and Daniel Horton at guard, Graham Brown and John Andrews at forward, and Courtney Sims at center. Harris and Horton had "horrendous" games (Amaker's quote) at Georgia Tech, but they bounced back with much better games against Notre Dame. Horton only had 4 points (and 8 turnovers) against GT, but he had a team-high 15 points (and only 2 turnovers) against ND. Harris did a little better in the Georgia Tech game, with 8 points, and only 2 turnovers, but he shot a miserable 3-for-13 to get those 8 points. Against Notre Dame, he hit double-figures (10 points), and shot a little better (4-for-12). He still only had 2 turnovers.

Brown played hard in both games, and was UM's leading rebounder in both game, with 9 and 8, respectively. He only scored 2 points against GT, but he did score 8 points against ND, on 4-for-5 shooting. He will be missed for the next 4-6 weeks. The other starting forward, Andrews, also played hard, and did as well as a walk-on can be expected to do. He had 5 points, including a 3-pointer, on 2-for-3 shooting against Georgia Tech, and 4 points against Notre Dame. He played good, solid defense, and he did what he was capable of doing. The final starter, Sims, had a very good game against Georgia Tech, when he was UM's leading scorer with 17 points (on 6-for-12 shooting), but he was less of a factor against Notre Dame, with only 6 points. He had 8 rebounds against GT, but only 3 against ND.

The bench really contributed this week, which is very encouraging, given the injury situation. As usual, the biggest contributor off the bench was Brent Petway. He was one of the few bright spots in the gloomy Georgia Tech game, with 12 points on 6-for-9 shooting, including several nice dunks. He only had 4 points against Notre Dame, but they were both thunderous dunks, and he did have the game-saving blocked shot. On top of all of that, he also pulled down 7 rebounds against GT, and 8 more against ND. That all adds up to a big contribution.

Chris Hunter also made a big contribution in the Georgia Tech game, with 13 points off the bench. He didn't have as strong a game against Notre Dame, with only 3 points. The team will need him to step up, now that Brown is going to be sidelined. The other bench player who had one good game this week was Ron Coleman. He didn't do much against Georgia Tech, although he finally hit a 3-pointer, accounting for all 3 of his points, but he was a force to reckon with in the Notre Dame game. He finally found his shot, and went 4-for-5, including 2-for-3 from 3-point range, for 11 points. He's another player who's going to have to step up to fill the void left by injuries. In his case, he could be a solid replacement for Abram.

Only 2 other bench players got into the Georgia Tech game: Sherrod Harrell and Dani Wohl. Harrell scored 2 points, on 2-for-2 free-throw shooting, but Wohl didn't attempt a shot. The final "bench" player to play this week was Abram, who tried out his shoulder against Notre Dame, but didn't take a shot.

The Upcoming Week

As you can see above, this week Michigan has 2 games, both at home, and both against teams they should beat pretty handily. On Tuesday (12/06/2004, 7:00 p.m. EST), they play High Point, then on Saturday (12/11/2004, noon EST), they play South Florida. Come on down to Crisler Arena to cheer on the Wolverines.

Go Blue!