01/17/2005 – Week #11 – A Flying Start To The Big Ten Season

The Week In Review

This past week was a great week for the University of Michigan men's basketball team. The big news was that they won both games they played this week, but that's only part of the story. Just as important was how they won those games. They won the games with huge contributions from two starters who finally returned to action after missing several games due to injuries. On Wednesday (01/12/2005), they beat Northwestern in Crisler Arena, 71-61. Then, on Saturday (01/15/2005), they beat Penn State on the road, 66-62. As I mentioned in last week's column, Daniel Horton returned from his sprained knee injury in the Iowa game on 01/05/2005. He played well in both games last week, but he really shined in the Northwestern game, when he scored a season-high 24 points. Also in the Northwestern game, Graham Brown made his first appearance since the 12/04/2004 game against Notre Dame, after missing 8 games with hernia surgery. He only took one shot that game, and he missed it, but he came back strong against Penn State, with his first career double-double (13 points and 10 rebounds). It was great to have both of these players back in the lineup, and playing well. I was afraid that it would take weeks for them to start playing at the level at which they had been playing before they were injured.

The Northwestern game went down as a 10-point win, but it was a lot closer than that until the final minute. Northwestern hung with the Wolverines, although they never got the lead in the game. There were lots of runs by both teams, but Michigan managed to hold onto the lead each time Northwestern tried to get ahead. It was another one of those games that it really helps to win. The team got more experience in a close game, and saw another good example of how to "seal the deal" at the end.

It was a good thing that Brown had a big game against PSU, since Chris Hunter (sprained ankle) and Brent Petway (injured shoulder) both missed the game, and Courtney Sims only played 20 minutes, due to foul trouble. Brown and J.C. Mathis both stepped up, and helped Michigan win a key road game. This game was even closer than the Northwestern game, and it wasn't decided until the final buzzer. Once again, it really helps that UM was able to play in a tight game, and win it at the end. That kind of experience really helps later in the season.

Just to catch you up, since the situation keeps changing so quickly, here's the latest injury status:

- Lester Abram – Shoulder surgery. He's lost for the rest of the season.
- Chris Hunter – Sprained ankle on 01/05/2005. He should be back within the next week.

Brent Petway – Sore shoulder on 01/08/2005. He should be back within the next week.

There are several players who are recovering from injuries, and may not be up to 100% yet:

- Daniel Horton – Recovering from a sprained knee, wearing a knee brace.
- Graham Brown – Back from hernia surgery. Doesn't appear to be too hampered by it.
- John Andrews – Recovering from a deep contusion of his thigh, and a sore knee.
- Ashtyn Bell – Recovering from a broken nose, no longer wearing a mask.
- Dani Wohl – Recovering from a sprained elbow, wearing an elbow brace.
- Sherrod Harrell – Recovering from a broken nose, no longer wearing a mask.

The Big Picture

These two wins raise UM's season record to 12-5, which is pretty good, but the really impressive things are that they've won 6 in a row overall, they're 3-0 in the Big Ten, and they're 2-0 on the road in league play. The last one is the most impressive, because it's tough to win on the road in general, but even more so in the Big Ten. While it's true that Penn State is one of the lower-division teams in the Big Ten, they still do pretty well at home. It's easy to look at Northwestern and put them in the bottom half of the Big Ten, but they're much better than last year, and they're likely to surprise a few teams before the season's over. So, these were two quality wins, and they should be appreciated. Also, even though the season is still young, at this point Michigan is one of only two teams in the Big Ten that haven't lost a league game yet. Illinois is 4-0, and Michigan is half a game back, at 3-0. That's not shabby.

Michigan has one more relatively easy game coming up, at Indiana on Wednesday (01/19/2005), before they enter the meat-grinder. Starting on Saturday (01/22/2005), they have 3 tough games in a row: home vs. Wisconsin, at MSU, and at Purdue. They get a "breather" for a couple of games, then they hit another rough stretch of 3 games, starting on 02/08/2005: home vs. Illinois, home vs. MSU, and at Wisconsin. Here's their remaining schedule:

Date	**Opponent**	**Site**
01/19 (Wed)	Indiana	Bloomington, Ind.
01/22 (Sat)	Wisconsin	Ann Arbor
01/27 (Thu)	Michigan State	East Lansing, Mich.
01/30 (Sun)	Purdue	West Lafayette, Ind.
02/02 (Wed)	Minnesota	Ann Arbor
02/05 (Sat)	Ohio State	Columbus, Ohio
02/08 (Tue)	Illinois	Ann Arbor
02/12 (Sat)	Michigan State	Ann Arbor
02/16 (Wed)	Wisconsin	Madison, Wis.
02/20 (Sun)	Indiana	Ann Arbor
02/23 (Wed)	Penn State	Ann Arbor
02/26 (Sat)	Northwestern	Evanston, Ill.
03/05 or 03/06	Iowa	Ann Arbor
Big Ten Tournament		
03/10 (Thu)	First Round	Chicago, Ill.
03/11 (Fri)	Quarterfinals	Chicago, Ill.
03/12 (Sat)	Semifinals	Chicago, Ill.
03/13 (Sun)	Finals	Chicago, Ill.

If they can win at least one game in each of those tough stretches of three games, they'll be in good shape.

Game Statistics

First, let's look at the shooting statistics from the Northwestern game:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	23-41 (56.1%)	6-13 (46.2%)	19-25 (76.0%)
Northwestern	21-44 (47.7%)	7-14 (50.0%)	12-16 (75.0%)
Advantage	UM	NU	UM

As you can see, the shooting stats were very close, except for FG shooting. 56.1% is darn good shooting from the floor. Also, note that Michigan made more free throws than Northwestern attempted. That's a good sign. With all the size and strength Michigan has up front, they should be getting to the line a lot.

Now, let's look at the non-shooting statistics from the Northwestern game:

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	23	11	11	4	7
Northwestern	24	13	13	1	3
Advantage	NU	NU	UM	UM	UM

These stats are also very close. Northwestern did a good job of keeping Michigan off the boards. So, how did Michigan win the game? Free throw shooting. That accounts for 7 of the 10 points they won by.

On to the shooting statistics from the Penn State game:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	24-59 (40.7%)	7-22 (31.8%)	11-13 (84.6%)
Penn State	19-47 (40.4%)	4-14 (28.6%)	20-29 (69.0%)
Advantage	UM	UM	UM

Michigan did better in all 3 shooting stats, but Penn State almost made up the difference in FGs (5) with their extra 9 points from the free throw line. Those three extra 3-pointers by UM made a big difference.

Finally, let's look at the non-shooting statistics from the Penn State game:

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	29	17	8	3	5
Penn State	40	14	16	3	2
Advantage	PSU	UM	UM	Even	UM

Other than the amazing rebounding edge for Penn State, Michigan won the battle of the stats. The biggest stat here is turnovers: those 8 extra possessions turned into 12 more shots by Michigan (59-47). 8 turnovers in a game is very good, especially for Michigan.

Individual Statistics

Although Graham Brown played in both games this week, he didn't start either of them. Instead, J.C. Mathis started in his place. Once Brown is a little more recovered from his surgery, I'm sure that Coach Amaker will put him back in the starting lineup.

Here are the individual stats for the starters this week:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	NU	PSU	NU	PSU	NU	PSU	NU	PSU
Ron Coleman	3-5	4-9	2-2	4-8	0-2	0-0	8	12
J.C. Mathis	1-1	4-9	0-0	0-2	2-4	1-2	4	9
Courtney Sims	5-7	3-3	0-0	0-0	7-7	0-0	17	6
Daniel Horton	8-13	2-11	1-4	0-4	7-8	2-2	24	6
Dion Harris	6-14	5-12	3-7	3-7	2-2	1-2	17	14
Totals	23-40	18-44	6-13	7-21	18-23	4-6	70	47

Once again, Harris was the only starter to hit double figures in both game, although Coleman got close. He almost hit double figures against Northwestern, and his 12 points against Penn State really helped in a close game. Sims and Horton were great against Northwestern, but not so hot against Penn State. Mathis did a good job filling in for Brown in both games, but he really helped out in the Penn State game, when Sims was in foul trouble.

Here's how the bench players did this week:

Player	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
	NU	PSU	NU	PSU	NU	PSU	NU	PSU
Graham Brown	0-1	5-12	0-0	0-0	0-0	3-3	0	13
John Andrews	0-0	1-3	0-0	0-1	1-2	4-4	1	6
Dani Wohl	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0	DNP
Totals	0-1	6-15	0-0	0-1	1-2	7-7	1	19

The bench players weren't a big factor in the Northwestern game, but Brown was certainly a big factor in the Penn State game.

The Upcoming Week

Once again, Michigan plays two Big Ten games this week, one on the road, and one at home. On Wednesday (01/19/2005), they play at Indiana, and then on Saturday (01/22/2005, 12:17 p.m.), they return home to play Wisconsin. I expect them to beat Indiana, even on the road, but the Wisconsin game will be tough. Come on down to Crisler Arena for the game, and cheer on the Wolverines.

Go Blue!