02/07/2005 – Week #14 – Dude, Where's My Team?

The Week In Review

Where's my team, the one that was 12-5 overall, 3-0 in the Big Ten, and just half a game out of first place just 3 weeks ago? The one that beat a couple Top-25 teams (Notre Dame and Iowa), and almost beat a 3rd (Arizona)? The one with the 6 game winning streak? Where did they go? I wish I knew…

Some weeks, it's easy to write these columns, and some weeks, it's tough. This is one of those tough weeks. It's easy enough to describe what happened to the University of Michigan men's basketball team this past week: they got clobbered. It's much harder to figure out why, and what should be done about it.

On Wednesday (02/02/2005), they lost at home to Minnesota, 71-54, then on Saturday (02/05/2005), they lost at Ohio State, 72-46. Take another look at those scores: they lost at home by 17, and on the road by 26. They barely cleared 50 points against Minnesota, and they didn't make it to 50 vs. OSU. That's sad. Once again, they played "flat" in both games, and they were never in either game after halftime.

In last week's column, I said that the season was teetering on the brink; well, the results of the past week make it clear that the season is over the brink, and into the toilet. There will certainly be no NCAA Tournament appearance, and it's looking very doubtful for even making the NIT. This team is destroyed. They have no confidence, no leadership, and very little hope for the rest of the season. It's hard to believe that just 3 weeks ago, they were at the top of the heap: they were 12-5 overall, and 3-0 in the Big Ten, just half a game out of first place. They had won 6 games in a row overall, and they were on a roll. Now, they've fallen to 12-11 overall, and 3-6 in the Big Ten. They've lost 6 games in a row, and they've got another tough part of their schedule looming. It's over, at least for this year. We'll talk about next year in a minute.

So, what's going on here? What happened? Why is this team struggling so much? Can it just be the loss of Lester Abram (for the season, due to his shoulder injury) and Daniel Horton (indefinitely, due to his arrest for domestic violence), or is there something else going on here? I believe that it's a combination of many things, including the rash of injuries earlier in the season, but the biggest problem is the lack of leadership. It's becoming clear that the absence of Horton is hurting the team in many ways, not just the lost points/assists/steals/etc. Horton provided the "glue" that held the team together, and without him, they appear rudderless. He made the other players around him that much better, especially Dion Harris, who has been asked to try to pick up the slack for Horton. So, as long has Horton is suspended, the team will flounder.

Don't get me wrong: I'm not suggesting that Coach Tommy Amaker should be doing anything differently. As I said last week, it's his call on how to deal with this situation, and I think that he's doing the right thing by sending a strong, clear message to the team that such behavior won't be tolerated. I'm sure that Amaker knows that the team really misses Horton, but he believes that what he's doing is in the best interest of the team and the program, and I agree. It just hurts to have to watch it unfold.

My only question for Amaker at this point is: under what conditions will Horton be allowed to rejoin the team? Amaker and Horton may have already talked about this, but no one else seems to know the answer to this question. There are lots of people who care a lot

about Michigan basketball, and I'm sure they'd all like to know what's going on. I know that I would.

The Big Picture

Forget about the NCAA Tournament. Maybe next year, but not this year. Sure, it's a big disappointment, and certain knee-jerk (mostly jerk) "fans" will start screaming for Amaker's job, but that's not the solution. The only solution is to wait yet another year. I know, this was supposed to be "the year", but next year looks even better. Assuming Horton is allowed to return to the team, Michigan will have a fabulous senior class next year, along with a dynamite junior class. Ron Coleman will be the entire sophomore class, but he's a good ballplayer. Amaker is also bringing in a good freshman class, including a true point guard. So, even though things are looking very bleak right now, they'll get better again. This isn't the end of the world, it's just another setback.

By the way: this is the earliest I've ever had to write my "wait until next year" speech.

What about the rest of this season? It'll be good practice for the bench players, but that's about it. Given the way Michigan has been playing lately, I only see them winning one more game, at home against Penn State. They might be able to beat Indiana in Crisler, or maybe Northwestern on the road, but that's about it. The other 4 games are almost certainly losses.

Here's their remaining schedule:

Date	**Opponent**	**Site**
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.

The games this week, against (#1) Illinois and (#12) Michigan State, could get really ugly, and it would take a miracle to win either of them.

Game Statistics

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	19-47 (40.4%)	5-18 (27.8%)	11-13 (84.6%)
Minnesota	27-43 (62.8%)	5-12 (41.7%)	12-18 (66.7%)
Advantage	Minnesota	Minnesota	Michigan

The shooting stats tell a lot of the story in this game. Minnesota got 4 **less** shots than UM, but they made 8 more than UM did. That adds up. They also shot a much better percentage from 3-point range. For once, free-throw shooting wasn't a factor in this game.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	19	12	24	1	8
Minnesota	28	17	25	4	12
Advantage	Minn	Minn	Mich	Minn	Minn

For the 4th game in a row, Michigan was out-rebounded. The last opponent that UM out-rebounded was Indiana, back on 01/19/2005. Actually, Michigan has been out-rebounded in 6 of their 9 Big Ten games so far. Those extra possessions against them are killing them. The assists don't matter much, and the turnovers are essentially even, but the 4 extra steals that Minnesota had made a difference.

On to the shooting statistics from the Ohio State game:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	19-41 (46.3%)	1-10 (10.0%)	7-11 (63.6%)
Ohio State	29-64 (45.3%)	8-26 (30.8%)	6-10 (60.0%)
Advantage	UM	OSU	UM

Talk about a deceptive stat: UM shot a slightly better percentage from the floor than OSU did, but look at the difference in the number of baskets made: 10 more baskets for OSU. Take a look at the 3-point shooting: there are 7 of those extra baskets right there. That's how you lose by 26 points.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	32	4	29	4	5
Ohio State	28	16	12	1	17
Advantage	UM	OSU	OSU	UM	OSU

Michigan finally out-rebounded someone, which is great, but look at the turnovers. I read in the paper that 29 turnovers is the highest total for any team in the Big Ten this season. That's terrible. So are the 17 steals that they gave up to OSU.

Individual Statistics

To make a point to Dion Harris and Courtney Sims, Coach Amaker started Sherrod Harrell in place of Harris, and Brent Petway in place of Sims, against Minnesota. It didn't work. Harris had the worst game of his career, and Sims had one of his worst. Amaker tried another different starting lineup against Ohio State, with Harrell starting in place of Dani Wohl, and Chris Hunter starting for Sims.

Here are the individual stats for the starters this week:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	Minn	OSU	Minn	OSU	Minn	OSU	Minn	OSU
Ron Coleman	3-8	2-6	1-5	0-3	0-0	2-2	7	6
Graham Brown	4-4	1-1	0-0	0-0	1-3	0-0	9	2
Brent Petway	1-3	Bench	0-0	Bench	2-2	Bench	4	Bench
Chris Hunter	Bench	1-4	Bench	0-0	Bench	2-4	Bench	4

Dani Wohl	1-2	Bench	0-0	Bench	0-0	Bench	2	Bench
Dion Harris	Bench	4-11	Bench	1-5	Bench	0-1	Bench	9
Sherrod Harrell	3-6	0-3	1-2	0-2	0-0	0-0	7	0
Totals	12-23 52.2%	8-25 32.0%	2-7 28.6%	1-10 10.0%	3-5 60.0%	4-7 57.1%	29	21

Most of these numbers are terrible, although the starters did shoot well in the Minnesota game. The 3-point shooting and free-throw shooting are ridiculous, as is the total of 21 points for the starters against OSU.

As you can see, none of the starters hit double figures in either of the games. This is the first week that I can remember this happening. Brown and Harris both got close, but it took Harris 11 shots to get 9 points. At least Brown was efficient (4-for-4) when he got his 9 points.

Here's how the bench players did this week:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	Minn	OSU	Minn	OSU	Minn	OSU	Minn	OSU
Dion Harris	0-7	Starter	0-4	Starter	0-0	Starter	0	Starter
Dani Wohl	Starter	0-0	Starter	0-0	Starter	0-0	Starter	0
John Andrews	2-6	3-3	2-3	0-0	2-2	0-0	8	6
Ashtyn Bell	0-0	1-1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2
Chris Hunter	5-9	Starter	1-4	Starter	6-6	Starter	17	Starter
Brent Petway	Starter	1-3	Starter	0-0	Starter	0-0	Starter	2
J.C. Mathis	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0
Courtney Sims	0-2	6-9	0-0	0-0	0-0	3-4	0	15
Totals	7-24 29.2%	11-16 68.8%	3-11 27.3%	0-0 0%	8-8 100%	3-4 75.0%	25	25

Chris Hunter and Courtney Sims were the only players to score in double figures this week, and they both did it coming off the bench. Hunter had 17 against Minnesota, and Sims had 15 against Ohio State. John Andrews had a pretty good week, but other than that, the bench didn't contribute much this week.

The Upcoming Week

The Wolverines return home this week for a pair of games, after playing 5 of their last 6 games on the road. On Tuesday (02/08/2005, 7:00 p.m.) they play (#1) Illinois in Crisler Arena. Then, on Saturday (02/12/2005, 4:00 p.m.), they play (#12) Michigan State, also in Crisler Arena. Both games are going to be really tough, and the team could use all the moral support they can get. Come on down to Crisler on Tuesday evening and Saturday afternoon, to help Michigan break out of this ugly losing streak.

Go Blue!