02/14/2005 – Week #15 – The Free-Fall Continues

The Week In Review

It was another tough week for the University of Michigan men's basketball team. They lost two more Big Ten games, which brings the current losing streak to 8 games. That's the bad news. The good news is that they played a lot better this week than they have in a while. It just wasn't good enough to beat two Top-25 teams, even in Crisler Arena.

On Tuesday (02/08/2005), they lost to (#1) Illinois, 57-51, then on Saturday (02/12/2005), they lost to (#12) Michigan State, 64-49. Just as they have so many times during their current losing streak, UM was right around 50 points again. Last week it was 54 (Minnesota) and 46 (Ohio State) points. Without Daniel Horton in the lineup, they are having real problems scoring points.

Since they're having trouble scoring, Coach Tommy Amaker has changed strategies, and is now slowing the pace of the game down. It almost worked against Illinois, but it was not as effective against MSU. In the Illinois game, the slower pace obviously bothered the Illini, and that allowed UM to grab a small (4 point) lead at halftime, and extend that lead to 8 points midway through the 2nd half. Then, the roof fell in, as Dee Brown single-handedly took over for Illinois. In less than 2 minutes, he had 3 great steals that he converted into easy layups, and that changed the momentum of the game over to Illinois for good. Michigan did their best to hang with Illinois down the stretch, but once they fell behind, they could never quite catch up.

The MSU game was different. Michigan couldn't keep up with the hot-shooting Spartans, who played a good, methodical ball game. State hit their first 6 shots, which were mostly dunks and layups, and Michigan couldn't buy a basket early. By the time MSU cooled off a little, and UM finally got their shooting touch back, the game was already in bad shape. MSU didn't crush Michigan, as they have in the past, they just kept steadily grinding away, and never really let UM get going. It was actually a pretty boring game, without much emotion by either side. MSU did what they had to do to win, and Michigan put up a reasonable fight, but it was obvious after just 3 minutes that there wasn't going to be an upset this time. Michigan needed to come out hot, and hope to catch MSU napping. It didn't happen.

The Big Picture

With the two losses, Michigan's record has now fallen to 12-13 overall, and 3-8 in the Big Ten. This is the first time this season that Michigan has been below 0.500 overall, and things don't look good at all for making the NIT. To qualify for the NIT, a team needs to finish at or above 0.500, and the last 5 games of the regular season don't look very promising.

Here's Michigan's remaining schedule:

Date	**Opponent**	**Site**
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 (Sat)	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 game at Wisconsin is an almost-certain loss. Wisconsin has only lost one home game in the last 3 years, and Michigan doesn't have the team to win there. They might be able to win the home games against Indiana and Penn State, and maybe the road game at Northwestern, but the last home game, against Iowa, will be really tough. So, maybe they can go 3-2 in the last 5 games, but 2-3 is more likely. Even if they go 3-2, and finish the regular season at 15-15, they still need to win their first round game in the Big Ten Tournament to finish at or above 0.500.

Obviously, the NCAA Tournament is out of the question, unless UM can catch fire in the Big Ten Tournament and win it all, which guarantees a spot in the Big Dance. Given how Michigan has been playing since early January, that doesn't seem very likely.

Game Statistics

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	19-40 (47.5%)	6-14 (42.9%)	7-14 (50.0%)
Illinois	21-48 (43.8%)	7-24 (29.2%)	8-10 (80.0%)
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Illinois

Michigan outshot Illinois, and they shot well, except for free throws. They could have won the game. It was that close. Illinois had two more field goals, one more 3-pointer, and one more free throw. That's a mighty thin edge. The only troubling stat here is Michigan's free throw shooting percentage. In a 6-point loss, 7 missed free throws look awfully big.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	28	11	13	0	1
Illinois	24	13	5	0	8
Advantage	Mich	Ill	Ill	Even	Ill

Michigan out-rebounded Illinois, which is impressive. Unfortunately, they had a lot more turnovers, and a lot less steals, so they threw away those valuable extra possessions.

On to the shooting statistics from the Michigan State game:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	16-38 (42.1%)	7-14 (50.0%)	10-12 (83.3%)
Michigan State	25-49 (51.0%)	3-14 (21.4%)	11-11 (100%)
Advantage	MSU	UM	MSU

Michigan's shooting percentage isn't bad, but MSU's is better. I'm surprised that UM shot 3-pointers so much better, but even those 4 extra triples weren't enough to make up for the 9 extra baskets that MSU got. Both teams shot free throws well, and they balanced out.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	18	7	17	6	4
Michigan State	28	14	12	2	7
Advantage	MSU	MSU	MSU	UM	MSU

After out-rebounding Illinois, UM took a step backwards against MSU. They got badly beaten on the boards, and they should be embarrassed by only getting 18 rebounds. The assists don't matter that much, the turnovers aren't too bad, and neither are the steals. The 10 extra MSU possessions are the big story.

Individual Statistics

Coach Amaker used the same starting lineup in both games this week: Ron Coleman, Chris Hunter, Graham Brown, Dion Harris, and Sherrod Harrell, with Hunter starting in place of the too-casual Courtney Sims. It didn't make much difference.

Here are the individual stats for the starters this week:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	Ill	MSU	Ill	MSU	Ill	MSU	Ill	MSU
Ron Coleman	0-3	2-5	0-3	1-2	0-0	2-2	0	7
Chris Hunter	4-9	1-6	2-3	0-1	0-1	0-0	10	2
Graham Brown	1-1	2-4	0-0	0-0	0-0	2-2	2	6
Dion Harris	7-17	6-11	3-7	4-6	4-8	6-7	21	22
Sherrod Harrell	1-3	1-2	1-1	1-2	0-0	0-0	3	3
Totals	13-33 39.4%	12-28 42.9%	6-14 42.9%	6-11 54.5%	4-9 44.4%	10-11 90.9%	36	40

Actually, these numbers aren't too bad, with one exception: 44.4% free throw shooting vs. Illinois?

As you can see, only Harris had a good week. Everyone else either had two low-scoring games (Brown and Harrell), or one good game and one bad game (Coleman and Hunter). Unfortunately, Coleman and Hunter didn't have their good games at the same time. For a good part of the season, Coleman and Hunter were playing well, and scoring in double-figures almost every game. In fact, they were each the team-high scorers in several games. Now, they're both struggling, and it's hurting the team.

Here's how the bench players did this week:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	Ill	MSU	Ill	MSU	Ill	MSU	Ill	MSU
Dani Wohl	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0
John Andrews	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0
Ashtyn Bell	0-0	0-1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0
Brent Petway	0-0	3-4	0-0	1-2	0-0	0-0	0	7
Courtney Sims	6-7	1-5	0-0	0-1	3-5	0-1	15	2
Totals	6-7 85.7%	4-10 40.0%	0-0 0%	1-3 33.3%	3-5 60.0%	0-1 0%	15	9

Most of the bench players didn't contribute much this week, although Petway and Sims each had one good game. Once again, they didn't have their good games in the same game, and they were ineffective in their other games. If Coleman, Hunter, Petway, and Sims had all

had their better games in the same game (either Illinois or MSU), Michigan would have won that game. As it was, they managed to balance each other out, and UM lost both games.

Petway deserves special attention for his outside shooting against MSU. Up until that game, he had attempted one 3-pointer, and the longest shot he had made was probably a 10-footer. Most of his shots had been dunks, tap-ins, and 2-footers. Then, out of nowhere, he launched a near 3-pointer against State, and hit it. If his toe hadn't been on the line, it would have been a 3-pointer. The next time down the floor, no one from MSU came out to guard him again, so he loaded up another long shot, and hit it again. This time, he was behind the arc, and he had his first career 3-pointer. He tried one more 3-pointer, and missed it, but it sure was exciting.

The Upcoming Week

The beat goes on for the Wolverines. They hit the road again for a really tough game at Wisconsin on Wednesday (02/16/2005), then they return home for a game against Indiana on Sunday (02/20/2005, 3:30 p.m.). They'll almost certainly lose at Wisconsin, but they stand a decent chance against Indiana, especially if they play like they did last week. The team could use all the moral support they can get. Come on down to Crisler on Sunday afternoon, to help Michigan break out of this ugly losing streak.

Go Blue!