03/07/2005 – Week #18 – The (Merciful) End To The Regular Season

The Week In Review

The University of Michigan men's basketball team only played one game this week, on Saturday (03/05/2005), and they lost it to Iowa, 74-72, in overtime. This was the final game of the regular season, and it was a fitting way to end it. The Wolverines played well, and could have won as easily as they lost, but once again, they couldn't seal the deal in the last seconds of regulation and overtime. The game was close almost the whole way, especially during the 2nd half, but Iowa came out on top.

Since it was the final home game of the season, it was Senior Day. Michigan honored the two seniors on the team before the game: J.C. Mathis and Dani Wohl. Mathis is a 5th year senior, since he sat out a year after transferring to Michigan from the University of Virginia after his sophomore season. He had an up-and-down 2-year career at Michigan, and he ended on an "up" note in his final home game. Wohl is a 4th year junior, since he sat out a year after transferring to Michigan from Binghamton after his freshman year. He could have come back next year for his 5th year senior season, but and he elected to pass it up, since he'll graduate in April. He had a nice career at Michigan, and was a key contributor this season, when the team suffered several absences due to injuries and a suspension. He also had a good final game in Crisler Arena, and scored his only basket of the game at the buzzer in overtime.

The other news this week was the continued absence of Chris Hunter, due to his ankle injury. He has now missed the last 3 games. It's a shame, because he has played really well when his ankle has been healthy, and the team could really use him right now.

The Big Picture

With the loss, Michigan ends the regular season with an overall record of 13-17, and 4-12 in the Big Ten. This is a far cry from what was expected of this team at the beginning of the season, and where they were headed as late as January 15th, when they were 12-5 overall, and 3-0 in the Big Ten. A little quick arithmetic will show that Michigan went 1-12 from that point on, with only the Penn State win on 02/23/2005 to avoid the longest losing streak in school history.

At this point, it is impossible for Michigan to be eligible for the NIT. To get up to 0.500, they would have to win 4 games in the Big Ten Tournament, which would give them the automatic berth in the NCAA Tournament. Since that isn't very likely, the only thing they have to play for is to win another game in the Big Ten Tournament. Michigan enters the tournament as the #9 seed, and they play the #8 seed (Northwestern) at 11:00 a.m. on Thursday (03/10/2005). If they can somehow win that one, they get to play the #1 seed, Illinois on Friday. Even though Michigan played Illinois tough in Ann Arbor on 02/08/2005, losing 57-51, they don't stand much chance of beating them in the tournament. So, UM will probably either end the season on Thursday at 13-18, or on Friday at 14-18.

Game Statistics

Let's look at the shooting statistics from the Iowa game:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	26-62 (41.9%)	9-24 (37.5%)	11-17 (64.7%)
Iowa	26-55 (47.3%)	4-16 (25.0%)	18-25 (72.0%)
Advantage	Iowa	Michigan	Iowa

Right here, you can see why Iowa won this game: free throws. They made more free throws (18) than Michigan attempted. In the 1st half, the first 5 fouls that Michigan committed against Iowa were all shooting fouls, and the Hawkeyes made 8 of those 10 free throw attempts. When you look at the other shooting stats, it looks like Michigan should have won, since they made the same number of field goals (26), but 9 of them were 3-pointers, while only 4 of Iowa's field goals were from 3-point range. Unfortunately, the 7 extra points from the free throw line more than balanced out those extra 5 points.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	33	14	14	4	5
Iowa	38	14	15	2	7
Advantage	Iowa	Even	Mich	Mich	Iowa

The biggest news here is the 38 rebounds that Iowa got. That, and the free throw shooting, were just enough to win the game for them. It was nice to see UM keep their turnovers down, but these stats are too close to make a difference. It was all in the shooting stats.

Individual Statistics

Coach Amaker started the two seniors for the Iowa game, along with Graham Brown, Dion Harris, and Sherrod Harrell. Here's how they did:

Player	Field Goals	3-Pointers	Free Throws	Points
Dani Wohl	1-3	0-0	0-1	2
Graham Brown	4-5	0-0	2-3	10
Dion Harris	9-25	6-14	1-2	25
J.C. Mathis	1-6	0-1	0-2	2
Sherrod Harrell	2-2	1-1	0-0	5
Totals	17-41 41.5%	7-16 43.8%	3-8 37.5%	44

As a group, the starters did OK in the Iowa game. The free throw shooting is pretty poor, but other than that, they did OK.

Individually, Harris and Brown both had good games, and the 25 points by Harris is a career high for him. He even shot a decent percentage to get all those points. Brown played hard, as he always does, and the other 3 starters did the best they could.

Here's how the bench players did this week:

Player	Field Goals	3-Pointers	Free Throws	Points
Ashtyn Bell	0-0	0-0	0-0	0
Brent Petway	6-12	0-1	4-5	16
Ron Coleman	3-9	2-7	4-4	12
Courtney Sims	0-0	0-0	0-0	0
Totals	9-21 42.9%	2-8 25.0%	8-9 88.9%	28

The bench stats are a little misleading, since Coleman is really one of the regular starters, and Petway is an occasional starter. Coleman had a pretty good game against Iowa, but

Petway had a great game. In fact, it's debatable who had the better game, Harris or Petway; even though Harris had more points, Petway had a double-double, with 10 rebounds. The 16 points that he scored were also a career high for him. He had 3 big plays in a row in the 2nd half, when he scored and drew the foul. He hit 2 of those 3 free throws, and the 8 points gave Michigan a big lift when they needed it.

Then there's Courtney Sims. In just a few weeks, he has gone from a reliable starter to a forgettable benchwarmer. He only played 5 minutes against Iowa, all in the 1st half, and he looked like he was sleepwalking out there. His head is definitely not in the game these days, and we can only hope that he gets things straightened out in the off-season, and returns in good shape, both physically and mentally, next season.

The Upcoming Week

Michigan plays in the Big Ten Tournament in Chicago this week. As I mentioned above, their first game is on Thursday (03/10/2005, 11:00 a.m.) against Northwestern. If they win that one, they play Illinois on Friday. The last 2 rounds are on Saturday and Sunday. If UM can pull off a miracle, and win the tournament, they'll be in the NCAA Tournament, and they'll find out where and when they'll play on Selection Sunday. The odds aren't good, but there's always a chance.

Go Blue!