11/07/2005 – Week #01 – Here We Go Again

Looking Back

Welcome back to "Nothing But 'Net" for the 2005-2006 season. Once again, I'm really looking forward to following and rooting for the Wolverines this season, and once again, things look promising. Of course, things looked promising last year at this time, but a funny thing happened on the way to the NCAA Tournament.

Actually, what happened last season wasn't funny at all. Between injuries and off-court legal problems, UM played almost all their games without one starter (Lester Abram), and about half their games without another (Daniel Horton). Toss in shorter injuries to a third starter (Graham Brown), two key substitutes (Chris Hunter and Brent Petway), and two lesser-used substitutes (Ashtyn Bell and Dani Wohl), and you have all the ingredients for a disappointing season, and that's what we got. Instead of making it to the NCAA Tournament, UM finished 13-18, and lost in the 1st round of the Big Ten Tournament.

Here's a table I whipped up for my last column last season that graphically shows all the injury and suspension problems they had:

Game	Abram	Bell	Brown	Horton	Hunter	Petway	Wohl
Binghamton							
Colorado							
Sacramento State	Injury		Injury				
Arizona	Injury	Injury					
Providence	Injury	Injury					
Georgia Tech	Injury	Injury					
Notre Dame		Injury					
High Point	Injury	Injury	Injury	Injury			
South Florida	Injury		Injury	Injury			Injury
Boston University	Injury		Injury	Injury			Injury
UCLA	Injury		Injury	Injury			Injury
Delaware State	Injury		Injury	Injury			Injury
UNC-Asheville	Injury		Injury	Injury			Injury
Iowa	Injury		Injury				
Fairfield	Injury		Injury		Injury		
Northwestern	Injury				Injury	Injury	
Penn State	Injury				Injury	Injury	
Indiana	Injury				Injury		
Wisconsin	Injury				Injury		
Michigan State	Injury			Suspend			
Purdue	Injury			Suspend			
Minnesota	Injury			Suspend			
Ohio State	Injury			Suspend			
Illinois	Injury			Suspend			
Michigan State	Injury			Suspend			
Wisconsin	Injury			Suspend			
Indiana	Injury			Suspend			
Penn State	Injury			Suspend	Injury		
Northwestern	Injury			Suspend	Injury		
Iowa	Injury			Suspend	Injury		
Northwestern	Injury			Suspend			

Total	**28**	**5**	**9**	**18**	**8**	**2**	**6**

That's a grand total of 76 games missed, which really hurt.

So, why am I still dwelling on last season? Because it directly affects this season: all of the key players in that list are back for this season, all healed up, with a couple exceptions: Bell left the team, Wohl graduated and didn't use his 5th years of eligibility, and Petway is academically ineligible until Christmas time. But, Abram and Horton are both back, and that makes Michigan a much better team than the one that limped through January, February, and March last season.

The Week In Review

The Wolverines played their first (of two) exhibition games on Saturday (11/05/2005) in Crisler Arena against Grand Valley State. They won, 77-69, and they looked sloppy doing it. As with most exhibition games, it was a low-key affair, with a small crowd and very little excitement. Coach Tommy Amaker played all of the regulars, including 2 of the 3 freshmen, and everyone played well at times. Abram seems recovered from his shoulder surgery, and Horton picked right up where he left off last season. Hunter seemed fine, but we couldn't tell how well Petway is recovering from his shoulder surgery, since he isn't eligible to play.

Game Statistics

Let's look at the shooting statistics from the Grand Valley State (GVSU) game:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	26-48 (54.2%)	6-15 (40.0%)	19-23 (82.6%)
GVSU	27-54 (50.0%)	6-17 (35.3%)	9-15 (60.0%)
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan

Right here, you can see why Michigan won this game: they not only shot a better percentage than GVSU, they got 10 more points at the free-throw line than GVSU did. That was the difference in the game right there.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	29	13	25	4	12
GVSU	27	17	22	1	13
Advantage	Mich	GVSU	GVSU	Mich	GVSU

There's mixed news here, but nothing significant. There were too many turnovers, and UM should have won the rebounding battle by more, but these stats are too close to make a difference. It was all in the shooting stats.

Individual Statistics

For the first time in 9 months, Coach Amaker could finally start the lineup that he wants to: Abram, Brown, Dion Harris, Horton, and Courtney Sims. Here's how they did:

Player	Field Goals	3-Pointers	Free Throws	Points
Lester Abram	3-7	0-1	4-4	10
Graham Brown	5-6	0-0	2-4	12

Dion Harris	0-5	0-3	0-0	0
Daniel Horton	7-10	4-7	5-6	23
Courtney Sims	3-4	0-0	1-1	7
Totals	18-32 56.3%	4-11 36.4%	12-15 80.0%	52

As a group, the starters did fine. The 3-point shooting isn't great, but other than that, they did OK.

Individually, Horton had a great game. He shot a good percentage, and he looked sharp. Abram and Brown also looked pretty good out there, and Sims was OK, but Harris had a tough time. Fortunately, UM didn't need his points in this game, but they will soon.

Here's how the bench players did in this game:

Player	Field Goals	3-Pointers	Free Throws	Points
Ron Coleman	2-3	0-0	0-0	4
Sherrod Harrell	0-0	0-0	0-0	0
Chris Hunter	5-9	2-3	3-3	15
Jevohn Shepherd	0-1	0-1	2-2	2
Jerret Smith	1-3	0-0	2-3	4
Totals	8-16 50.0%	2-4 50.0%	7-8 87.5%	25

Obviously, Hunter had a great game coming off the bench. I know that I shouldn't be surprised that he can shoot 3-pointers, since he was the 2nd best 3-point shooter on the team last season, percentage-wise, but it still seems odd to see someone his height hitting 3-pointers. Coleman also played well, but he's still getting used to playing power forward, in place of Petway. Harrell only played 3 minutes, so he didn't get much of a chance to do anything. Two of the three freshmen (Shepherd and Smith) got into the game, and they both saw enough minutes (10 and 18, respectively) to show us what they can do. They both looked promising. We didn't see the third freshman, Kendric Price, or any of the other bench players. When the lead got up to 24 points, it looked like Amaker would be able to empty the bench, but GVSU caught fire, and he had to keep the regulars in there to finish off the game.

The Big Picture

Obviously, the Wolverines have their whole season in front of them. They have plenty of talent, and the big trick for Amaker is going to be motivating them, and getting the right combinations out on the floor at the right time. I know I said this last year at this time, but it's certainly not unreasonable to expect this team to make it to the NCAA Tournament, and actually win a couple games.

Here's Michigan's schedule for this season:

Date	Opponent	Site
11/05/2005 (Sat)	Grand Valley (exh)	Ann Arbor
11/11/2005 (Fri)	Northern Michigan (exh)	Ann Arbor
11/18/2005 (Fri)	Central Michigan	Ann Arbor
11/22/2005 (Tue)	Boston University	Boston, MA
11/26/2005 (Sat)	Butler	Ann Arbor
11/29/2005 (Tue)	Miami (FL)	Ann Arbor

12/03/2005 (Sat)	Notre Dame	South Bend, IN
12/07/2005 (Wed)	Delaware State	Ann Arbor
12/10/2005 (Sat)	South Florida	Tampa, FL
12/17/2005 (Sat)	UCLA	Ann Arbor
12/22/2005 (Thu)	Miami (OH)	Ann Arbor
12/28/2005 (Wed)	Coppin State	Ann Arbor
12/31/2005 (Sat)	Chicago State	Ann Arbor
01/03/2006 (Tue)	Indiana	Bloomington, IN
01/07/2006 (Sat)	Purdue	Ann Arbor
01/14/2006 (Sat)	Illinois	Champaign, IL
01/18/2006 (Wed)	Northwestern	Ann Arbor
01/21/2006 (Sat)	Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN
01/25/2006 (Wed)	Michigan State	Ann Arbor
01/28/2006 (Sat)	Wisconsin	Ann Arbor
02/01/2006 (Wed)	Penn State	State College, PA
02/04/2006 (Sat)	Iowa	Iowa City, IA
02/09/2006 (Thu)	Ohio State	Ann Arbor
02/11/2006 (Sat)	Purdue	West Lafayette, IN
02/15/2006 (Wed)	Minnesota	Ann Arbor
02/18/2006 (Sat)	Michigan State	East Lansing, MI
02/21/2006 (Tue)	Illinois	Ann Arbor
02/25/2006 (Sat)	Ohio State	Columbus, OH
03/04/2006 (Sat)	Indiana	Ann Arbor
Big Ten Tournament		
03/09/2006 (Thu)	First Round	Indianapolis, IN
03/10/2006 (Fri)	Quarterfinals	Indianapolis, IN
03/11/2006 (Sat)	Semifinals	Indianapolis, IN
03/12/2006 (Sun)	Finals	Indianapolis, IN

Looking at the schedule, it's nice to see that there aren't any 3-game road trips this year, although it is a little depressing to have all the home games in February on weeknights, and all the weekend games in February on the road.

Last year, I made some wild predictions about how well UM would do, and which games I thought they would win and lose. Once the injuries started piling up, and Horton got suspended, those predictions went out the window. Even though I stunk at it last year, I'm going to take another shot at it this season: I think UM will go 8-3 in the non-conference portion of their schedule, losing to Boston University, Notre Dame, and UCLA, and go 10-6 in their Big Ten schedule, losing both games to MSU and Illinois, and road games at Iowa and Minnesota. I expect them to win at least one game in the Big Ten Tournament, and have a good enough record (19-10) to get invited to the NCAA Tournament. We shall see how well my predictions work out this season.

Meet The Wolverines

There were no significant personnel losses from last season's team, and some fine new additions.

As mentioned above, Dani Wohl graduated, and didn't return for his final year of eligibility, and J.C. Mathis graduated and used up his eligibility. Ashtyn Bell and John Andrews both left the team in the off-season.

Besides the three freshmen (Price, Shepherd, and Smith), there are three more newcomers on the team. One of them, Hayes Grooms, was on the team last year, but had to sit out for a year since he transferred in from Lamar University. He's a 5th-year senior on the team this year. There are two walk-ons on the team this year: Troy Sanchez, a 5th-year senior guard, and Phillip DeVries, at freshman forward.

Here are all the players currently listed on the roster:

Freshmen

Phillip DeVries (#40)
Height: 6' 10"
Weight: 215
Position: Forward
Comments: DeVries is a walk-on, and I don't know anything about him.

Kendric Price (#21)
Height: 6' 8"
Weight: 200
Position: Forward
Comments: I haven't seen Price play yet, so I don't know anything about him. He might be red-shirted this season.

Jevohn Shepherd (#15)
Height: 6' 10"
Weight: 215
Position: Forward
Comments: Shepherd is very fast, and a good leaper. He was arguably the best prep player in Canada last year.

Jerret Smith (#1)
Height: 6' 3"
Weight: 185
Position: Guard
Comments: Smith is a pure point guard, and he will free up Horton and Harris to play shooting guard. He just needs some time to adjust to the speed of the college game.

Sophomores

Ron Coleman (#24)
Height: 6' 6"
Weight: 210
Position: Wing
Comments: Coleman had a very good freshman year. Due to the injuries and suspension, he got to play a lot more than he normally would have, and he often delivered. He's got a nice shot, good speed, good leaping ability, and good court awareness.

Alex Brzozowicz (#30)
Height: 6' 3"
Weight: 185
Position: Guard
Comments: Brzozowicz didn't play much last season. He was mostly a practice player.

Juniors
Lester Abram (#32)
Height: 6' 6"
Weight: 200
Position: Wing
Comments: Abram missed most of last season with a shoulder injury, but he's back and healthy this season. He got a medical redshirt for last season, so he's still considered a junior, not a senior. He's fast, he can jump, and he's got a great shot. He's one of the leaders on the team, and was selected as one of the 4 captains. He also switched his jersey number from #2 to #32, but I don't know why.

Amadou Ba (#50)
Height: 6' 10"
Weight: 250
Position: Center
Comments: Ba sat out his freshman year as a redshirt, and he played sparingly the next 2 seasons. He's still learning the game, and he always tries hard when he's in the game. He's big and tall, and he'll provide some muscle underneath, coming off the bench.

Dion Harris (#5)
Height: 6' 3"
Weight: 205
Position: Guard
Comments: Harris did a great job taking over the role of the "go to guy" on the team last season when Abram and Horton were lost. He's a shooting guard who can also drive to the basketball. He has good ball-handling skills, and can fill in at point guard if necessary. His only weakness is a poor shooting percentage.

Brent Petway (#23)
Height: 6' 8"
Weight: 205
Position: Forward
Comments: Petway is a tall, powerful player, with great speed. He's also the most exciting dunker on the team, maybe in the nation. He had a very good sophomore year, and he improved his offense, including his outside shots. He was a monster on defense last year, with many incredible blocked shots. Unfortunately, he's academically ineligible for the fall semester.

Courtney Sims (#44)
Height: 6' 11"
Weight: 245
Position: Forward
Comments: Sims is the tallest player on the team, and he's a great shot-blocker, and a tough defender, but he needs to be a little more passionate and aggressive on the court. He tends to disappear out there.

Seniors
Graham Brown (#25)
Height: 6' 9"
Weight: 255
Position: Forward
Comments: Brown had another good year last season, although he still needs to work more on his offense. He's a leader on the team, and was also selected as one of the 4 captains

this year. He's another player who provides much-needed height and power underneath. He's also a warrior, in the mold of Chris Young.

Hayes Grooms (#10)
Height: 6' 2"
Weight: 175
Position: Guard
Comments: Grooms sat out last season as a transfer from Lamar University. This year, he'll have one season of eligibility left. I don't know anything about him, since I've never seen him play. He also switched numbers, from #34 to #10.

Sherrod Harrell (#22)
Height: 6' 3"
Weight: 200
Position: Guard
Comments: Harrell played quite a bit last season, due to the injuries and suspension. He even started 12 games. He did pretty well when he was in there. He's another of the 4 captains this season.

Daniel Horton (#4)
Height: 6' 3"
Weight: 205
Position: Guard
Comments: Horton missed 6 games with a knee injury, and 12 games due to a suspension, so he only played in 13 games last season. When he was in the game, he played well. He's the glue that holds the team together, and they were lost without him last season. If he can stay healthy, he should have a great senior season.

Chris Hunter (#31)
Height: 6' 11"
Weight: 225
Position: Center
Comments: Hunter improved dramatically between his sophomore and junior seasons, and he should be a force coming off the bench this season. He has a nice touch on his shots, and he's good around the basket with rebounds and blocked shots. He's another of the 4 captains on this year's team.

Troy Sanchez (#14)
Height: 6' 2"
Weight: 165
Position: Guard
Comments: Sanchez is a walk-on, and I don't know anything about him.

As you can see, Michigan has a lot of talent again this year. They have a lot of height: 2 players at 6' 11", 2 players at 6' 10", one at 6' 9", and 2 more at 6' 8". They also have some muscle, with 3 players weighing around 250 pounds. Equally important, they have talent in the backcourt, with several good ball-handlers, shooters, and scorers. They have good rebounding, good speed, and a new point guard to run the show. They have lots of depth, and lots of experience. With just about everyone back from last year's team, and another year's worth of game experience and maturity, Michigan is ready to take the next step. Michigan has the talent to play with just about every team on their schedule. If they can gel as a team, and avoid serious injuries, they can make a solid run in the NCAA Tournament in the spring.

The Upcoming Week

Michigan's 2nd, and final, exhibition game of the year is this Friday (11/11/2005) at 7:00 p.m. vs. Northern Michigan in Crisler Arena. Come on out and cheer them on.

Go Blue!