12/05/2005 – Week #05 – Two More Big Victories

The Week In Review

It was a very good week for the University of Michigan men's basketball team last week. They won both games that they played, including their portion of the ACC- Big Ten Challenge, and their 2nd road game of the year. On Tuesday (11/29/2005), they beat Miami (FL) in Crisler Arena, 74-53, then on Saturday (12/03/2005), they beat Notre Dame in South Bend, 71-67. These were two important wins, and they raise UM's record to 5-0.

The win over Miami (FL) was important for a couple of reasons. First of all, it was part of the ACC – Big Ten Challenge, and the Big Ten needed all the help it could get. For the 7th straight year, the ACC won the Challenge, but it was very close this year. The ACC won 6 games to 5. Michigan has done better than many of the other Big Ten schools, with a 3-2 record in the Challenge.

The other reason that the win over Miami was an important game was that Miami is a good team, from the ACC, and they've gotten votes in the polls the last couple of weeks. They're not in the Top 25, but they are in that grey area known as "Also Received Votes", which is where Michigan is currently lingering. After a few more weeks like this, UM might actually climb up into the Top 25 section, but not yet. The 21-point victory over Miami was a good, solid win against a quality team, and it was the kind of game that UM probably would have lost last year.

Just as an aside, I was pleasantly surprised to be quoted at the top of the 11/29/2005 issue (Volume VII, Issue V) of "The Michigan Full Court Press", the official newsletter of the Maize Rage. There was a copy on many of the seats for the Miami game, and it started with this quote, from my 03/29/2004 column:

> "The Maize Rage was bigger than ever, and they got the whole place rocking.
> It was awesome to see and hear what a large, enthusiastic crowd could do.
> The team responded to the energy, and that got the crowd going even more.
> It was lots of fun."

More about the Maize Rage in a minute.

Remember last week when I said "winning close games is good practice for winning more close games"? Well, that's exactly what happened in the Notre Dame game. It was a game of runs, with 11 lead changes and 8 ties. The game was tied at halftime (27-27), and Michigan opened up a nice lead (39-32) early in the 2nd half. ND came back to open up a decent lead (59-53) with about 6 minutes left, and they were still up by 5 points (65-60) with about 3 minutes left in the game. Michigan managed to tie it up at 67 with one minute left, and they played great clutch basketball in the last 60 seconds, and won by 4 points. It was a very exciting game, and a huge win for this team. Notre Dame is a quality opponent, and being able to beat them on their home floor, in front of a mostly hostile crowd (more about that in a minute), is very impressive. Once again, it's the kind of game that just sort of slipped away from the Wolverines last year, but not this year.

If you watched the Notre Dame game on ESPN2, you couldn't miss the large group of maize shirts in the top rows behind one of the baskets. Yes, it was our own Maize Rage, there to support the team, and they did an excellent job. There were only 100 of them, but you could hear them over the Notre Dame crowd several times, and (this is the important part), you only heard them supporting Michigan, not harassing Notre Dame. This is in stark

contrast to the IdiotZZone at the other Big Ten university in the state. I have always admired the Maize Rage for their class, and I've always been proud of the job they do at home and on the road. They represent Michigan in a positive manner, and they help the team as much as they can, without resorting to intimidation and ugliness. I know that The Evil Empire in East Lansing has had more success lately in basketball, but at what price? Is winning at all costs worth the price? I would much rather win some/lose some with class than win more/lose less with thugs.

Game Statistics

First, let's look at the shooting statistics from the Miami (FL) game:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	22-57 (38.6%)	7-18 (38.9%)	23-29 (79.3%)
Miami (FL)	20-48 (41.7%)	2-10 (20.0%)	11-19 (57.9%)
Advantage	Miami	Michigan	Michigan

Even though Miami shot a slightly better percentage overall, Michigan shot much better from 3-point range and the free throw line. UM made 5 more 3-pointers, and 12 more free throws than Miami, accounting for the 21 point trouncing. In fact, this game was the 3rd time this season that UM has made more free throws than the other team has attempted (the only exception was the Butler game, and that one was close).

Now, let's look at the non-shooting statistics from the Miami (FL) game:

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	42	14	12	2	8
Miami (FL)	27	9	19	5	4
Advantage	Mich	Mich	Mich	Miami	Mich

When one team out-rebounds the other 42-27, and has 7 less turnovers (12-19), they are probably going to win the game, and that's exactly what happened. The only stat that Miami won was Blocks, but the 4 extra Steals (8-4) pretty much cancel those out.

Moving on to the Notre Dame game, let's look at the shooting stats:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	27-58 (46.6%)	7-17 (41.2%)	10-11 (90.9%)
Notre Dame	24-58 (41.4%)	6-20 (30.0%)	13-18 (72.2%)
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan

It was a close game, and these statistics show it. Even though UM had better shooting percentages in all 3 categories, for the first time this year, they were out-scored at the free throw line. Not by much, but in a close game, 3 points is a lot. Fortunately, Michigan hit 3 more baskets, including one more 3-pointer, than Notre Dame did. That just barely made up for the 3-point deficit at the free throw line.

The 3-point shooting stats for Notre Dame are deceptive. They took exactly ten 3-point shots in each half, and they missed all 10 in the 1st half, and hit 6-of-10 in the 2nd half. It was their hot 3-point shooting in the 2nd half that kept them in the game, but it wasn't quite enough to win it.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	33	17	13	6	8
Notre Dame	35	11	14	7	5
Advantage	ND	Mich	Mich	ND	Mich

Once again, these stats are all very close, and UM got out-rebounded for the first time this season. However, the slight edge in Turnovers and Steals was just enough to tip a very close game to Michigan.

Individual Statistics

Coach Amaker used his "regular" starting lineup again for both games: Lester Abram, Graham Brown, Dion Harris, Daniel Horton, and Courtney Sims. Here's how they did:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	Miami	ND	Miami	ND	Miami	ND	Miami	ND
Lester Abram	3-8	0-5	0-1	0-0	8-10	4-4	14	4
Graham Brown	2-6	6-6	0-0	0-0	0-0	1-1	4	13
Dion Harris	5-13	5-14	3-8	2-7	3-4	0-0	16	12
Daniel Horton	5-9	7-14	3-5	3-6	0-0	2-2	13	19
Courtney Sims	5-10	4-9	0-0	0-0	2-3	3-4	12	11
Totals	20-38 52.6%	22-48 45.8%	6-14 42.9%	5-13 38.5%	13-17 76.5%	10-11 90.9%	59	59

As a group, the starters did very well in both games. They shot nice percentages, and they scored most of the points (59 out of 74, and 59 out of 71).

Individually, 3 of the 5 starters (Harris, Horton, and Sims) hit double figures in both games, but the other 2 starters had their moments, especially Brown. The Miami game was close to a blowout, so there didn't need to be a "hero", but the Notre Dame game was a cliffhanger, and there was a hero to save the day: Graham Brown. No, he wasn't the leading scorer (Horton was, with 19 points), but his 13 points all came at crucial moments in the game, and you can't fault his shooting percentage: 6-for-6 from the floor, and 1-for-1 at the free throw line. Even more important than his points, he pulled down 11 and 10 rebounds in the two games last week, giving him a double-double against Notre Dame. Just to top things off, he also drew three big charges against Miami, which really fired up the team and the crowd. The Maize Rage had their biggest group yet, and it was UM's largest crowd of the season so far, so Brown's efforts made a big impact, especially in a nationally-televised game.

Actually, there were two heroes in the Notre Dame game: Brown scored several big baskets in a row to keep Michigan right in the thick of things, but Dion Harris hit the go-ahead basket when the score was tied at 67-67 with 17 seconds left. Abram iced the victory with 2 free throws moments later.

Take a good look at the scoring again: Michigan had 4 of the 5 starters in double figures in both games. That's impressive scoring balance, and it makes it hard for the other team to concentrate on just one or two "stars".

Here's how the bench players did this week:

	Field Goals	3-Pointers	Free Throws	Points

Player	Miami	ND	Miami	ND	Miami	ND	Miami	ND
Amadou Ba	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0	DNP
Ron Coleman	0-4	2-6	0-1	2-4	2-2	0-0	2	6
Hayes Grooms	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0	DNP
Sherrod Harrell	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0	DNP
Chris Hunter	2-6	3-4	1-2	0-0	6-6	0-0	11	6
Jevohn Shepherd	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-2	DNP	0	DNP
Jerret Smith	0-1	0-0	0-1	0-0	2-2	0-0	2	0
Totals	2-11 18.1%	5-10 50.0%	1-4 25.0%	2-4 50.0%	10-12 83.3%	0-0 0.0%	15	12

The bench contributed a little this week, but most of it was Hunter, with a little Coleman thrown in, and a touch of Smith. Hunter's 11 points against Miami gave UM a 5th player in double figures, which is impressive, and Coleman hit a big 3-pointer against Notre Dame. Smith didn't score much, but he did a decent job running the point when he was in, and he played some good defense. The other bench players who played this week didn't do much.

The Big Picture

For the first time since the 1999-2000 season, Michigan is off to a 5-0 start. They have 6 more games left in their non-conference schedule, and only 2 of them should be difficult: at South Florida, and home against UCLA. Of their 6 remaining non-conference games, 5 of them are at home. They should have an easy time against the "States" (Delaware State, Coppin State, and Chicago State), but they might have tougher time against "the other Miami", Miami (OH). Realistically, they should win at least 5 of their 6 remaining non-conference games, which would give them a sparkling 10-1 record going into Big Ten play. 11-0 would be even better. ☺

Here's Michigan's entire remaining schedule:

Date	Opponent	Site
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

The Upcoming Week

Looking ahead to the upcoming week, Michigan finally gets a break, after 4 tough games in a row. On Wednesday (12/07/2005), they play Delaware State in Crisler Arena. They should win this game handily, and get to play some of the bench players for longer stretches. The other game this week is on Saturday (12/10/2005), when Michigan returns to the road, and plays at South Florida. South Florida is in the new Big East, and they're a pretty good team, with a 3-2 record. They have decent height (two 6'10" players and two 6'9" players), and a few good scorers (4 players averaging 11 points/game or more). It's always tough to play on the road, and the long trip down to Tampa can cause problems. This will be another good test for the Wolverines.

The game on Wednesday evening against Delaware State is at 7:00 p.m. Come on down to Crisler and cheer on the Wolverines.

Go Blue!