01/02/2006 – Week #09 – End Of Non-Conference, Start Of Big Ten

The Week In Review

Happy New Year!

Or, not so happy, if you're a Michigan football fan. I'm still nursing an Alamo Bowl hangover, and wondering how Michigan managed to lose to Nebraska. I stayed after the Coppin State basketball game, and watched the football game on the videoscreens with a couple hundred other UM fans, and I still don't quite understand how Michigan lost. If you look back at my columns for the last few years, you'll see that I seldom complain much about the spotty officiating in the Michigan basketball games, but sometimes a particularly bad call can change the outcome of a close game. It's a lot worse in basketball than in football, but I can never remember a more poorly officiated football game than the Alamo Bowl. I found it very interesting when the ESPN announcers called the officials "incompetent".

Enough said about football. That season is over, and the real meat of the basketball season is just beginning. This past week, the University of Michigan men's basketball team played their final two non-conference games of the year, and they won both of them handily. On Wednesday (12/28/2005) evening, they beat Coppin State 81-53, then on Saturday (12/31/2005), they beat Chicago State 86-69. Both games were against teams that they should have beaten easily, and they did. They were good practice games, before the brutal Big Ten season starts. In both games, Michigan did a good job holding their double-digit leads once they got them. These 2 wins raise UM's season record to a very respectable 10-1.

Game Statistics

Let's look at the shooting statistics from the Coppin State game:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	31-51 (60.8%)	7-16 (43.8%)	12-17 (70.6%)
Coppin State	20-55 (36.4%)	4-15 (26.7%)	9-12 (75.0%)
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Coppin State

Everything you need to know about the game is right here: UM made 31 baskets, Coppin State made 20. Michigan shot well, Coppin State didn't. End of story.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	33	26	14	2	6
Coppin State	25	8	13	0	7
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Copp. St.	Michigan	Copp. St.

The non-shooting stats aren't as important as the shooting stats in this game, but the Assists total for Michigan is impressive. The plus-8 rebounding edge is nice. The rest of the stats are a wash.

Moving on to the Chicago State game, let's look at the shooting statistics:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws

Michigan	34-57 (59.6%)	4-14 (28.6%)	14-19 (73.7%)
Chicago State	24-56 (42.9%)	10-19 (52.6%)	11-18 (61.1%)
Advantage	Michigan	Chicago State	Michigan

These stats make the game look closer than it was, mostly because of Chicago State's great 3-point shooting. Fortunately, Michigan made 10 more baskets overall, which won the game.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	40	18	14	11	3
Chicago State	24	12	11	1	4
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Chic. St.	Michigan	Chic. St.

The non-shooting stats are as important as the shooting stats in this game, especially the Rebounds and Blocks. Michigan ruled underneath, as they should have, with their height advantage. Those 16 extra rebounds and 11 blocked shots made a huge difference in the game.

Individual Statistics

Coach Amaker went back to his regular starting lineup for both games this week: Lester Abram, Graham Brown, Dion Harris, Daniel Horton, and Courtney Sims. Here's how they did:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	Copp.	Chic.	Copp.	Chic.	Copp.	Chic.	Copp.	Chic.
Lester Abram	4-7	8-11	1-2	1-2	1-3	2-3	10	19
Graham Brown	4-4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	8	0
Dion Harris	7-12	5-10	5-7	2-6	2-2	0-0	21	12
Daniel Horton	4-7	5-9	1-2	1-3	2-2	6-7	11	17
Courtney Sims	8-9	9-13	0-0	0-0	3-4	4-4	19	22
Totals	27-39 69.2%	27-43 62.8%	7-11 63.6%	4-11 36.4%	8-11 72.7%	12-14 85.7%	69	70

As a group, the starters did a great job this week. They shot well in just about every category, except for 3-point shooting against Chicago State.

Individually, 4 of the 5 starters hit double figures in both games, which is awesome. This kind of scoring balance is very important. The only starter who didn't hit double figures was Brown. He came close in the Coppin State game with 8 points, but he was held scoreless against Chicago State. He didn't play at all in the 2nd half of the Chicago State game, but I don't know why. I hope he wasn't injured.

There were a couple of significant achievements this week: Horton had double-doubles in both games, and both times he did it with 10 assists, which tied his career high. Also, Sims hit a new career high in blocked shots, when he had 8 against Chicago State.

Here's how the bench players did this week:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	Copp.	Chic.	Copp.	Chic.	Copp.	Chic.	Copp.	Chic.

Amadou Ba	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0
Ron Coleman	2-6	4-6	0-3	0-0	1-2	0-0	5	8
Hayes Grooms	0-1	0-1	0-0	0-1	1-2	2-2	1	2
Sherrod Harrell	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0
Chris Hunter	2-3	0-1	0-0	0-1	2-2	0-0	6	0
Jevohn Shepherd	0-2	3-6	0-2	0-1	0-0	0-3	0	6
Totals	4-12 25.0%	7-14 50.0%	0-5 0.0%	0-3 0.0%	4-6 66.7%	2-5 40.0%	12	16

The bench contributed quite nicely in both games, which is a good sign. Coleman had a couple of nice games, but it was either feast or famine for Hunter and Shepherd. Grooms chipped in a couple of points, but the rest of the bench players didn't do much. Besides his nice scoring, Coleman also hit a new career high, with 8 rebounds against Chicago State.

It should be noted that Jerret Smith didn't play in either game, due to an ankle injury. There are a couple of other minor injuries to report: Chris Hunter was sick for a few days, but he still played a little against Chicago State. Lester Abram has a cut on his hand, and it's heavily bandaged, but he can still play. Finally, Dion Harris hurt his hamstring in the 2nd half of the Chicago State game, but he should be able to continue playing.

Early Midterm Grades

This year, Michigan plays 27 regular season games, 11 non-conference and 16 Big Ten games. At this point, they've played 11 games, so they're more than a third of the way through the season. Even though it would seem that the logical time to give midterm grades would be after game #14 (Illinois, on 01/14/2006), I'm going to do it now, while we have a break in the schedule.

Name	Grade	Comments
Freshmen		
Phillip DeVries	Inc.	He hasn't played at all.
Kendric Price	Inc.	He hasn't played at all, due to being red-shirted.
Jevohn Shepherd	B-	He's a smaller, lighter version of Brent Petway. He's a leaper, and he's very fast and athletic. He can hit 3-pointers, but he's not a very good shooter.
Jerret Smith	B	He's a natural point guard, and he's done pretty well out there. He seems fairly poised, but he's not a very good shooter.
Sophomores		
Ron Coleman	B-	After an encouraging freshman season, he's regressed a little this year. He hasn't played as much, and when he has, he's been tentative.
Alex Brzozowicz	Inc.	He hasn't played at all.
Juniors		
Lester Abram	B+	He's a redshirt junior this year, after missing almost all of last year to injury. He's back, and he's playing very well.
Amadou Ba	C	He hasn't played much at all, but when he has, he's done OK out there. He's not very quick, and he isn't a natural basketball player, but he tries hard.

Dion Harris	B+	When he's good, he's very good, but when he's bad, he really hurts the whole team. Does much better at shooting guard than point guard.
Brent Petway	Inc.	He hasn't played at all, due to academic ineligibility. He's eligible for the Big Ten season.
Courtney Sims	B+	He still needs to play stronger and meaner inside, but has a nice touch, and great hands and agility. He's the leading scorer on the team, so far.
Seniors		
Graham Brown	B+	He does all the little things to help Michigan win. He's not a big scorer, but he's a strong presence inside, and a fierce competitor.
Hayes Grooms	B-	He hasn't played much, but he appears to be a good little point guard. He has decent ball-handling skills, and decent speed.
Sherrod Harrell	B-	He hasn't played much, but he's played fairly well when he's been in there. He has decent ball-handling skills, and good speed.
Daniel Horton	A-	He's become a true leader out there, and he can pick the team up and carry them on his back. He's a good scorer, and a decent ball-handler.
Chris Hunter	B+	He's Michigan's star 6th man. He's got very nice jumpers, including good 3-point shooting. He's got good ball-handling, especially for his size, but he needs to play a little tougher inside.
Troy Sanchez	Inc.	He hasn't played at all.
Coach		
Tommy Amaker	B+	He's a good recruiter, a good practice coach, and a decent bench coach. He's done a good job keeping this year's team focused on the current game.

The Big Picture

As predicted, Michigan won their last 2 non-conference games, to finish the non-conference schedule with a 10-1 record. That's their best start since the (vacated) 1992-1993 season. Now, the real season begins. Michigan plays 16 Big Ten games, 8 at home, and 8 on the road. I expect them to win 6 of their home games (except Illinois and MSU), and 3 of the away games (at Penn State, Purdue, and Iowa). That would give them a 9-7 record, which would probably be good enough for 6th place in the Big Ten, and an overall record of 19-8. If they can win at least one game in the Big Ten Tournament, they should be able to make it to the NCAA Tournament.

Here's Michigan's entire schedule:

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Score	Record
11/18/2005 (Fri)	Central Michigan	Ann Arbor	W	87-60	1-0 (0-0)
11/22/2005 (Tue)	Boston University	Boston, MA	W	51-46	2-0 (0-0)
11/26/2005 (Sat)	Butler	Ann Arbor	W	78-74	3-0 (0-0)
11/29/2005 (Tue)	Miami (FL)	Ann Arbor	W	74-53	4-0 (0-0)
12/03/2005 (Sat)	Notre Dame	South Bend, IN	W	71-67	5-0 (0-0)
12/07/2005 (Wed)	Delaware State	Ann Arbor	W	69-49	6-0 (0-0)

12/10/2005 (Sat)	South Florida	Tampa, FL	W	68-47	7-0 (0-0)
12/17/2005 (Sat)	UCLA	Ann Arbor	L	68-61	7-1 (0-0)
12/22/2005 (Thu)	Miami (OH)	Ann Arbor	W	87-80	8-1 (0-0)
12/28/2005 (Wed)	Coppin State	Ann Arbor	W	81-53	9-1 (0-0)
12/31/2005 (Sat)	Chicago State	Ann Arbor	W	86-69	10-1 (0-0)
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			

Look at that brutal stretch near the end of the season: at MSU, home vs. Illinois, and at OSU. Michigan could easily lose all 3 of those, which could make their NCAA chances a little shaky. Let's look at the Big Ten in detail.

Big Ten Preview

Here are the current Big Ten standings, before league play begins:

Team	Wins	Losses
Illinois	14	0
Ohio State	10	0
Michigan	10	1
Michigan State	12	2
Wisconsin	10	2
Minnesota	9	2
Indiana	8	2
Iowa	11	3
Penn State	7	3
Northwestern	7	4
Purdue	6	5

Based on what I've seen so far, here are my predictions on what the final Big Ten standings will look like:

Team	Wins	Losses
Illinois	13	3

Michigan State	12	4
Indiana	11	5
Wisconsin	11	5
Ohio State	10	6
Michigan	9	7
Iowa	8	8
Minnesota	6	10
Purdue	3	13
Northwestern	3	13
Penn State	2	14

It should be a good battle between Illinois and MSU again this year for the Big Ten title. It's possible that the other ranked teams (Indiana, Ohio State, Wisconsin) might sneak in there, but I doubt it.

Here's a look at each of the other Big Ten teams, in alphabetical order:

Illinois (Ranked #6)
- Losses: None.
- Big wins: At North Carolina (68-64)
  At neutral site vs. Xavier (65-62)
  At home vs. Georgetown (58-48)
  At Oregon (89-59)
  At Missouri (82-50)
- Michigan games: At Champaign (Saturday 01/14/2006)
  In Ann Arbor (Tuesday 02/21/2006)
- Notes: Illinois isn't quite as loaded as they were last year, but they're still playing very well. Michigan stands no chance in the game at Illinois, but they might be able to sneak out a win in Crisler. Last year, UM had a 6-point lead late in the game, before Dee Brown took over.

Indiana (Ranked #17)
- Losses: At home vs. (#1) Duke (75-67)
  At Indiana State (72-67)
- Big wins: None.
- Michigan games: At Bloomington (Tuesday 01/03/2006)
  In Ann Arbor (Saturday 03/04/2006)
- Notes: Indiana's loss to (#1) Duke is no disgrace, but the loss to Indiana State is a little puzzling. Indiana doesn't have a lot of height, but they do have good guards, and lots of experience. Michigan hasn't done well in Bloomington for the last decade, and I don't expect them to win there this year, but they stand a good chance of beating IU in Crisler.

Iowa
- Losses: At neutral site vs. (#2) Texas (68-59)
  At Northern Iowa (67-63)
  At Iowa State (72-60)
- Big wins: At neutral site vs. (#17) (67-63)
  At home vs. (#24) N.C. State (45-42)
  At home vs. Arizona State (62-43)
- Michigan games: At Iowa City (Saturday 02/04/2006)

Notes: Iowa's big wins are impressive, but their losses to Northern Iowa and Iowa State are telling. They have good height, solid guards, and decent experience. Michigan can beat them in Iowa City, but it won't be easy.

Michigan State (Ranked #9)
- Losses: At Hawaii (89-67)
  At neutral site vs. (#8) Gonzaga (109-106)
- Big wins: At neutral site vs. (#9) Arizona (74-71)
  At home vs. Georgia Tech (88-86)
  At neutral site vs. (#6) Boston College (77-70)
- Michigan games: In Ann Arbor (Wednesday 01/25/2006)
  At East Lansing (Saturday 02/18/2006)
- Notes: Don't let that loss to Hawaii fool you; the Sparties were jet-lagged, and most of their starters cramped up in the heat and humidity. Look at those impressive wins against ranked teams. MSU has a solid team, with good height, good depth, and plenty of experience. Still, I expect Michigan to split their games with MSU, winning in Ann Arbor, and losing in East Lansing.

Minnesota
- Losses: At home vs. Gardner-Webb (73-72)
  At (#23) Maryland (83-66)
- Big wins: At Arizona State (85-79)
- Michigan games: At Minneapolis (Saturday 01/21/2006)
  In Ann Arbor (Wednesday 02/15/2006)
- Notes: Minnesota is pretty tall, and they have plenty of depth and experience. Their loss to Gardner-Webb at home is a true mystery. Minnesota is almost unbeatable in their weird old gym, so I expect Michigan to split with them, winning at home, and losing on the road.

Northwestern
- Losses: At neutral site vs. UNC-Wilmington (56-48)
  At DePaul (59-49)
  At Virginia (72-57)
  At home vs. Illinois-Chicago (71-62)
- Big wins: None.
- Michigan games: In Ann Arbor (Wednesday 01/18/2006)
- Notes: Northwestern has lost some pretty winnable games, and I don't expect them to be very good this year. They have more height, depth, and experience than usual, but I still expect Michigan to beat them in Ann Arbor. Unfortunately, Michigan only plays them once.

Ohio State (Ranked #20)
- Losses: None.
- Big wins: At home vs. Virginia Tech (69-56)
- Michigan games: In Ann Arbor (Thursday 02/09/2006)
  At Columbus (Saturday 02/25/2006)
- Notes: Ohio State is the surprise team of the Big Ten this season. They're undefeated, and ranked in the Top 25. Of course, they've only beaten one decent team, so we'll have to see how they do when they start playing other ranked teams. I expect Michigan to split with them, winning at home, and losing in Columbus.

Penn State
Losses: At home vs. Clemson (96-88)
At Texas A&M (60-55)
At Pittsburgh (91-54)
Big wins: None.
Michigan games: At State College (Wednesday 02/01/2006)
Notes: Penn State hung in there during 2 of their losses, but check out that score vs. Pittsburgh. Ouch. PSU has decent height this year, with pretty good depth, and decent experience. Still, I expect Michigan to beat them in their one meeting. Once again, it's unfortunate that Michigan only plays them once this season.

Purdue
Losses: At neutral site vs. Xavier (74-55)
At Florida State (97-57)
At Evansville (75-69)
At Loyola-Chicago (80-65)
At (#4) Memphis (90-70)
Big wins: None.
Michigan games: In Ann Arbor (Saturday 01/07/2006)
At West Lafayette (Saturday 02/11/2006)
Notes: Purdue is still struggling. They have tons of guards, but not much height. I expect Michigan to sweep them this year.

Wisconsin (Ranked #24)
Losses: At (#22) Wake Forest (91-88)
At (#20) Pittsburgh (73-64)
Big wins: None.
Michigan games: In Ann Arbor (Saturday 01/28/2006)
Notes: Wisconsin has good height, good depth, and good experience. Still, I expect Michigan to beat them in Ann Arbor.

The Upcoming Week

Looking ahead to the upcoming week, Michigan has two games this week, one on the road, and one at home. On Tuesday (01/03/2006, 6:00 p.m. EST) they play at Indiana, then on Saturday (01/07/2006, 12:05 p.m. EST) they play Purdue in Crisler. Come on down to Crisler Arena on Saturday and cheer on the Wolverines.

Go Blue!