01/09/2006 – Week #10 – The Start Of The Big Ten Season

The Week In Review

This past week, the University of Michigan men's basketball team played their first two Big Ten games of the year, and they split them. On Tuesday (01/03/2006) evening, they lost at Indiana 70-63, then on Saturday (01/07/2006), they beat Purdue in Crisler Arena 68-65. Neither of these results was very surprising. Michigan hasn't won in Bloomington in over 10 years, and Purdue isn't very good this year, so things played out the way I expected them to. However, Michigan played much better than expected at Indiana, and had a good chance to steal the win near the end. On the flip side, UM played very poorly against Purdue, and had to work very hard to sneak out a home win against a struggling team. The loss and the win leave UM with a season record of 11-2, 1-1 in the Big Ten.

Game Statistics

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	27-65 (41.5%)	5-16 (31.3%)	4-5 (80.0%)
Indiana	24-53 (45.3%)	6-19 (31.6%)	16-25 (64.0%)
Advantage	Indiana	Indiana	Indiana

Everything you need to know about the game is right here: IU shot 25 free throws, UM shot 5. IU made 16 free throws, UM made 4. Regardless of the better percentage UM shot, 12 extra free throws made is huge, especially in a 7-point victory. The other 2 percentages are too close to make much difference. It was all in the free throw shooting.

Incidentally, this often happens to teams visiting Indiana. They get a lot more fouls called on them then the home team does, more so than at any other venue in the Big Ten. When they play on the road, the Hoosiers get the normal number of fouls called on them, but not at home. It's just one of those things.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	42	13	22	5	6
Indiana	29	12	14	6	6
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Indiana	Indiana	Even

The important stat here is Turnovers. 22 turnovers is embarrassing. Those 8 extra possessions really hurt.

The puzzling stat here is Rebounds. How did UM out-rebound IU by 13 boards and still lose?

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	21-56 (37.5%)	7-18 (38.9%)	19-26 (73.1%)
Purdue	24-58 (41.4%)	8-19 (42.1%)	9-10 (90.0%)
Advantage	Purdue	Purdue	Michigan

Once again, it was free throw shooting that won the game, but this time it was Michigan's free throw shooting, not the opponent's. UM shot 16 more free throws, and made 10 more, so even though they didn't have the better shooting percentage, they "made it up on volume".

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	37	13	15	5	9
Purdue	36	16	20	6	2
Advantage	Michigan	Purdue	Michigan	Purdue	Michigan

In a close game like this, all the stats are important. Most of these stats are very close, but the 2 categories that UM won (Turnovers and Steals) made all the difference.

Individual Statistics

After a relatively injury-free non-conference schedule, Michigan started Big Ten play without one of their biggest weapons, Lester Abram. He missed both games with a sprained toe, although he was quoted as saying that he could have played in the Purdue game if he had really been needed. He was missed out there.

With Abram out, Coach Amaker tried 2 different starting lineups this week: Ron Coleman started in Abram's place against Indiana, and Jerret Smith started against Purdue. The rest of the regular starting lineup (Graham Brown, Dion Harris, Daniel Horton, and Courtney Sims) was intact. Here's how they did:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	IU	PU	IU	PU	IU	PU	IU	PU
Graham Brown	4-6	4-6	0-0	0-0	0-0	3-6	8	11
Ron Coleman	0-3	Bench	0-1	Bench	0-0	Bench	0	Bench
Dion Harris	8-16	0-7	3-6	0-4	0-0	0-0	19	0
Daniel Horton	8-17	7-20	2-6	5-9	2-2	5-5	20	24
Courtney Sims	2-4	1-3	0-0	0-0	1-2	4-4	5	6
Jerret Smith	Bench	3-6	Bench	1-2	Bench	0-1	Bench	7
Totals	22-46 47.8%	15-42 35.7%	5-13 38.5%	6-15 40.0%	3-4 75.0%	12-16 75.0%	52	48

As a group, the starters did a decent job this week. They didn't shoot very well in either game, except for free throws, which were reasonable.

Individually, Horton was the only starter to hit double figures in both games, and he was UM's high scorer in both games. Harris had a great game against IU, but he was terrible in the Purdue game. Coleman didn't do much in his start against IU, but Smith played well in the first start of his career. Sims was double-teamed most of the times in both games, and he didn't adjust to it very well.

The big story this week was the rebounding of Graham Brown. He had an amazing (career high) 21 rebounds (6 offensive) against Indiana, then he followed it up with 10 more rebounds against Purdue. He chipped in 8 and 11 points to go with all those rebounds, and had a great week. It was a shame to waste those 21 rebounds against Indiana by not winning the game.

Here's how the bench players did this week:

Player	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
	IU	PU	IU	PU	IU	PU	IU	PU
Ron Coleman	Starter	2-3	Starter	1-2	Starter	3-4	Starter	8
Hayes Grooms	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0
Chris Hunter	2-8	1-2	0-1	0-1	0-0	0-1	4	2
Brent Petway	1-3	2-6	0-0	0-0	0-0	3-4	2	7
Jevohn Shepherd	1-7	1-3	0-2	0-0	1-1	1-1	3	3
Jerret Smith	1-1	Starter	0-0	Starter	0-0	Starter	2	Starter
Totals	5-19 26.3%	6-14 42.9%	0-3 0.0%	1-3 33.3%	1-1 100.0%	7-10 70.0%	11	20

The bench contributed nicely in both games. Coleman had a nice game against Purdue, after starting at Indiana. Hunter didn't chip in as many points as he usually does, which hurt UM against Indiana. Shepherd played well against Purdue, but he was "off" against IU. Smith returned to the lineup after missing a couple games with an ankle injury, and he didn't do much against IU, but he was good in a starting role against Purdue. Grooms only played a few minutes, and didn't do much of anything. The big story on the bench this week was the return of Petway. He missed the entire non-conference schedule due to academic ineligibility, but he did well in the classroom in the fall term, and he got his reinstatement paperwork submitted just in time to play at Indiana. He looked rusty in that game, but he was more like his old self against Purdue, with a couple nice dunks, and a lot of positive energy out there. The team has missed him, and so has the crowd.

The Big Picture

Are the Wolverines as good as their 11-2 record would suggest, or are they as bad as their record against Top 25 teams (UCLA and Indiana) would indicate? Well, neither. They're certainly better than last year's team, but not as good as they should be, given all the talent they have. They probably should have beaten both UCLA and Indiana, or at least one of them, but they didn't. They looked weak against Purdue, but they still managed to win the game. The problem in both games last week was the absence of Lester Abram. Since the beginning of last season, a stretch of 44 games, Michigan's records look like this:

Overall record: 24-20 (0.545)
Without Lester Abram: 11-19 (0.367)
With Lester Abram: 13-1 (0.929)

Obviously, when they have Abram on the floor, they are a much better team.

As I've always said, the Big Ten season is a marathon, not a sprint. It would have been nice if UM could have started the Big Ten schedule 2-0, but they didn't. They're 1-1, which isn't too bad, and there are still a lot of games to be played. Everyone always wants to agonize over losses, or close wins that maybe should have been blowouts, but you can only get so much information from those games. Just because Michigan looked weak against Purdue doesn't mean that they're in trouble. There's plenty of time for them to get back on track.

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	L	70-63	10-2 (0-1)
01/07/2006 (Sat)	Purdue	Ann Arbor	W	68-65	11-2 (1-1)
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			

Big Ten Results

Here are the current Big Ten standings, after the first week of league play:

Team	Big Ten			Overall		
	Wins	Losses	Percent	Wins	Losses	Percent
Wisconsin	2	0	1.000	12	2	0.857
Indiana	2	0	1.000	10	2	0.833
Northwestern	2	0	1.000	9	4	0.692
Illinois	1	1	0.500	15	1	0.938
Ohio State	1	1	0.500	11	1	0.917
Michigan	1	1	0.500	11	2	0.846
Iowa	1	1	0.500	12	4	0.750
Minnesota	0	1	0.000	9	3	0.750
Penn State	0	1	0.000	7	4	0.636
Michigan State	0	2	0.000	12	4	0.750
Purdue	0	2	0.000	6	7	0.462

Here are the results from last week's games:

Tuesday (01/03/2006)
Michigan lost at Indiana, 70-63

Wednesday (01/04/2006)
Purdue lost at Northwestern, 66-53

Thursday (01/05/2006)
Penn State lost at Ohio State, 104-69
Michigan State lost at Illinois, 60-50
Wisconsin beat Iowa at a neutral site, 66-52

Saturday (01/07/2006)
Purdue lost at Michigan, 68-65
Northwestern won at Minnesota, 57-49
Illinois lost at Iowa, 63-48
Ohio State lost at Indiana, 81-79

Sunday (01/08/2006)
Michigan State lost at Wisconsin, 82-63

There were a few surprises this week:
- MSU losing both games. They were both tough opponents, on the road, but still…
- Northwestern winning on the road, at Minnesota.
- Iowa beating Illinois.

Here are the games scheduled for the upcoming week:

Tuesday (01/10/2006)
Wisconsin at Minnesota

Wednesday (01/11/2006)
Indiana at Michigan State
Penn State at Northwestern
Ohio State at Purdue

Saturday (01/14/2006)
Michigan at Illinois
Iowa at Penn State
Northwestern at Wisconsin
Minnesota at Purdue

Sunday (01/15/2006)
Michigan State at Ohio State

There are a couple of big games this week:
- Indiana at Michigan State on Wednesday. If MSU loses this one, they're in trouble.
- Michigan at Illinois on Saturday. It would be a huge upset, but I don't expect UM to pull it off.
- Michigan State at Ohio State. This will tell us whether OSU is for real.

I expect Wisconsin to win both of their games to stay in 1st place. Indiana only plays one game, and it's a toughie, so they might drop back in the standings. Northwestern should handle Penn State on Wednesday, but I don't expect them to beat Wisconsin on the road. Illinois only plays one game, and I expect them to win it.

The Upcoming Week

Looking ahead to the upcoming week, Michigan only has one game this week, at Illinois on Saturday (01/14/2006). Despite their loss to Iowa, Illinois is a very good team, and beating them at their place is very difficult. It would be a huge upset if Michigan could beat them, but I'm not holding my breath.

Go Blue!