01/23/2006 – Week #12 – Two Solid Wins

The Week In Review

This past week, the University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games, and they won them both. On Wednesday (01/18/2006), they beat Northwestern in Crisler Arena 68-51, then on Saturday (01/21/2006), they won at Minnesota 71-55. These were both games that Michigan should have won handily, and they did. Both games also showed how much better this team is than last year's: they had lost their last 3 games against both Northwestern and Minnesota. The win at Minnesota was more impressive than the home win against Northwestern for several reasons. This was Michigan's 4th road win this year, and they only won 4 road games all last season. The win at Minnesota also ended a 9-game losing streak there, dating back to 1993.

Regardless of the opponents, the most impressive thing about the two wins was how UM played in both games. They played with poise and focus. They dueled with both teams early, but once they opened up a decent lead, they kept it for the rest of the game. They answered every run with a run of their own, and they didn't get rattled.

The two wins raise UM's season record to 13-3, 3-2 in the Big Ten. As we'll see below, the league leaders (Indiana and Wisconsin) both have one loss, so UM is still in the thick of the Big Ten title chase.

Game Statistics

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	30-46 (65.2%)	7-17 (41.2%)	1-1 (100.0%)
Northwestern	18-43 (41.9%)	6-17 (35.3%)	9-12 (75.0%)
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Northwestern

There's your whole game story right there: UM shot 65.2%, and Northwestern shot 41.9%. Michigan hit 30 field goals, and Northwestern hit 18. Game over.

No one else made much of a big deal out of this, but I'm still amazed by it: UM shot (and made) only one free throw in the game. I can't remember the last time that's happened. I looked in the media guide, and they track most free throws in a game, but not least, so I don't know quite how historical this is, but I find it amazing. It's also amazing that UM was outshot 12-to-1 in free throws, and outscored 9-to-1, and yet still won the game handily.

Interestingly, but not nearly as amazing, is the fact that all 12 of the Northwestern free throws were shot by the same player, Mohamed Hachad.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	20	21	14	4	8
Northwestern	23	10	18	0	6
Advantage	NW	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan

Other than Rebounds, Michigan won these stats convincingly. 21 Assists is impressive.

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	25-53 (47.2%)	9-21 (42.9%)	12-12 (100.0%)
Minnesota	21-55 (38.2%)	3-18 (16.7%)	10-17 (58.8%)
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan

Sure, Michigan shot a better percentage across the board, especially that smoking free-throw percentage, but the game was won behind the 3-point line. Minnesota missed all 6 of their 3-point attempts in the 1st half, and their first 4 attempts of the 2nd half, before they finally made one. By then, the game was almost out of reach. They made all three of their 3-pointers in one mini-run that cut Michigan's lead from 17 down to 7, but that was the end of their fun. They missed the rest of them, and lost the game because of it.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	30	18	16	5	10
Minnesota	35	14	19	4	6
Advantage	Minnesota	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan

Once again, Michigan lost the rebounding battle, but won the rest of the stats. These stats are all close enough that they didn't determine the outcome. It was the 3-point shooting.

Individual Statistics

Lester Abram was healthy enough to start again, so Coach Amaker got to use his regular starting lineup in both games: Abram, Graham Brown, Dion Harris, Daniel Horton, and Courtney Sims. Here's how they did:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	NW	Minn	NW	Minn	NW	Minn	NW	Minn
Lester Abram	9-12	3-5	2-5	0-2	0-0	0-0	20	6
Graham Brown	0-0	3-6	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	6
Dion Harris	6-12	6-9	3-7	3-5	0-0	1-1	15	16
Daniel Horton	2-7	8-16	0-2	6-10	0-0	10-10	4	32
Courtney Sims	2-2	0-6	0-0	0-0	1-1	0-0	5	0
Totals	19-33 57.6%	20-32 62.5%	5-14 35.7%	9-17 52.9%	1-1 100.0%	11-11 100.0%	44	60

As a group, the starters did an excellent job in both games. They shot very well across the board, especially at the free-throw line. The 3-point shooting against Northwestern was a little low, but not too bad.

Individually, it was a good week for the guards, but not a good week for the big men. Harris was the only starter to hit double figures in both games, and he played a key role in finishing the Minnesota win, but the big story was Horton. He was on fire against Minnesota, hitting 60% of his 3-pointers. Combined with his perfect 10-for-10 free-throw shooting, he was awesome, hitting a career-high 32 points. Of course, he had an "off" night against Northwestern, and even left the game early with a mildly sprained ankle, but he came back 3 days later with a vengeance. Incidentally, Horton is now 18-for-18 from the free-throw line in Big Ten play.

Abram had a great game against Northwestern, but a sub-par game against Minnesota. He left that game with an ankle sprain, and it isn't clear when he'll return to the lineup. For the big men, Brown got shut out against Northwestern, and Sims got shut out against Minnesota. This is not good. Even when they did score, they didn't score much. Michigan needs better scoring balance to be successful against the "big boys" coming up on the schedule.

Here's how the bench players did this week:

Player	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
	NW	Minn	NW	Minn	NW	Minn	NW	Minn
Amadou Ba	0-1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0
Ron Coleman	3-3	1-1	2-2	0-0	1-1	0-0	8	3
Hayes Grooms	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0
Sherrod Harrell	0-0	1-1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2
Chris Hunter	4-4	0-2	0-0	0-1	0-0	0-0	8	0
Brent Petway	3-3	3-5	0-0	0-1	0-0	0-0	6	6
Jevohn Shepherd	0-1	0-0	0-1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0
Jerret Smith	1-1	0-2	0-0	0-2	0-0	0-0	2	0
Totals	11-13 84.6%	5-11 45.5%	2-3 66.7%	0-4 0.0%	1-1 100.0%	0-0 0.0%	24	11

The bench contributed nicely in the Northwestern game, but not so much in the Minnesota game. Coleman and Petway both chipped in some points in both games, but everyone else got shut out in at least one game. As usual, most of Petway's shots were highlight-film alley-oop dunks. He is just so much fun to watch. Once again, he picked the whole team up when he came in.

The Big Picture

Michigan won two games that they had to win, in order to stay in the Big Ten race. They are obviously better than Northwestern and Minnesota, but they still had to go out and play the games and prove it. They did. Now, it's time to face two nationally ranked teams in Crisler Arena this week. There are still many games left to be played, and Michigan still hasn't beaten a ranked team this season, but they've played well in the 3 games that they've lost to ranked teams, and they're playing better and better every week. If they want to stay in the Big Ten title hunt, they will need to beat a few Top 25 teams along the way, and this week is a good time to start.

Here's Michigan's schedule and results:

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	L	79-74	11-3 (1-2)
01/18/2006 (Wed)	Northwestern	Ann Arbor	W	68-51	12-3 (2-2)
01/21/2006 (Sat)	Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN	W	71-55	13-3 (3-2)
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 Week #3 of league play:

	Big Ten			Overall		
Team	Wins	Losses	Percent	Wins	Losses	Percent
Indiana	4	1	0.800	12	3	0.800
Wisconsin	4	1	0.800	14	4	0.778
Ohio State	4	2	0.667	14	2	0.875
Illinois	3	2	0.600	17	2	0.895
Michigan	3	2	0.600	13	3	0.812
Michigan State	3	2	0.600	15	4	0.789
Iowa	3	2	0.600	14	5	0.737
Penn State	2	3	0.400	10	6	0.625
Northwestern	2	4	0.333	9	8	0.529
Purdue	1	5	0.167	7	10	0.412
Minnesota	0	5	0.000	9	7	0.562

Here are the results from last week's games:

Tuesday (01/17/2006)
Illinois lost at Indiana, 62-60

Wednesday (01/18/2006)
Northwestern lost at Michigan, 68-51
Purdue lost at Penn State, 74-54
Wisconsin lost at Ohio State, 77-67
Minnesota lost at Iowa, 76-72 (3 OT)

Saturday (01/21/2006)
Michigan won at Minnesota, 71-55
Iowa lost at Michigan State, 85-55

Ohio State won at Penn State, 75-64
Purdue lost at Indiana, 62-49
Illinois won at Northwestern, 58-47
North Dakota State won at Wisconsin, 62-55 (Non-conference)

There were a few surprises this week:

- Illinois lost at Indiana. Actually, this isn't too surprising, given how well Indiana does at home.
- Wisconsin lost at Ohio State. Actually, this also isn't too surprising, because Ohio State is pretty good.
- MSU throttled Iowa at home. It's not surprising that State won, but it was surprising that they won by such a large margin.
- The biggie: Wisconsin lost at home to North Dakota State, a team that's transitioning from Division II. The Badgers were 68-3 at home since Bo Ryan took over there. It was a stunning upset.

Here are the games scheduled for the upcoming week:

Tuesday (01/24/2006)
Indiana at Iowa

Wednesday (01/25/2006)
Michigan State at Michigan
Penn State at Wisconsin
Northwestern at Purdue
Minnesota at Illinois

Saturday (01/28/2006)
Wisconsin at Michigan
Penn State at Michigan State
Purdue at Illinois
Ohio State at Iowa

Sunday (01/29/2006)
Indiana at Minnesota

There are a couple of big games this week:

- Indiana at Iowa on Tuesday. Iowa needs to win to stay in the race.
- Michigan State at Michigan on Wednesday. Someone's going to get a 3rd loss.
- Wisconsin at Michigan on Saturday. Another chance for Michigan to knock off a Top 25 team.
- Ohio State at Iowa on Saturday. Iowa has 2 big home games this week.

A lot of the current front-runners are playing each other again this week, so the league standings could look very different next week.

The Upcoming Week

Looking ahead to the upcoming week, Michigan has two games this week: home against (#12) Michigan State on Wednesday (01/25/2006, 8:00 p.m.), and home against (#13) Wisconsin on Saturday (01/28/2006, 2:35 p.m.). These are both huge games.

The MSU game is sure to be an emotional one. MSU will certainly be favored, and if UM is without a healthy Lester Abram, it will be tough for Michigan to win. Even with a healthy Abram, it's going to be quite a battle. The key to winning for Michigan will be to contain Paul Davis. If they can hold him to less than 20 points, they can win the game.

Wisconsin is currently tied for 1st place in the Big Ten, one game ahead of Michigan. It's an important game for both teams, and it is sure to be hotly contested.

Come on down to Crisler Arena on Wednesday evening and Saturday afternoon, and cheer on the Wolverines.

Go Blue!