02/06/2006 – Week #14 – That Was A Fun Week In The Top-25

The Week In Review

This past week, the (#20) University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games on the road, and they won the first and lost the second. Now, any win on the road in the Big Ten is a big deal, and any loss on the road is understandable, so these results are not too surprising. However, the way UM lost was a little disquieting. On Wednesday (02/01/2006), they beat Penn State in State College 71-65, then on Saturday (02/04/2006), they lost to (#23) Iowa 94-66, in Iowa City. It's hard to sugarcoat a 28 point loss. Sure, it only counts as one loss, but it does show just how poorly Michigan is still capable of playing, on any given day.

The win and the loss leave UM's season record at 16-4, 6-3 in the Big Ten. That's a fine record, and a huge improvement over the last few years, but it's still not as good as it should be. I'm afraid that when the polls come out today, Michigan will be out of the Top 25, after only one week as a ranked team.

I've been writing these columns since December 1999, and this week was the first week that Michigan has been ranked in that whole time. I've been dying to write about UM's ranking, and who's ranked ahead of them, and to put that magic "(#XX)" in front of their name in my columns, and now it might all be over, after just one week. Sigh.

Game Statistics

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	26-51 (51.0%)	12-25 (48.0%)	7-10 (70.0%)
Penn State	26-66 (39.4%)	5-18 (27.8%)	8-13 (61.5%)
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan

There's your whole game story right there: Michigan hit 7 more 3-pointers than Penn State did. They also shot a better percentage across the board, which helps a lot.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	36	18	15	7	1
Penn State	35	15	8	3	5
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	PSU	Michigan	PSU

It was a close game, and these stats show it. Michigan barely won the rebounding and assists battle, but even the huge advantage that Penn State had in Turnovers and Steals wasn't enough to win the game for them. It was the 3-point shooting that won it for Michigan.

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	22-53 (41.5%)	6-22 (27.3%)	16-28 (57.1%)
Iowa	32-49 (65.3%)	13-19 (68.4%)	17-24 (70.8%)
Advantage	Iowa	Iowa	Iowa

These stats are dismal for Michigan. The Wolverines have been shooting in the 75% range from the free-throw line this year, but not on Saturday. And, look at the 3-point shooting percentage for Iowa: almost 70%! That's incredible.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	27	15	16	2	9
Iowa	34	27	18	2	7
Advantage	Iowa	Iowa	Michigan	Even	Michigan

The game was a blowout, and you can see it in these stats. UM got hammered on the boards, and Iowa's 27 assists is amazing, no matter who's playing.

Individual Statistics

Once again, Lester Abram was not able to start, so Coach Amaker couldn't use his regular starting lineup in either game. Instead, he started Ron Coleman in place of Abram. 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	PSU	Iowa	PSU	Iowa	PSU	Iowa	PSU	Iowa
Graham Brown	3-4	2-4	0-0	0-0	2-3	0-0	8	4
Ron Coleman	4-7	1-11	2-4	1-6	0-0	0-2	10	3
Dion Harris	8-13	4-10	7-11	2-6	0-0	2-6	23	13
Daniel Horton	4-10	5-10	3-8	1-4	2-2	8-9	13	19
Courtney Sims	1-6	4-6	0-0	0-0	0-0	4-7	2	12
Totals	20-40 50.0%	16-41 39.0%	12-23 52.2%	4-16 25.0%	4-5 80.0%	14-24 58.3%	56	51

There are some lousy numbers lurking in these stats, especially in the Iowa game. 25% shooting from 3-point range, and 58.3% shooting from the free-throw line: terrible.

Individually, the guards did OK, but the rest of the team had an off week. Horton and Harris both hit double figures in both games, and Harris was the star of the Penn State game, with seven 3-pointers. Sims hit double figures against Iowa, but he all but disappeared against Penn State, with 2 points in 12 minutes. Brown did his best, as always. The real problem in the Iowa game was Coleman. He did fine against Penn State, but he single-handedly cost UM the Iowa game. I know that it seems hard to believe that one player could be responsible for a 28-point loss, but it's true. I don't know that I've ever blamed a loss on one player, but I am this time. Sure, his 1-for-11 shooting hurt, and his 0-for-2 free-throw shooting didn't help, but that's not the real story. Basketball is a game of momentum, and when a team is playing in a hostile arena against a ranked team, momentum can be huge. Midway through the 1st half, UM was leading 25-20, and they had the momentum going their way. They were controlling the pace of the game, and they had been leading the whole way. Iowa missed a 3-pointer, and Coleman got the rebound. He looked for a guard to pass the ball to, and he spotted Horton, but he didn't notice an Iowa player hanging back. Coleman tried to throw the ball to Horton, but it went straight to the Iowa player. OK, it was a dumb pass, and those things happen, but what happened next just made things worse. The Iowa player took the ball straight to the basket, made the basket, and he was fouled by, you guessed it, Coleman. The good news is that the Iowa

player missed the free throw; the bad news is that no one boxed out the shooter, and he got the rebound, and Iowa made another basket, and got fouled. They made that free throw, to complete the 5-point play, and tie the game up. In one trip down the floor, Coleman cost Michigan all the momentum, and the game. Even though UM managed to get one more lead, 29-28, they had lost the momentum, and once Iowa smelled blood in the water, they went wild. Maybe if Coleman hadn't made that dumb pass, and followed it up with an even dumber foul, someone else would have made an equally dumb move a minute later, but maybe not. When you're playing on the road against a ranked team, for 1st place in the conference, you need to play sharp for 40 minutes. You can't make even one dumb pass.

The other bad news from the Iowa game was that Horton finally missed a free throw, ending his perfect season. His streak made it to 42 before he missed one. He is now 48-for-49 for the season, which is still very impressive.

Here's how the bench players did this week:

Player	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
	PSU	Iowa	PSU	Iowa	PSU	Iowa	PSU	Iowa
Lester Abram	1-1	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	2	DNP
Hayes Grooms	DNP	1-3	DNP	1-2	DNP	0-0	DNP	3
Sherrod Harrell	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0
Chris Hunter	3-7	2-4	0-2	0-2	1-2	0-0	7	4
Brent Petway	2-3	3-4	0-0	0-0	0-0	1-2	4	7
Jevohn Shepherd	0-0	0-1	0-0	0-1	0-0	1-2	0	1
Jerret Smith	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	2-3	DNP	2	DNP
Totals	6-11 54.5%	6-12 50.0%	0-2 0.0%	1-5 20.0%	3-5 60.0%	2-4 50.0%	15	15

The bench chipped in some points in both games this week, but they weren't a big factor. As usual, it was mostly Hunter and Petway, with a few points from some of the other players. Abram played 2 minutes in the PSU game, and he scored 2 points, but he came out right away since his ankle still didn't feel right. He didn't play at all in the Iowa game, which definitely hurt Michigan's chances. The other injury that was a factor this week was to Smith, who suffered a concussion in the Penn State game, and didn't make the trip to Iowa. His minutes were taken by Grooms and Harrell.

The Big Picture

The game at Iowa was for 1st place in the Big Ten, and since UM lost it, they're now in 2nd place. It's not the end of the world. There's still a lot of basketball left to be played, and Michigan stands as good a chance as anyone, except maybe Iowa, to win the Big Ten title. And, while the Big Ten title would be very nice, Michigan's primary goal this season is to make it to the NCAA Tournament. With 16 wins, and at least 8 more games to play, they should be able to get to 20 wins, which would get them into the Big Dance.

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	W	72-67	14-3 (4-2)
01/28/2006 (Sat)	Wisconsin	Ann Arbor	W	85-76	15-3 (5-2)
02/01/2006 (Wed)	Penn State	State College, PA	W	71-65	16-3 (6-2)
02/04/2006 (Sat)	Iowa	Iowa City, IA	L	94-66	16-4 (6-3)
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 #5 of league play:

	Big Ten			Overall		
Team	Wins	Losses	Percent	Wins	Losses	Percent
Iowa	7	2	0.778	18	5	0.783
Illinois	6	3	0.667	20	3	0.870
Michigan	6	3	0.667	16	4	0.800
Ohio State	5	3	0.625	16	3	0.842
Michigan State	5	3	0.625	17	5	0.773
Indiana	5	3	0.625	13	6	0.684
Wisconsin	5	4	0.556	15	7	0.682
Penn State	3	6	0.333	11	9	0.550
Northwestern	3	6	0.333	10	10	0.500
Purdue	2	8	0.200	8	13	0.381
Minnesota	1	7	0.125	10	9	0.526

Here are the results from last week's games:

Monday (01/30/2006)
Florida A&M lost at Ohio State, 95-53 (non-conference)

Tuesday (01/31/2006)
Illinois won at Wisconsin, 66-51

Wednesday (02/01/2006)
Michigan won at Penn State, 71-65
Iowa won at Purdue, 77-68
Northwestern lost at Indiana, 72-63

Saturday (02/04/2006)
Michigan lost at Iowa, 94-66
Minnesota lost at Ohio State, 67-53
Wisconsin lost at Purdue, 70-62
Michigan State won at Northwestern, 77-66
Penn State won at Illinois, 66-65
Connecticut won at Indiana, 88-80 (non-conference)

There were a few surprises this week:

- Wisconsin lost at home again, on Tuesday. Granted, it was to Illinois, but up until last week, Wisconsin had been 68-3 at home since Bo Ryan started coaching there 4 years ago. Last week, they lost at home to lowly North Dakota State.
- Wisconsin lost at Purdue on Saturday. They are now officially in a "free fall". They've lost 5 of their last 6 games, and 2 of them have been to inferior opponents (North Dakota State and Purdue). The wheels are coming off.
- (The biggie) Penn State won at Illinois. Illinois doesn't have quite the home winning record that Wisconsin had, but it's close. Penn State is not that good, and it would have been a stunning upset if they had beaten Illinois in State College. To go on the road and beat Illinois in Champaign is just amazing.

As a result of these games, Iowa is now all alone in 1st place in the Big Ten.

Here are the games scheduled for the upcoming week:

Wednesday (02/08/2006)
Indiana at Wisconsin
Minnesota at Penn State
Purdue at Michigan State
Iowa at Northwestern

Thursday (02/09/2006)
Ohio State at Michigan

Saturday (02/11/2006)
Michigan at Purdue
Iowa at Indiana
Michigan State at Minnesota
Wisconsin at Penn State
IUPU-Fort Wayne at Northwestern (non-conference)

Sunday (02/12/2006)
Illinois at Ohio State

There are a couple of big games this week:

- Indiana at Wisconsin on Wednesday. This is Wisconsin's last chance to salvage their season.
- Ohio State at Michigan on Thursday. Someone's going to get a 4th loss in the Big Ten.

- Iowa at Indiana on Saturday. If Indiana can win both games this week, they'll be in a tie for 1st place.
- Illinois at Ohio State on Sunday. Someone's going to drop out of the race in this one.

Here are all the Big Ten results for the whole season, in alphabetical order:

Team	Record	Wins	Losses	Remaining Games
Illinois	6-3	Michigan State (H) Michigan (H) Northwestern (A) Minnesota (H) Purdue (H) Wisconsin (A)	Iowa (A) Indiana (A) Penn State (H)	Ohio State (A) Northwestern (H) Indiana (H) Michigan (A) Iowa (H) Minnesota (A) Michigan State (A)
Indiana	5-3	Michigan (H) Ohio State (H) Illinois (H) Purdue (H) Northwestern (H)	Michigan State (A) Iowa (A) Minnesota (A)	Wisconsin (A) Iowa (H) Penn State (A) Illinois (A) Penn State (H) Michigan State (H) Purdue (A) Michigan (A)
Iowa	7-2	Illinois (H) Penn State (A) Minnesota (H) Indiana (H) Ohio State (H) Purdue (A) Michigan (H)	Wisconsin (N) Michigan State (A)	Northwestern (A) Indiana (A) Michigan State (H) Minnesota (A) Illinois (A) Penn State (H) Wisconsin (H)
Michigan	6-3	Purdue (H) Northwestern (H) Minnesota (A) Michigan State (H) Wisconsin (H) Penn State (A)	Indiana (A) Illinois (A) Iowa (A)	Ohio State (H) Purdue (A) Minnesota (H) Michigan State (A) Illinois (H) Ohio State (A) Indiana (H)
Michigan State	5-3	Indiana (H) Ohio State (A) Iowa (H) Penn State (H) Northwestern (A)	Illinois (A) Wisconsin (A) Michigan (A)	Purdue (H) Minnesota (A) Iowa (A) Michigan (H) Ohio State (H) Indiana (A) Wisconsin (H) Illinois (H)
Minnesota	1-7	Indiana (H)	Northwestern (H) Wisconsin (H) Purdue (A) Iowa (A) Michigan (H) Illinois (A) Ohio State (A)	Penn State (A) Michigan State (H) Michigan (A) Iowa (H) Purdue (H) Wisconsin (A) Illinois (H) Northwestern (A)

Northwestern	3-6	Purdue (H) Minnesota (A) Purdue (A)	Penn State (H) Wisconsin (A) Michigan (A) Illinois (H) Indiana (A) Michigan State (H)	Iowa (H) Illinois (A) Ohio State (A) Wisconsin (H) Penn State (A) Ohio State (H) Minnesota (H)
Ohio State	5-3	Penn State (H) Purdue (A) Wisconsin (H) Penn State (A) Minnesota (H)	Indiana (A) Michigan State (H) Iowa (A)	Michigan (A) Illinois (H) Wisconsin (A) Northwestern (H) Michigan State (A) Michigan (H) Northwestern (A) Purdue (H)
Penn State	3-6	Northwestern (A) Purdue (H) Illinois (A)	Ohio State (A) Iowa (H) Ohio State (H) Wisconsin (A) Michigan State (A) Michigan (H)	Minnesota (H) Wisconsin (H) Indiana (H) Purdue (A) Indiana (A) Northwestern (H) Iowa (A)
Purdue	2-8	Minnesota (H) Wisconsin (H)	Northwestern (A) Michigan (A) Ohio State (H) Penn State (A) Indiana (A) Northwestern (H) Illinois (A) Iowa (H)	Michigan State (A) Michigan (H) Penn State (H) Minnesota (A) Indiana (H) Ohio State (A)
Wisconsin	5-4	Iowa (N) Michigan State (H) Minnesota (A) Northwestern (H) Penn State (H)	Ohio State (A) Michigan (A) Illinois (H) Purdue (A)	Indiana (H) Penn State (A) Ohio State (H) Northwestern (A) Minnesota (H) Michigan State (A) Iowa (A)

Looking at the remaining schedule for each of the contenders, here's how it lays out:

	Tough Games		Easy Games	
Team	Home	Away	Home	Away
Illinois	Indiana Iowa	Ohio State Michigan Michigan State	Northwestern	Minnesota
Indiana	Iowa Michigan State	Wisconsin Illinois Michigan	Penn State	Penn State Purdue
Iowa	Michigan State Wisconsin	Indiana Illinois	Penn State	Northwestern Minnesota
Michigan	Ohio State Illinois	Michigan State Ohio State	Minnesota	Purdue

	Indiana			
Michigan State	Michigan Ohio State Wisconsin Illinois	Iowa Indiana	Purdue	Minnesota
Ohio State	Illinois Michigan	Michigan Wisconsin Michigan State	Northwestern Purdue	Northwestern
Wisconsin	Indiana Ohio State	Michigan State Iowa	Minnesota	Penn State Northwestern

As you can see, Michigan State now has the most difficult remaining schedule, with 6 tough games remaining, although 4 of them are at home. Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio State all have 5 tough games left, and 3 of them are on the road. Michigan also has 5 tough games left, but only 2 of them are on the road. Iowa and Wisconsin have the easiest remaining schedule, with only 4 tough games left, 2 at home and 2 on the road.

The Upcoming Week

Looking ahead to the upcoming week, Michigan has two games this week. On Thursday (02/09/2006, 7:00 p.m.), they play Ohio State in Crisler Arena, then on Saturday (02/11/2006) they play at Purdue. Michigan is a half game ahead of Ohio State, but both teams have 3 losses in the conference. The loser of this game drops 2 losses behind Iowa, and stands little chance of winning the Big Ten title. Michigan has already played, and beaten, Purdue this season, in Ann Arbor, but they looked terrible against them, and barely won. If the Wolverines play the way they played during their games against MSU and Wisconsin, they'll do fine against both Ohio State and Purdue. However, if they lose their focus like they did against Iowa, they could be in big trouble.

Come on down to Crisler Arena on Thursday evening to cheer on the Wolverines, and check back again next week to see how things went, and why.

Go Blue!