02/13/2006 – Week #15 – The Injury Bug Strikes Again

The Week In Review

This past week, the (#22) University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games, and they lost them both. That's bad enough, but they looked terrible in both losses, and one of the losses was to lowly Purdue. On Thursday (02/09/2006), they lost to (#17) Ohio State in Crisler Arena, 94-85, then on Saturday (02/11/2006), they lost at Purdue, 84-70. Combined with last week's loss to Iowa on Saturday (02/04/2006), these 2 losses give Michigan a 3-game losing streak. They also seriously damage their hopes of winning the Big Ten title, and even of making it to the NCAA Tournament. The two losses also drop Michigan's record to 16-6, 6-5 in the Big Ten, and will certainly drop UM out of the polls, after only 2 weeks as a ranked team. It was a lousy week.

The losses were a result of some key injuries that have occurred in the last few weeks. More about that below.

Game Statistics

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	34-65 (52.3%)	8-23 (34.8%)	9-11 (81.8%)
Ohio State	36-59 (61.0%)	15-24 (62.5%)	7-13 (53.8%)
Advantage	Ohio State	Ohio State	Michigan

There's your whole game story right there: Ohio State hit 7 more 3-pointers than Michigan did. They also shot a better percentage, except at the free throw line, which helps a lot. Take another look at that 3-point shooting for OSU: 15-for-24 (62.5%). That's amazing. I haven't seen anything like it since Loyola Marymount destroyed Michigan in the 1990 NCAA Tournament. At one point, starting midway through the 1st half and continuing into the 2nd half, OSU hit a blazing 13-out-of-14 3-pointers. It was incredible, and depressing, to watch. Some of them were fairly easy shots, when a Michigan defender didn't rotate over quickly enough to cover an open man, but some of them were very tough shots, with a Michigan defender right in the OSU player's face. The Buckeyes were just on fire, and there wasn't much Michigan could do about it. Unfortunately, the same thing happened last Saturday at Iowa.

Against OSU, Michigan had two choices: stop OSU inside, and hope they shot a normal percentage from outside, or stop them outside, and give up a lot of points inside. It's hard to cover both effectively. So, Michigan decided to gamble that Ohio State wouldn't be able to hit 62.5% from 3-point range for the game, and 75% for the 1st half. And, it worked, at least at first. Michigan opened a 21-8 lead early in the 1st half, and they consistently shut down OSU underneath the whole 1st half. However, after missing their first three 3-point attempts, OSU just couldn't miss from outside the rest of the half, and the UM strategy didn't work out.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	37	23	15	4	6
Ohio State	22	20	8	4	8
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	OSU	Even	OSU

When was the last time you saw a team get out-rebounded by 15 boards and win a game handily? When you're shooting 62.5% from 3-point range, you don't need rebounds, you just need a few turnovers by your opponents. That's what OSU got.

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	18-51 (35.3%)	8-22 (36.4%)	26-34 (76.5%)
Purdue	30-49 (61.2%)	6-14 (42.9%)	18-24 (75.0%)
Advantage	Purdue	Purdue	Michigan

Purdue was hot from the floor, and Michigan was not. Some of it was Michigan's defense, but some of it was a 3rd straight team that was just on fire. Those things happen, and they're happening to Michigan right now.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	31	11	15	0	4
Purdue	24	14	12	3	8
Advantage	Michigan	Purdue	Purdue	Purdue	Purdue

These stats are pretty close, except for Rebounds and Steals, which almost evened out. The important stat was shooting percentage.

Individual Statistics

Things are starting to get grim again. First, it was Lester Abram who got injured, in the game at Minnesota on 01/21/2006, and he's only played for 2 minutes since then (6 games). Next, it was Jerret Smith who got injured. He suffered a mild concussion in the game at Penn State on 02/01/2006, then he came down with mononucleosis, and hasn't played in the last 3 games. Finally (hopefully it's "finally"), Dion Harris sprained his ankle badly in the Ohio State game, and didn't make the trip to Purdue. This was the first game that Harris has missed in his Michigan career (86 games). The injury situation this year is starting to look a lot like last year, when injuries (and a suspension) just destroyed the season. Smith is out for at least a couple weeks, but Abram and Harris could be back any time.

With all the injuries, Coach Amaker had to come up with two different starting lineups. In the both games, he started Ron Coleman in place of Abram, and in the Purdue game, he started Jevohn Shepherd in place of Harris. The other 3 regular starters (Graham Brown, Daniel Horton, and Courtney Sims) were the same. Here's how they did:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	OSU	PU	OSU	PU	OSU	PU	OSU	PU
Graham Brown	0-1	0-1	0-0	0-0	0-0	1-2	0	1
Ron Coleman	6-11	6-12	1-4	4-8	2-2	2-2	15	18
Dion Harris	5-9	DNP	4-7	DNP	0-0	DNP	14	DNP
Daniel Horton	5-17	2-10	3-8	0-3	2-3	4-4	15	8
Courtney Sims	13-16	1-2	0-0	0-0	0-1	5-8	26	7
Jevohn Shepherd	Bench	2-6	Bench	1-2	Bench	4-5	Bench	9

Totals	29-54 53.7%	11-31 35.5%	8-19 42.1%	5-13 38.5%	4-6 66.7%	16-21 76.2%	70	43

As a group, the starters had a mediocre week. There are no good percentages here, except maybe field goal shooting against OSU and free throw shooting against Purdue.

The theme as far as individual performances this week was: consistency, and lack thereof.

Only one starter hit double figures in both games, and that was Coleman. He had a then-season-high 15 points against OSU, and followed it up with a career-high 18 points against Purdue. He shot a respectable percentage in both games, and had 4 big 3-pointers against Purdue. He was the only starter who was consistently good this week.

Brown was consistent this week, but it wasn't a good consistency. While Michigan doesn't count on him for much scoring, he does need to chip in more than one for the week.

Horton was also consistent, but also not in a good way. He was OK in the OSU game, with 15 points, and three 3-pointers, but he shot pretty poorly (5-for-17 = 29.4%). That actually looks pretty good compared to the 8 points (and zero 3-pointers) that he got against Purdue, on 2-for-10 (20%) shooting. He also sustained a deep thigh bruise in the Purdue game, and sat out most of the 2nd half. He should be able to play in the next game, but he'll be slowed down a little. Just what Michigan needs at this point: another injury.

Harris only played in one game, so he didn't have a chance to be consistent. He played pretty well against OSU, until he got injured. Once he was helped off the floor, the rest of the team just seemed to give up, and OSU cruised to the win.

Similarly, Shepherd only played in one game as a starter this week, so he didn't have much of a chance to be consistent. However, he played very well in his first start ever, scoring a career-high 9 points, and pulling down a career-high 6 rebounds.

Finally, there's Mr. Inconsistency himself: Courtney Sims. For most of the Big Ten season, he was the Invisible Man out there, getting 2 points here and 3 points there. Then, he busted out with 18 points against Wisconsin, and 12 points against Iowa. He was awesome against Ohio State, scoring at will, and getting 26 points. He even had 16 rebounds against Ohio State. Then, he disappeared again at Purdue, making one basket. He did have 5 more points on free throws, but it was nothing compared to the game he had 2 days earlier.

Here's how the bench players did this week:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	OSU	PU	OSU	PU	OSU	PU	OSU	PU
Hayes Grooms	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-2	0-0	4-5	0	4
Sherrod Harrell	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	2-2	DNP	2
Chris Hunter	4-8	6-15	0-2	3-7	5-5	1-2	13	16
Brent Petway	0-0	1-3	0-0	0-0	0-0	3-4	0	5
Jevohn Shepherd	1-1	Starter	0-0	Starter	0-0	Starter	2	Starter
Totals	5-11 45.4%	7-20 35.0%	0-4 0.0%	3-9 33.3%	5-5 100.0%	10-13 76.9%	15	27

The bench helped out a little this week, but it wasn't enough. Once again, Hunter contributed most of the bench scoring. In fact, he was the only other player on the team to have double figures in both games. He even hit three 3-pointers in the Purdue game.

Usually, Petway chips in more points than he did this week, but he's been playing hurt. He took a knee to his chest, and he's wearing a flak vest under his uniform, which is slowing him down. The other bench players didn't really contribute much.

The Big Picture

Just three games ago, Michigan was on the top of the basketball world. They had just beaten two Top-25 teams, and they were in 1st place in the Big Ten. They looked like a lock for the NCAA Tournament, and the only real worry was how soon Abram would be back in action from his sprained ankle. Then came the lopsided loss at Iowa on 02/04/2006, followed by the home loss to Ohio State and the loss on the road at Purdue. Now, it looks like the wheels are coming off.

So, which team is it? Is it the one that had won 5 games in a row going into the Iowa game, or the one that has lost 3 in a row, and given up 94, 94, and 84 points in that span? Well, both. Get Abram and Harris and Smith back out there, at 100%, and Michigan would stand a good chance of winning 3 out of their last 5 games, and a couple games in the Big Ten Tournament, giving them 20+ wins. But, without all 3 of those players, their chances go way down. Take a look at the updated 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	L	94-85	16-5 (6-4)
02/11/2006 (Sat)	Purdue	West Lafayette, IN	L	84-70	16-6 (6-5)
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			

Michigan's last 5 games are against one "easy" team (Minnesota, fresh off their victory over Michigan State) and 4 "hard" teams. Two of those four "hard" games are on the road. Even though Michigan beat Michigan State in Ann Arbor on 01/25/2006, winning the game in East Lansing will be twice as hard, especially without 2 starters and a key bench player. If Ohio State shoots like they did last week against Michigan in the rematch in Columbus on 02/25/2006, it could be a blowout like the Iowa game. Even the two home games against Illinois and Indiana are going to be tough. Michigan could easily lose all 4 of those tough games, which would send them to the NIT instead of the NCAA Tournament.

Big Ten Results

Here are the current Big Ten standings, after Week #6 of league play:

Team	Big Ten			Overall		
	Wins	Losses	Percent	Wins	Losses	Percent
Iowa	8	3	0.727	19	6	0.760
Ohio State	7	3	0.700	18	3	0.857
Wisconsin	7	4	0.636	17	7	0.708
Illinois	6	4	0.600	20	4	0.833
Michigan State	6	4	0.600	18	6	0.750
Michigan	6	5	0.545	16	6	0.727
Indiana	5	5	0.500	13	8	0.619
Northwestern	4	6	0.400	12	10	0.545
Minnesota	3	7	0.300	12	9	0.571
Penn State	3	8	0.273	11	11	0.500
Purdue	3	9	0.250	9	14	0.391

Here are the results from last week's games:

Wednesday (02/08/2006)
Indiana lost at Wisconsin, 72-54
Minnesota won at Penn State, 77-66
Purdue lost at Michigan State, 77-52
Iowa lost at Northwestern, 51-48

Thursday (02/09/2006)
Ohio State won at Michigan, 94-85

Saturday (02/11/2006)
Michigan lost at Purdue, 84-70
Iowa won at Indiana, 70-67
Michigan State lost at Minnesota, 69-55
Wisconsin won at Penn State, 82-62
IUPU-Fort Wayne lost at Northwestern, 73-49 (non-conference)

Sunday (02/12/2006)
Illinois lost at Ohio State, 69-53

There were a few surprises this week:

- (The Upset Of The Week) Iowa lost at Northwestern on Wednesday. Iowa was coming off a huge home win over Michigan where they scored 94 points, then they went to Northwestern and scored 53 points. Go figure.

- Michigan lost at Purdue on Saturday. Sure, Michigan has injury problems, but Purdue has even more serious injury/suspension problems. It just goes to show how hard it is to win on the road in the Big Ten.
- Michigan State lost at Minnesota on Saturday. Did I mention that it's hard to win on the road in the Big Ten?

Despite losing at Northwestern, Iowa is still all alone in 1st place in the Big Ten. The race is their's to win or lose. If they win out, no one can catch them.

Here are the games scheduled for the upcoming week:

Tuesday (02/14/2006)
Michigan State at Iowa

Wednesday (02/15/2006)
Minnesota at Michigan
Indiana at Penn State
Ohio State at Wisconsin
Northwestern at Illinois

Saturday (02/18/2006)
Michigan at Michigan State
Penn State at Purdue
Northwestern at Ohio State
Iowa at Minnesota

Sunday (02/19/2006)
Indiana at Illinois

There are a couple of big games this week:
- Michigan State at Iowa on Tuesday. Iowa only has 3 tough games left, and 2 of them are at home. This is one of them. If MSU can beat them, the race is wide open. If Iowa wins, MSU is out of the race.
- Ohio State at Wisconsin on Wednesday. OSU is the hottest team in the Big Ten right now, but Wisconsin seems to have recovered from their earlier tailspin.
- Michigan at Michigan State on Saturday. Michigan won the first round, in Ann Arbor, but it'll be much harder to win in East Lansing.

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

Team	Record	Wins	Losses	Remaining Games
Illinois	6-4	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	5-5	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	8-3	Illinois (H) Penn State (A) Minnesota (H) Indiana (H) Ohio State (H) Purdue (A) Michigan (H) Indiana (A)	Wisconsin (N) Michigan State (A) Northwestern (A)	Michigan State (H) Minnesota (A) Illinois (A) Penn State (H) Wisconsin (H)
Michigan	6-5	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	6-4	Indiana (H) Ohio State (A) Iowa (H) Penn State (H) Northwestern (A) Purdue (H)	Illinois (A) Wisconsin (A) Michigan (A) Minnesota (A)	Iowa (A) Michigan (H) Ohio State (H) Indiana (A) Wisconsin (H) Illinois (H)
Minnesota	3-7	Indiana (H) Penn State (A) Michigan State (H)	Northwestern (H) Wisconsin (H) Purdue (A) Iowa (A) Michigan (H) Illinois (A) Ohio State (A)	Michigan (A) Iowa (H) Purdue (H) Wisconsin (A) Illinois (H) Northwestern (A)
Northwestern	4-6	Purdue (H) Minnesota (A) Purdue (A) Iowa (H)	Penn State (H) Wisconsin (A) Michigan (A) Illinois (H) Indiana (A) Michigan State (H)	Illinois (A) Ohio State (A) Wisconsin (H) Penn State (A) Ohio State (H) Minnesota (H)
Ohio State	7-3	Penn State (H) Purdue (A) Wisconsin (H) Penn State (A) Minnesota (H) Michigan (A) Illinois (H)	Indiana (A) Michigan State (H) Iowa (A)	Wisconsin (A) Northwestern (H) Michigan State (A) Michigan (H) Northwestern (A) Purdue (H)
Penn State	3-8	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	3-9	Minnesota (H) Wisconsin (H) Michigan (H)	Northwestern (A) Michigan (A) Ohio State (H) Penn State (A)	Penn State (H) Minnesota (A) Indiana (H) Ohio State (A)

			Indiana (A) Northwestern (H) Illinois (A) Iowa (H) Michigan State (A)	
Wisconsin	7-4	Iowa (N) Michigan State (H) Minnesota (A) Northwestern (H) Penn State (H) Indiana (H) Penn State (A)	Ohio State (A) Michigan (A) Illinois (H) Purdue (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:

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

As you can see, Michigan State still has the most difficult remaining schedule, with 6 tough games remaining, although 4 of them are at home. Illinois and Michigan have the next toughest schedules, with 4 tough games remaining, 2 at home and 2 on the road. Indiana, Iowa, Ohio State, and Wisconsin all only have 3 tough games left, but only Iowa has 2 of those games at home. They have to be the favorites to win the title at this point.

The Upcoming Week

Looking ahead to the upcoming week, Michigan has two games this week. On Wednesday (02/15/2006, 7:00 p.m.), they play Minnesota in Crisler Arena, then on Saturday (02/18/2006) they play at Michigan State. They have to win the Minnesota game, and it would be a great boost if they could somehow win the game at MSU. Come on down to Crisler Arena on Wednesday evening to cheer on the Wolverines, and check back again next week to see how things went, and why.

Go Blue!