02/27/2006 – Week #17 – A Huge Win, And A Predictable Loss

The Week In Review

This past week, the University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games, and they won one and lost one. On Tuesday (02/21/2006), they beat (#8) Illinois in Crisler Arena, 72-64, then on Saturday (02/25/2006), they lost at Ohio State, 64-54. It was a week of highs and lows. On the one hand, the win against Illinois was huge, and Michigan played well, and deserved it. Ranked #8 in the nation, Illinois is the highest-ranked team that Michigan has defeated since Tommy Amaker took over as head coach 5 years ago. On the other hand, the Wolverines looked pretty average at Ohio State, and deserved to lose. The win and the loss leave Michigan with a record of 18-8, 8-7 in Big Ten play.

Game Statistics

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	23-47 (48.9%)	9-20 (45.0%)	17-18 (94.4%)
Illinois	27-58 (46.6%)	4-14 (28.6%)	6-9 (66.7%)
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan

The story of the game is right here: Free Throws. UM made almost twice as many free throws as Illinois attempted. Those extra 11 points more than account for the margin of victory. Of course, it helped that Michigan shot better than Illinois in every category, especially 3-point shooting. For once, Dee Brown of Illinois didn't have a monster game ("only" 20 points) against Michigan.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	30	15	16	2	4
Illinois	27	13	12	1	5
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Illinois	Michigan	Illinois

These stats are very close, which makes sense, since the game was very close. The 3 extra rebounds that UM had were offset by the 4 extra turnovers. It was free throw shooting that won the game for Michigan.

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	22-59 (37.3%)	4-17 (23.5%)	6-9 (66.7%)
Ohio State	22-56 (39.3%)	4-18 (22.2%)	16-22 (72.7%)
Advantage	Ohio State	Michigan	Ohio State

This game is a mirror image of the Illinois game, except that OSU was the team with almost twice as many made free throws as UM attempted. Those 10 extra points were the exact margin of defeat. The other shooting stats were dead even.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals

Michigan	43	10	18	1	5
Ohio State	33	16	10	4	8
Advantage	Michigan	OSU	OSU	OSU	OSU

This has happened a couple of times this year: UM outrebounded their opponent by 10 boards, and still lost. Amazing. In this case, besides the free-throw shooting, the Turnovers, Blocks, and Steals all helped OSU win the game.

Individual Statistics

Since Lester Abram still is not back from his severe ankle sprain, Coach Amaker started Ron Coleman in place of him. Dion Harris was healthy enough to start both games, but he is definitely a step slower than he used to be, and he hasn't regained his shooting touch. The other regular starters (Graham Brown, Daniel Horton, and Courtney Sims) all started in both games. Here's how they did:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	Ill	OSU	Ill	OSU	Ill	OSU	Ill	OSU
Graham Brown	0-0	3-7	0-0	0-0	0-0	1-2	0	7
Ron Coleman	2-6	5-12	2-5	1-5	0-0	2-3	6	13
Dion Harris	1-8	1-7	1-7	1-4	0-0	0-0	3	3
Daniel Horton	13-20	4-16	5-7	2-8	8-8	2-2	39	12
Courtney Sims	3-7	5-9	0-0	0-0	5-5	0-0	11	10
Totals	19-41 46.3%	18-51 35.3%	8-19 42.1%	4-17 23.5%	13-13 100.0%	5-7 71.4%	59	45

As a group, the starters had a decent week. They shot well against Illinois, and pretty poorly against Ohio State.

As far as individual performances this week, two of the starters hit double figures in both games: Horton and Sims. Sims was good in both games, with a double-double (10 rebounds) against OSU, but the big star of the week was Horton. He hit a career-high 39 points against Illinois, and he was fabulous. He carried the team on his back. Incidentally, 39 points is the highest single game point total for any player in the Big Ten this season, in both conference and non-conference games.

As the season winds down, I'm keeping a close eye on Horton's free throw shooting in Big Ten play. He had another perfect week (10-for-10), which makes him 76-for-78 (97.4%) for the Big Ten season. Here's how he's done it:

		Free Throw Shooting	
Date	Opponent	Game	Overall
01/03/2006	Indiana	2-2	2-2
01/07/2006	Purdue	5-5	7-7
01/14/2006	Illinois	3-3	10-10
01/18/2006	Northwestern	0-0	10-10
01/21/2006	Minnesota	10-10	20-20
01/25/2006	Michigan State	8-8	28-28
01/28/2006	Wisconsin	10-10	38-38
02/01/2006	Penn State	2-2	40-40
02/04/2006	Iowa	8-9	48-49
02/09/2006	Ohio State	2-3	50-52
02/11/2006	Purdue	4-4	54-56

02/15/2006	Minnesota	8-8	62-64
02/18/2006	Michigan State	4-4	66-68
02/21/2006	Illinois	8-8	74-76
02/25/2006	Ohio State	2-2	76-78

Horton is in great shape to break the Big Ten free throw percentage record for a single season. According to Tom Wywrot, the basketball guy at the UM Athletic Department, the current record is held by Steve Alford, the current Iowa coach. He played for Indiana in college, and he shot 93.5% (58-for-62) in 1985. Horton is well ahead of that pace.

The other starters didn't hit double figures in both games, but they played pretty well. Brown had a solid game against Illinois, and even though he didn't score any points, he did have a team-high 10 rebounds. He had another solid game against OSU as well. Coleman had a good game against Illinois, and he was the leading scorer for UM in the game at OSU. Harris didn't play well in either game. He's a step slow, and he can't find his shot. Hopefully, he'll be in better shape for the last regular season game, and post-season play.

Here's how the bench players did this week:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	Ill	OSU	Ill	OSU	Ill	OSU	Ill	OSU
Brent Petway	2-3	2-5	0-0	0-0	0-0	1-2	4	5
Jevohn Shepherd	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0
Jerret Smith	2-3	2-3	1-1	0-0	4-5	0-0	9	4
Totals	4-6 66.7%	4-8 50.0%	1-1 100.0%	0-0 0.0%	4-5 80.0%	1-2 50.0%	13	9

As a group, the bench players didn't make much of a contribution in either game. This is troubling, since Michigan is going to need significant bench scoring down the stretch.

This is the smallest group of bench players that Amaker has used all season. Usually, he goes 5-deep on the bench, but with Chris Hunter out with a knee injury for 3-6 weeks, Michigan is missing a key player.

Individually, Smith had a pretty good week. He played the best game of his short career against Illinois, and he played a solid game at OSU. This is all pretty amazing, since he's still recovering from mononucleosis. Petway played hard in both games, and he had a career-high 11 rebounds against OSU. Shepherd wasn't a factor in either game. UM needs more of a contribution from him.

The Big Picture

We're coming down to the wire. This is the final week of the regular season, and Michigan is sitting firmly on "the bubble" for the NCAA Tournament. If they can win their last home game, against Indiana this Saturday (03/04/2006), they should be off the bubble and in the tournament. If they lose, they stay on the bubble. OF course, they will still get a chance to pick up another win or two in the Big Ten Tournament, which could also get them off the bubble and into the Big Dance.

Here's 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	61-68	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	63-70	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	74-79	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	66-94	16-4 (6-3)
02/09/2006 (Thu)	Ohio State	Ann Arbor	L	85-94	16-5 (6-4)
02/11/2006 (Sat)	Purdue	West Lafayette, IN	L	70-84	16-6 (6-5)
02/15/2006 (Wed)	Minnesota	Ann Arbor	W	72-50	17-6 (7-5)
02/18/2006 (Sat)	Michigan State	East Lansing, MI	L	71-90	17-7 (7-6)
02/21/2006 (Tue)	Illinois	Ann Arbor	W	72-64	18-7 (8-6)
02/25/2006 (Sat)	Ohio State	Columbus, OH	L	54-64	18-8 (8-7)
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 #8 of league play:

Team	Big Ten			Overall		
	Wins	Losses	Percent	Wins	Losses	Percent
Ohio State	10	4	0.714	21	4	0.840
Illinois	9	5	0.643	23	5	0.821
Iowa	9	5	0.643	20	8	0.714
Wisconsin	9	5	0.643	19	8	0.704
Michigan	8	7	0.533	18	8	0.692
Michigan State	7	7	0.500	19	9	0.679
Indiana	7	7	0.500	15	10	0.600
Penn State	6	9	0.400	14	12	0.538
Minnesota	5	9	0.357	14	11	0.560
Northwestern	5	9	0.357	13	13	0.500
Purdue	3	11	0.214	9	16	0.360

Here are the results from last week's games:

Tuesday (02/21/2006)
Illinois lost at Michigan, 72-64

Wednesday (02/22/2006)
Penn State lost at Indiana, 69-65
Ohio State won at Michigan State, 79-68
Purdue lost at Minnesota, 62-50

Thursday (02/23/2006)
Wisconsin lost at Northwestern, 62-51

Saturday (02/25/2006)
Michigan lost at Ohio State, 64-54
Northwestern lost at Penn State, 68-55
Iowa lost at Illinois, 71-59

Sunday (02/26/2006)
Michigan State lost at Indiana, 78-71
Minnesota lost at Wisconsin, 80-74

There were a couple of surprises this week:

- Wisconsin lost at Northwestern on Thursday. Wisconsin has been tough at home, but not so good on the road. Still, losing by 11 at Northwestern? As I've mentioned many times before, it's tough to win on the road in the Big Ten.
- Michigan State lost at Indiana on Sunday. Did I mention that it's tough to win on the road in the Big Ten?

Here are the games scheduled for the upcoming week, which is the final week of the regular season:

Tuesday (02/28/2006)
Illinois at Minnesota

Wednesday (03/01/2006)
Indiana at Purdue
Penn State at Iowa
Ohio State at Northwestern

Thursday (03/02/2006)
Wisconsin at Michigan State

Saturday (03/04/2006)
Indiana at Michigan
Illinois at Michigan State
Minnesota at Northwestern
Wisconsin at Iowa

Sunday (03/05/2006)
Purdue at Ohio State

Given who Ohio State has left to play (at Northwestern and home vs. Purdue), they are a lock to win the Big Ten title. They will easily win both games, and finish 12-4, all alone in 1st place. The battle now is for seedings in the Big Ten Tournament. The top 5 teams get a bye in the 1st round, and don't have to play on Thursday (03/09/2006).

There are a few big games this week:

- Wisconsin at Michigan State on Thursday. Wisconsin is playing for a share of 2nd place in the Big Ten, while MSU is just trying to finish in 5th place.
- Indiana at Michigan on Saturday. If Michigan can win this one, they'll finish above 0.500 in the Big Ten, and clinch at least a tie for 5th place. Indiana is playing to get into the NCAA Tournament, and they need every win they can get.
- Illinois at Michigan State on Saturday. Illinois is also playing for a share of 2nd place in the Big Ten, and MSU will still be trying to finish 5th.
- Wisconsin at Iowa on Saturday. If Wisconsin can beat MSU on Thursday, they'll be playing for at least a tie for 2nd place in the Big Ten. Assuming Iowa can beat Penn State on Wednesday, they'll also be playing for 2nd place. Something has to give.

All season long, I've been saying that's it's tough to win on the road in the Big Ten. Here are the numbers that back it up:

	Big Ten Record			
Team	Home	Away	Neutral	Total
Illinois	7-1	2-4	0-0	9-5
Indiana	7-1	0-6	0-0	7-7
Iowa	6-0	3-4	0-1	9-5
Michigan	6-1	2-6	0-0	8-7
Michigan State	5-1	2-6	0-0	7-7
Minnesota	4-3	1-6	0-0	5-9
Northwestern	3-3	2-6	0-0	5-9
Ohio State	6-1	4-3	0-0	10-4
Penn State	3-5	3-4	0-0	6-9
Purdue	3-4	0-7	0-0	3-11
Wisconsin	6-1	2-4	1-0	9-5
Total	56-21			

Overall, the home teams have a 56-21 (0.727) record. None of the contenders has lost more than one game at home, and only Penn State and Purdue have losing records at home. Ohio State is the only team with a winning record on the road.

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

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

		Michigan State (H)	Illinois (A)	
Iowa	9-5	Illinois (H) Penn State (A) Minnesota (H) Indiana (H) Ohio State (H) Purdue (A) Michigan (H) Indiana (A) Michigan State (H)	Wisconsin (N) Michigan State (A) Northwestern (A) Minnesota (A) Illinois (A)	Penn State (H) Wisconsin (H)
Michigan	8-7	Purdue (H) Northwestern (H) Minnesota (A) Michigan State (H) Wisconsin (H) Penn State (A) Minnesota (H) Illinois (H)	Indiana (A) Illinois (A) Iowa (A) Ohio State (H) Purdue (A) Michigan State (A) Ohio State (A)	Indiana (H)
Michigan State	7-7	Indiana (H) Ohio State (A) Iowa (H) Penn State (H) Northwestern (A) Purdue (H) Michigan (H)	Illinois (A) Wisconsin (A) Michigan (A) Minnesota (A) Iowa (A) Ohio State (H) Indiana (A)	Wisconsin (H) Illinois (H)
Minnesota	5-8	Indiana (H) Penn State (A) Michigan State (H) Iowa (H) Purdue (H)	Northwestern (H) Wisconsin (H) Purdue (A) Iowa (A) Michigan (H) Illinois (A) Ohio State (A) Michigan (A) Wisconsin (A)	Illinois (H) Northwestern (A)
Northwestern	5-9	Purdue (H) Minnesota (A) Purdue (A) Iowa (H) Wisconsin (H)	Penn State (H) Wisconsin (A) Michigan (A) Illinois (H) Indiana (A) Michigan State (H) Illinois (A) Ohio State (A) Penn State (A)	Ohio State (H) Minnesota (H)
Ohio State	10-4	Penn State (H) Purdue (A) Wisconsin (H) Penn State (A) Minnesota (H) Michigan (A) Illinois (H) Northwestern (H) Michigan State (A)	Indiana (A) Michigan State (H) Iowa (A) Wisconsin (A)	Northwestern (A) Purdue (H)

		Michigan (H)		
Penn State	6-9	Northwestern (A) Purdue (H) Illinois (A) Indiana (H) Purdue (A) Northwestern (H)	Ohio State (A) Iowa (H) Ohio State (H) Wisconsin (A) Michigan State (A) Michigan (H) Minnesota (H) Wisconsin (H) Indiana (A)	Iowa (A)
Purdue	3-11	Minnesota (H) Wisconsin (H) Michigan (H)	Northwestern (A) Michigan (A) Ohio State (H) Penn State (A) Indiana (A) Northwestern (H) Illinois (A) Iowa (H) Michigan State (A) Penn State (H) Minnesota (A)	Indiana (H) Ohio State (A)
Wisconsin	9-5	Iowa (N) Michigan State (H) Minnesota (A) Northwestern (H) Penn State (H) Indiana (H) Penn State (A) Ohio State (H) Minnesota (H)	Ohio State (A) Michigan (A) Illinois (H) Purdue (A) Northwestern (A)	Michigan State (A) Iowa (A)

And then there were 4: with losses last week, Michigan and Michigan State both drop out of the ranks of the contenders for the Big Ten title, although I'm still counting them as a "tough" opponents below. Ohio State is all alone in 1st place, with Illinois, Iowa, and Wisconsin all 1 game behind them.

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

With 1 week left in the regular season, Ohio State has the easiest remaining schedule. They only have 2 games left, and they're both against "easy" teams. One of those games is at home, and the other is on the road. Iowa has the next easiest schedule, with one "hard" game, at home, and one "easy" game, also at home. Illinois plays their last 2 games on the road, but only one of them is against a "hard" team. Wisconsin has the most difficult remaining schedule, with 2 away games, both against other contenders.

The Upcoming Week

Looking ahead to the upcoming week, Michigan has one game left in the regular season. On Saturday (03/04/2006, 2:30 p.m.) they play Indiana in Crisler Arena. If Michigan wants to go to the NCAA Tournament, they need to beat Indiana. IU won the game against Michigan in Bloomington, 70-63, way back on 01/03/2006, but they're 0-6 on the road in the Big Ten this year. They're fighting to get into the NCAA Tournament, and it should be quite a battle.

Come on down to Crisler Arena on Saturday afternoon to cheer on the Wolverines. It's Senior Day, and this is a big and important senior class: Graham Brown, Daniel Horton, and Chris Hunter, along with Hayes Grooms, Sherrod Harrell, and Troy Sanchez. Let's send them off in style.

Go Blue!