03/20/2006 – Week #20 – A Successful Start To The NIT

The Week In Review

This past week, the University of Michigan men's basketball team played in the first round of the National Invitation Tournament (NIT), and they beat Texas-El Paso (UTEP) on Thursday (03/16/2006) in Crisler Arena, 82-67. UTEP is a decent team, and this was a quality win. It also ends a 3-game losing streak for Michigan. The win raises Michigan's record to 19-10.

The Wolverines started slowly, but once they got going, they got the lead and held it for the rest of the game. They led by 10 points (44-34) at halftime, and they pushed the lead up to 20 points near the end of the game, then coasted to a 15-point victory.

Of course, Michigan had been hoping to get into the NCAA Tournament, but they ended up in the NIT instead. It's a nice enough consolation prize, but the cold hard truth is that an NIT championship is about the equivalent of winning one or two games in the Big Dance. If you can't make it to the NCAA Tournament, anything short of an NIT championship is a disappointment. So, the Wolverines have their work cut out for them.

Game Statistics

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	29-52 (55.8%)	11-21 (52.4%)	13-20 (65.0%)
UTEP	21-46 (45.7%)	6-19 (31.6%)	19-23 (82.6%)
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	UTEP

Once again, the shooting stats tell the story of the game; the game was a blowout, and the shooting stats show it, especially 3-point shooting. UM shot a great percentage from the field, which more than made up for an unexpectedly low percentage at the free throw line.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	29	23	13	4	12
UTEP	26	13	19	4	8
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan	Even	Michigan

As if the shooting stats weren't enough, the non-shooting stats are all Michigan as well. The 23 assists is one of Michigan's best performances this season, and 13 turnovers is also one of their best performances in quite a while.

Individual Statistics

On Senior Day (Saturday 03/04/2006 vs. Indiana), Coach Amaker couldn't start the seniors he really wanted to start, since Lester Abram and Chris Hunter were still injured. He made up for it in the UTEP game, by starting 5 seniors again, including Abram and Hunter. The fact that Abram and Hunter are healthy enough to start is very good news, since Abram has only played in 2 games since he was injured in the game at Minnesota on 01/21/2006, and Hunter has only played in 1 game since he was injured early in the game at Michigan State on 02/18/2006. Abram had been listed as "day to day" for weeks, but Hunter was expected to be out for 3-6 weeks, which could have meant the end of his career. Instead, he was able to start, and play well. Besides Abram and Hunter, Amaker also started Sherrod

Harrell, who usually comes off the bench, and regular starters Graham Brown and Daniel Horton. Here's how they did:

Player	Field Goals	3-Pointers	Free Throws	Points
Lester Abram	0-4	0-1	0-0	0
Graham Brown	3-6	0-0	0-2	6
Sherrod Harrell	0-1	0-0	0-0	0
Daniel Horton	5-8	3-6	1-2	14
Chris Hunter	6-10	2-5	6-6	20
Totals	14-29 48.3%	5-12 41.7%	7-10 70.0%	40

As a group, the starters did OK. Their percentages are decent, and they scored a reasonable number of points.

Individually, it was mostly Hunter and Horton. In his first start since his knee injury, Hunter scored a season-high 20 points, including 2 nice 3-pointers. Horton had a solid game, except for missing a free throw. In an eerie coincidence, he made exactly 42 in a row before missing one, for the second time this season. He started the Big Ten season by hitting 42 in a row, before he missed one.

The other 3 starters didn't do much. Brown chipped in 6 points, but Abram and Harrell were both shut out. Abram is still a step slow, and he hasn't gotten his shot back yet. Hopefully, he'll benefit from a few days rest before the 2nd round NIT game.

In this game, Amaker did something that I don't remember ever seeing him do before: several times, he substituted 5 new players at once. For example, near the first media timeout of the game, he pulled out all 5 starters at once, and put in Ron Coleman, Dion Harris, Brent Petway, Courtney Sims, and Jerret Smith. It's pretty cool that he has 2 complete, reasonable lineups.

Since the game was a blowout at the end, Amaker got a lot of bench players in, if only for a minute. Here's how they did:

Player	Field Goals	3-Pointers	Free Throws	Points
Amadou Ba	0-0	0-0	0-0	0
Alex Brzozowicz	0-0	0-0	0-0	0
Ron Coleman	1-2	1-2	0-0	3
Hayes Grooms	0-1	0-0	0-0	0
Dion Harris	5-9	4-5	4-4	18
Brent Petway	4-4	0-0	2-4	10
Troy Sanchez	0-0	0-0	0-0	0
Jevohn Shepherd	0-0	0-0	0-0	0
Courtney Sims	4-5	0-0	0-0	8
Jerret Smith	1-2	1-2	0-2	3
Totals	15-23 65.2%	6-9 66.7%	6-10 60.0%	42

As a group, the bench players made a huge contribution in the UTEP game. Other than free throws, they shot very well, and they accounted for more than half of Michigan's points.

Individually, there were 3 stars coming off the bench: Harris, Petway, and Sims. While Sims didn't quite hit double figures, he had a good, solid game. Petway had a very good

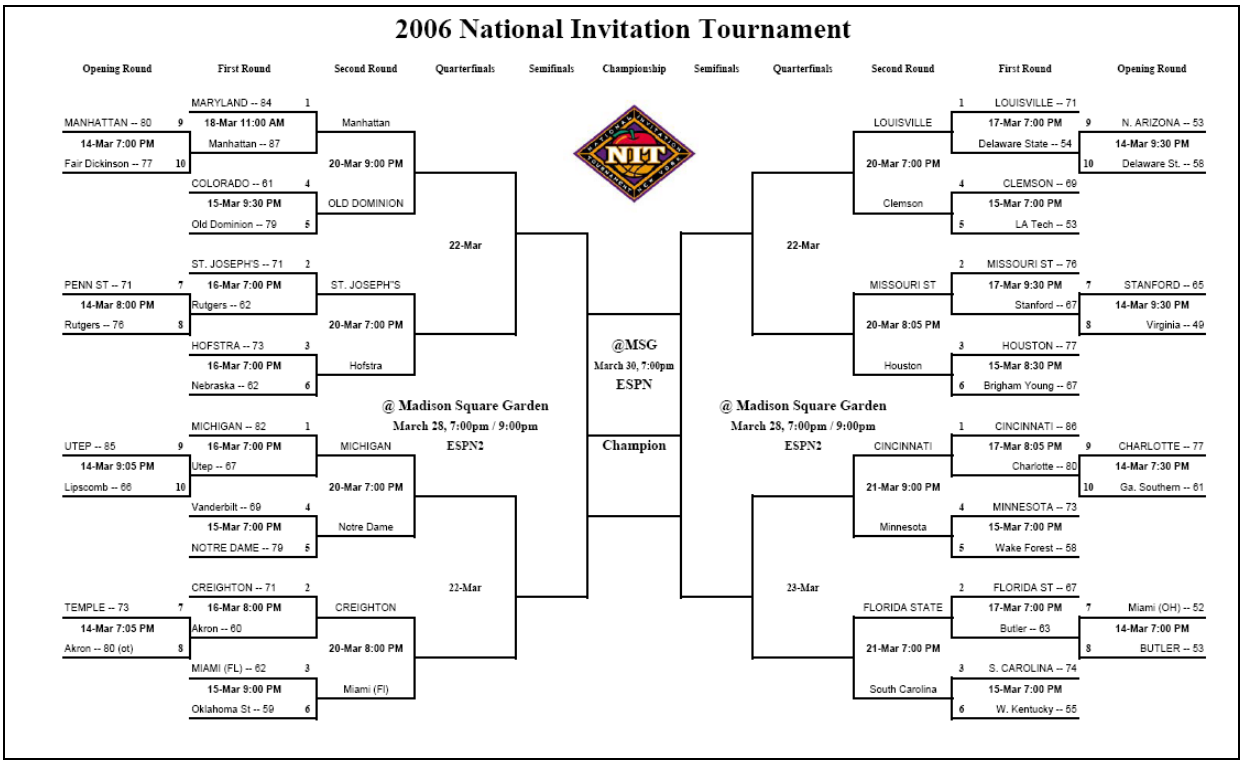
game, slamming home 4 gorgeous alley-oop passes, including 2 in the first 3 offensive trips he was on the court. But, the big star off the bench was Harris. As you can see, he hit 80% of his 3-point attempts, and he was back in mid-season form, after a few subpar games since he returned from his ankle injury.

Smith and Coleman did OK out there, but the other bench players didn't do much. Several of them were only in for the last minute of the game, once it was all wrapped up. One of them was Troy Sanchez, who appeared in his first career game. Good for him.

The Big Picture

Michigan played a good game against UTEP, and they deserved to win big. As a result, they advance to the 2nd round of the NIT, where they will play Notre Dame, in Crisler Arena. Michigan has already played, and beaten, Notre Dame once this year, 71-67, in South Bend on 12/03/2005. If they can get by Notre Dame, they'll play the winner of the Creighton/Miami (FL) game, also in Crisler Arena. We can only hope that it's Miami, a team that Michigan beat handily (74-53) in Ann Arbor on 11/29/2005. The 2nd round game is on Monday (03/20/2006), and if they advance, Michigan will play again in Crisler Arena on Wednesday (03/22/2006). That game would be for a place in the final four (lowercase) of the NIT.

Here's the complete bracket and results for the NIT:



Here's the updated schedule and results for Michigan's season:

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Score	Record
11/18/2005 (Fri)	Central Michigan	Ann Arbor	W	87-60	1-0
11/22/2005 (Tue)	Boston University	Boston, MA	W	51-46	2-0
11/26/2005 (Sat)	Butler	Ann Arbor	W	78-74	3-0

11/29/2005 (Tue)	Miami (FL)	Ann Arbor	W	74-53	4-0
12/03/2005 (Sat)	Notre Dame	South Bend, IN	W	71-67	5-0
12/07/2005 (Wed)	Delaware State	Ann Arbor	W	69-49	6-0
12/10/2005 (Sat)	South Florida	Tampa, FL	W	68-47	7-0
12/17/2005 (Sat)	UCLA	Ann Arbor	L	61-68	7-1
12/22/2005 (Thu)	Miami (OH)	Ann Arbor	W	87-80	8-1
12/28/2005 (Wed)	Coppin State	Ann Arbor	W	81-53	9-1
12/31/2005 (Sat)	Chicago State	Ann Arbor	W	86-69	10-1
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	L	67-69	18-9 (8-8)
Big Ten Tournament					
03/09/2006 (Thu)	Round 1: Minnesota	Indianapolis, IN	L	55-59	18-10
National Invitation Tournament (NIT)					
03/16/2006 (Thu)	Round 1: UTEP	Ann Arbor	W	82-67	19-10
03/20/2006 (Mon)	Round 2: Notre Dame	Ann Arbor			

Big Ten Results

Nine of the 11 Big Ten teams went on to post-season play: 6 to the NCAA Tournament (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan State, Ohio State, and Wisconsin), and 3 to the NIT (Michigan, Minnesota, and Penn State). Of those 9 teams, only 2 are left alive after one week: Michigan and Minnesota. All 6 of the Big Ten teams in the NCAA Tournament lost in either the 1st round (Iowa, Michigan State, and Wisconsin) or the 2nd round (Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio State). Penn State got eliminated in the 1st round of the NIT, but Michigan and Minnesota both won their 1st round NIT games. Here are the complete results:

Wednesday (03/15/2006)
NIT (1st round): (#4) Minnesota beat (#5) Wake Forest, 73-58
NIT (1st round): (#8) Rutgers beat (#7) Penn State, 76-71

Thursday (03/16/2006)
NIT (1st round): (#1) Michigan beat (#9) UTEP, 82-67
NCAA (1st round): (#4) Illinois beat (#13) Air Force, 78-69
NCAA (1st round): (#6) Indiana beat (#11) San Diego State, 87-83

Friday (03/17/2006)
NCAA (1st round): (#2) Ohio State beat (#15) Davidson, 70-62
NCAA (1st round): (#14) Northwestern State beat (#3) Iowa, 64-63

NCAA (1st round): (#8) Arizona beat (#9) Wisconsin, 94-75
NCAA (1st round): (#11) George Mason beat (#6) Michigan State, 75-65

Saturday (03/18/2006)
NCAA (2nd round): (#5) Washington beat (#4) Illinois, 67-64
NCAA (2nd round): (#3) Gonzaga beat (#6) Indiana, 90-80

Sunday (03/19/2006)
NCAA (2nd round): (#7) Georgetown beat (#2) Ohio State, 70-52

As you can see, several of the Big Ten losses were upsets, including a couple embarrassing ones: Iowa losing to Northwestern State, Michigan State losing to George Mason, and Ohio State losing to Georgetown. Wisconsin losing to Arizona isn't embarrassing, but the score was.

The Upcoming Week

Michigan plays Notre Dame in the 2nd round of the NIT on Monday (03/20/2006, 7:00 p.m.) in Crisler Arena. If they win that game, they'll play again on Wednesday (03/22/2006, Time TBA) in Crisler Arena, against the winner of the Creighton/Miami (FL) game. Come on down to Crisler, and cheer on the Wolverines.

Go Blue!