03/27/2006 – Week #21 – On To The (NIT) Final Four

The Week In Review

This past week, the University of Michigan men's basketball team played in the second and third rounds of the National Invitation Tournament (NIT) in Crisler Arena, and they won both games. On Monday (03/20/2006) they beat Notre Dame, 87-84 (2 ot), then on Wednesday (03/22/2006) they beat Miami (FL), 71-65.

These two wins put Michigan in the NIT "Final Four" (no, not the NCAA Final Four, but an incredible simulation), in Madison Square Garden. This is a big deal. Notre Dame and Miami are both decent teams, and these were both quality wins. The wins raise Michigan's record to 21-10. They also give Michigan a perfect 13-0 (15-0 without sanctions) record in NIT games in Crisler Arena, and an overall record of 18-5 (23-5 without sanctions) in all NIT games. Going back to the 2004 NIT, which they won, Michigan has now won 8 games in a row in the NIT. Finally, since all 6 of the Big Ten teams in the NCAA Tournament (Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan State, Ohio State, and Wisconsin), lost and the other 2 Big Ten teams in the NIT (Minnesota and Penn State) lost, Michigan is now the only Big Ten team still playing.

The Notre Dame game was very exciting. ND led for most of the game, but Michigan played tough in the last 5 minutes of regulation, and managed to force overtime. UM had the last shot in regulation and both overtimes, and they missed the first two chances, but made the last one. Dion Harris hit an off-balance 3-pointer with a man in his face, as the clock hit zero. It was close enough to the final buzzer that the refs had to review the shot on the court-side monitor before they could signal that it was good. It was a thrilling way to win the game.

The Miami game was also pretty exciting, although Michigan did lead the whole way. The Wolverines had a pretty good lead with just a couple of minutes left, but Miami managed to chip into it a little bit, before Michigan closed the game out with great free-throw shooting down the stretch.

Game Statistics

Let's look at the shooting statistics from the Notre Dame game:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	30-68 (44.1%)	8-23 (34.8%)	19-26 (73.1%)
Notre Dame	28-57 (49.1%)	6-19 (31.6%)	22-27 (81.5%)
Advantage	Notre Dame	Michigan	Notre Dame

This was an extremely close game, and the shooting stats show it. While ND shot a slightly better percentage overall, the 2 extra baskets that UM got, both 3-pointers, just barely balanced out the extra 3 points that ND got from the free-throw line.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	37	14	13	5	12
Notre Dame	34	13	19	3	8
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan

I can't remember the last time that Michigan won all 5 of the non-shooting stats. Of course, all the stats here are very close, which makes sense, since it was a very close game. All these stats add up to a couple extra UM possessions, which account for the 2 extra baskets that Michigan got, which made the difference in the game.

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	21-46 (45.7%)	8-15 (53.3%)	21-22 (95.5%)
Miami	27-59 (45.8%)	6-20 (30.0%)	5-6 (83.3%)
Advantage	Miami	Michigan	Michigan

If you just looked at the field goals, you'd think that Miami won this game, but then you would look at the free throws, and see how Michigan won it: they made more than 3 times as many free throws as Miami attempted. Those 16 extra points more than accounted for the margin of victory. But, Michigan didn't just attempt a lot of free throws, they made a lot of free throws. In fact, they set a new Michigan record for NIT free throw percentage.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	30	11	12	3	5
Miami	28	13	9	5	6
Advantage	Michigan	Miami	Miami	Miami	Miami

These stats are very close, showing why the important stat was free throw shooting.

Individual Statistics

Encouraged by his success in the 1st round game against UTEP, Coach Amaker used the same all-senior starting lineup again in both games this week: Lester Abram, Graham Brown, Sherrod Harrell, Daniel Horton, and Chris Hunter. Here's how they did:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	ND	Miami	ND	Miami	ND	Miami	ND	Miami
Lester Abram	3-10	2-5	1-2	1-1	8-9	10-10	15	15
Graham Brown	2-3	0-1	0-0	0-0	1-4	0-0	5	0
Sherrod Harrell	0-0	1-2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2
Daniel Horton	10-19	5-11	3-7	3-6	6-7	6-6	29	19
Chris Hunter	5-12	5-9	1-5	1-1	4-5	5-5	15	16
Totals	20-44 45.5%	13-28 46.4%	5-14 35.7%	5-8 62.5%	19-25 76.0%	21-21 100.0%	64	52

As a group, the starters did very well. They shot well, and they scored a lot of points.

Individually, Abram, Horton, and Hunter all had great weeks. They all hit double figures in both games, and they all shot nice percentages, except for Abram against Notre Dame. Hunter is still forcing his 3-point shot a little, but he still hits a big one every now and then, to keep the opposing defenses honest. Also, be sure to note how well Abram shot free throws last week: 18-for-19. He actually shot better than Horton, who had another miss. Abram also pulled down 7 and 6 rebounds in the ND and Miami games, respectively. Horton obviously was the top scorer among the starters, and he played a career-high 47 (out of 50) minutes against Notre Dame.

Harrell didn't do much during his time in the game, and Brown didn't score much, but he did have 9 and 10 rebounds, respectively.

Besides starting an all-senior lineup against UTEP, Amaker also did something that I don't remember ever seeing him do before: he substituted 5 new players at once for the 5 starters. It worked, so he did it again in both games this week. The "second five" is Ron Coleman, Dion Harris, Brent Petway, Courtney Sims, and Jerret Smith. They were the only bench players he used in either game. Here's how they did:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	ND	Miami	ND	Miami	ND	Miami	ND	Miami
Ron Coleman	0-3	0-2	0-0	0-1	0-0	0-0	0	0
Dion Harris	6-15	6-11	3-9	3-6	0-0	0-0	15	15
Brent Petway	2-3	0-1	0-0	0-0	0-1	0-0	4	0
Courtney Sims	2-3	2-4	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-1	4	4
Jerret Smith	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0
Totals	10-24 41.7%	8-18 44.4%	3-9 33.3%	3-7 42.9%	0-1 0.0%	0-1 0.0%	23	19

As a group, the bench players made a decent contribution in both games. Other than free throws, they shot pretty well, and they chipped in some valuable points.

Of course, "the bench" in this case means "Dion Harris". Petway and Sims chipped in a little, but Coleman and Smith didn't do much. Harris was the man out there. He shot his usual mediocre percentage against Notre Dame, but he made up for it with his huge game-winning 3-pointer. He shot much better against Miami, and he appears to be fully recovered from his ankle injury.

The Big Picture

Michigan played 2 good games this week, and they deserved to win both of them. As a result, they advance to the "final four" of the NIT, where they will play (#5) Old Dominion, in Madison Square Garden, in New York City, on Tuesday (03/28/2006, 7:00 p.m.). If they can win that one, they'll play the winner of the (#1) Louisville vs. (#3) South Carolina game for the NIT Championship, on Thursday (03/30/2006, 7:00 p.m.).

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	W	87-84	20-10
03/22/2006 (Wed)	Round 3: Miami (FL)	Ann Arbor	W	71-65	21-10
03/28/2006 (Tue)	Round 4: Old Dominion	New York, NY			
03/30/2006 (Thu)	Round 5: (hopefully)	New York, NY			

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 Michigan is left alive. 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, and Minnesota got eliminated in the 2nd round. Here are the results for last week:

Monday (03/20/2006)
NIT (2nd round): (#1) Michigan beat (#5) Notre Dame, 87-84 (2 ot)

Tuesday (03/21/2006)
NIT (2nd round): (#1) Cincinnati beat (#4) Minnesota, 76-62

Wednesday (03/22/2006)
NIT (3rd round): (#1) Michigan beat (#3) Miami (FL), 71-65

The Upcoming Week

As mentioned above, Michigan plays Old Dominion on Tuesday (03/28/2006, 7:00 p.m.) in Madison Square Garden. The game is on ESPN2. If they win, the Wolverines will play for the NIT Championship on Thursday (03/30/2006, 7:00 p.m.), also in Madison Square Garden, against the winner of the Louisville/South Carolina game. The Championship game will be on ESPN. Tune in to watch the Wolverines, and check back here next week to see what happened, and why.

Go Blue!