04/03/2006 – Week #22 – Runner-Up In "The Little Dance"

The Week In Review

This past week, the University of Michigan men's basketball team played in the "final four" of the National Invitation Tournament (NIT) in Madison Square Garden. They won the semifinal game, to make it to the championship game, but they lost in the final game. On Tuesday (03/28/2006) they beat Old Dominion, 66-43, then on Thursday (03/30/2006) they lost to South Carolina, 76-64. The win and the loss leave Michigan with a final season record of 22-11, which is not bad.

I suppose that there's a lot to be said for winning the first 4 games in the NIT, and making it to the championship game, and I suppose that there's something to be said for playing in 5 postseason games in the NIT, instead of losing in the 1st or 2nd round of the NCAA Tournament, like all the Big Ten teams did, but still. If you can't get into the Big Dance, the only real consolation is winning the Little Dance, and Michigan came up short.

The Old Dominion (ODU) game was very encouraging. Michigan started out slowly, and they almost gave away their halftime lead in the 2nd half, but once they started to pull away, they looked great. The 43 points that they held ODU to was the best defensive job they've done all season. All they had to do was play with the same focus and intensity against South Carolina (USC). They didn't. They started slowly again, but they never really got back in the game. They did cut the deficit to just 3 points with about 6 minutes left in the 1st half, but then Brent Petway got called for a questionable intentional foul, and that was all the spark that South Carolina needed to pull away. Once they had the lead, they did a great job of keeping UM at bay, and they won easily. It was very discouraging that the Wolverines couldn't even mount a serious threat for the whole 2nd half.

I really don't like to blame the officiating for a loss, but I honestly believe that the South Carolina game could have gone either way with more competent refs. Michigan might still have lost, but they certainly would have stood a better chance of winning with better officiating. Oh well…

Game Statistics

Let's look at the shooting statistics from the Old Dominion game:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	27-59 (45.8%)	4-18 (22.2%)	8-14 (57.1%)
Old Dominion	15-53 (28.3%)	6-20 (30.0%)	7-12 (58.3%)
Advantage	Michigan	Old Dominion	Old Dominion

The game was a blowout, and the only stat you need to look at is the field goal percentage. It's hard to win a game when you shoot 28.3%. Note the low free-throw shooting percentage for Michigan; you'll see it again, but even worse, in the next game.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	43	13	10	4	8
Old Dominion	37	9	14	3	1
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan

For the second time in 2 weeks, Michigan won all 5 of the non-shooting stats. There are a couple impressive stats here: 43 rebounds and only 10 turnovers.

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	27-54 (50.0%)	7-15 (46.7%)	3-8 (37.5%)
South Carolina	29-58 (50.0%)	7-21 (33.3%)	11-18 (61.1%)
Advantage	Even	Michigan	South Carolina

When was the last time Michigan shot under 50% from the free-throw line? That's where they lost the game. Not so much that they missed 5 free throws, but that they only got to the line 8 times, compared to 18 for USC.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	27	12	13	3	5
South Carolina	31	20	13	6	10
Advantage	USC	USC	Even	USC	USC

After winning all 5 non-shooting stats against ODU, Michigan didn't win any of them against USC. After grabbing 43 rebounds against ODU, Michigan only had 27 against USC. Ugh.

Individual Statistics

In all 5 NIT games, Coach Amaker used the same all-senior starting lineup: Lester Abram, Graham Brown, Sherrod Harrell, Daniel Horton, and Chris Hunter. Here's how they did:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	ODU	USC	ODU	USC	ODU	USC	ODU	USC
Lester Abram	1-3	2-3	0-2	0-0	0-0	1-2	2	5
Graham Brown	1-2	1-1	0-0	0-0	2-4	0-0	4	2
Sherrod Harrell	0-0	0-1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0
Daniel Horton	4-12	7-14	1-5	3-6	1-3	1-4	10	18
Chris Hunter	4-12	5-10	0-2	2-3	1-1	0-0	9	12
Totals	10-29 34.5%	15-29 51.7%	1-9 11.1%	5-9 55.6%	4-8 50.0%	2-6 33.3%	25	37

As a group, the starters didn't do very well. They didn't shoot very well, especially in the Old Dominion game, and from the free throw line in both game, and they didn't score very many points.

Individually, only Horton hit double figures in both games. On the positive side for Horton, he shot a nice percentage against South Carolina, and he was the high scorer for Michigan in that game. He ended his career with 1614 points, which puts in 11th place in Michigan's all-time scoring list. That's the good news. The bad news was, of all things, his free throw shooting. After setting a new Big Ten single season record, finishing 2nd in the nation, and only missing 8 free throws during the entire regular season, he went 2-for-7 in the Final Four games. Unbelievable.

Of the other starters, only Hunter did much. He had a decent game against ODU, and he almost hit double figures, and he had a good solid game against South Carolina. The rest of the starters only chipped in 13 points combined for both games.

Besides starting the all-senior lineup in all 5 games, Amaker also substituted 5 new players at once for the 5 starters in all 5 games. The "second five" was Ron Coleman, Dion Harris, Brent Petway, Courtney Sims, and Jerret Smith. Here's how all the bench players did:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	ODU	USC	ODU	USC	ODU	USC	ODU	USC
Amadou Ba	1-1	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	2	DNP
Ron Coleman	4-6	3-4	1-2	1-1	0-0	0-0	9	7
Hayes Grooms	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0
Dion Harris	1-9	1-6	1-6	1-4	2-2	1-2	5	4
Brent Petway	2-2	6-11	0-0	0-0	0-1	0-0	4	12
Courtney Sims	8-10	1-2	0-0	0-0	2-3	0-0	18	2
Jevohn Shepherd	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0-0	DNP	0	DNP
Jerret Smith	1-2	1-2	1-1	0-1	0-0	0-0	3	2
Totals	17-30 56.7%	12-25 48.0%	3-9 33.3%	2-6 33.3%	4-6 66.7%	1-2 50.0%	41	27

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

Individually, there were a few good performances. Sims was awesome in the ODU game, but he disappeared (again) in the South Carolina game. Coleman played well in both games, and almost hit double figures in both of them. Petway played well in the ODU game, and even better in the USC game. That was the good news.

The bad news was the play of Dion Harris. His numbers tell the story: 1-for-9 and 1-for-6, for 5 and 4 points, respectively. That's ugly.

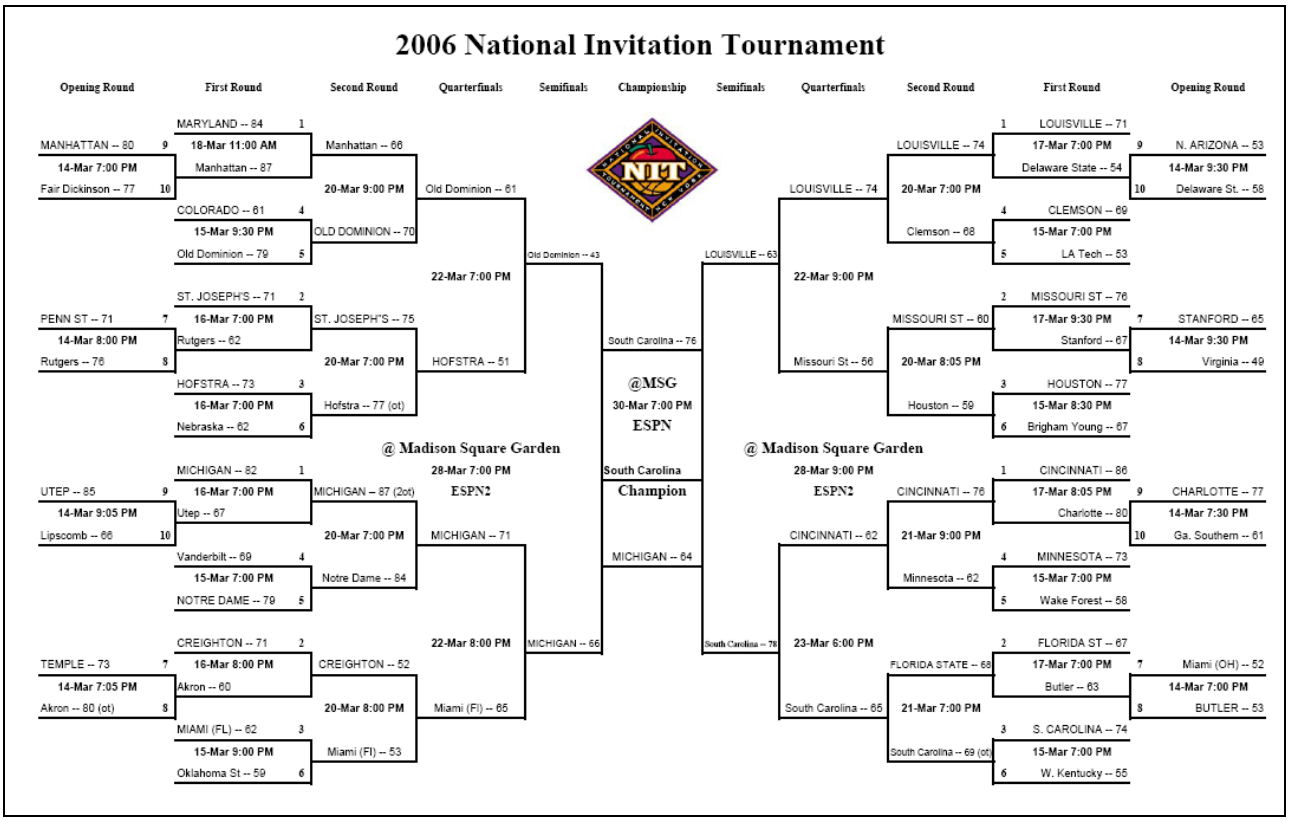
The rest of the bench players didn't do much out there. Smith chipped in a few points, and Ba had a nice basket at the end of the ODU game, to end his career, but that was about it. Grooms played in both games, and Shepherd played in the ODU game, but neither of them took a shot in either game.

The Big Picture

The season is finally over, and on the whole, it was a disappointment. There were some high points, and even more low points. An NIT Championship would have made up for more of the low points, but it was not to be. This was a team that was good enough to make it to the NCAA Tournament, and they managed to throw that away with a few poorly-timed meltdowns. It was a shame.

I've got a lot to say about the season, but I'll save it for my "wrap-up" article, next week.

Here are the final results for the NIT:



Here's the final 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	W	66-43	22-10
03/30/2006 (Thu)	Round 5: South Carolina	New York, NY	L	64-76	22-11

The Upcoming Week

The season is finally over, but there will still be a column next week: the final wrap-up, and final grades. Be sure to check back next week for all the details.

Go Blue!