10/30/2006 – Week #01 – Hope Springs Eternal

Looking Back

Welcome back to "Nothing But 'Net" for the 2006-2007 season. I know that it's hard to think about the Michigan men's basketball team when the football team is doing so well, but you can do it. I have confidence in you.

Once again, I'm really looking forward to following and rooting for the Wolverines this season, but this could be another one of those seasons where it's tough to be a UM basketball fan. On the one hand, Michigan should have a competitive starting lineup, and a decent bench, but on the other hand, the talent level of the team is down from last season, and last season ended in a National Invitation Tournament (NIT) bid, not an NCAA Tournament bid. It's hard to imagine how this season's team will be able to do better than last season's team, but I'll try to figure out a way to spin it.

Every season, there is a different story to be told at the beginning of the season. Some seasons, the story is about a young team growing up. Other seasons, it's about a team losing some key players, and having to start over. This season for the Wolverines is the second story; it's about reloading, or rebuilding.

You can't talk about this season's Michigan basketball without looking back at last season's team, and talking about who isn't coming back. Michigan lost several key players to graduation, and they will be sorely missed. Certainly the biggest loss was point/combo guard Daniel Horton. He started for all 4 years he was on the team, and he often carried the team on his back with his scoring, passing, and leadership. The second key member of last year's team was center/forward Graham Brown. While he didn't often score very many points, he was a force on the court, with lots of key rebounds and defensive stops, and lots of muscle and hustle all over the court. The third key member of last year's team to depart was center/forward Chris Hunter. He was the best "6th man" that Michigan has had in quite a while, and he occasionally started. He was a good defender, and a very good shooter. All three of these graduating seniors will be missed this season.

Besides the three key players lost to graduation, there were a few more players who are not returning: Amadou Ba, Hayes Grooms, Sherrod Harrell, and Troy Sanchez. Ba was a redshirt junior last year, and he had a year of eligibility left, but he graduated and chose not to return to the team. He hadn't gotten much playing time in his 3 years on the team, and he wasn't interested in sitting on the bench for his redshirt senior season. The other three players all graduated. Of the bunch of them, only Harrell had gotten any significant playing time. While I'm sure that these four players all contributed to the team in their own ways, they won't be missed the way Horton, Brown, and Hunter will be missed.

OK, enough about the players who are gone, let's talk about what happened last season. The Wolverines went into the 2005-2006 season expected to finally make it to the Big Dance, but they came up just short, again. To refresh your memory, here are the results from last year:

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

As you can see, Michigan finished with a very respectable 22-11 record, including 8-8 in the Big Ten. However, their 18 wins at the end of the regular season weren't quite enough to get into The Big Dance. They really needed to beat Minnesota in the 1st round of the Big Ten Tournament, and they didn't get the job done. They did pretty well in the NIT, but came up one game short there as well, losing in the finals to South Carolina.

Of course, they would have cruised into the NCAA Tournament with a good seed if they could have done better than 2-6 in their last 8 games. Their win over (#8) Illinois in Ann Arbor on 02/21/2006 was huge, but they followed it with 3 straight losses, and that put them into the NIT.

Looking Forward

As I mentioned above, Michigan has a competitive starting lineup and a decent bench this season, but the big story is their non-conference schedule. This is the easiest non-conference schedule that I can remember for Michigan, and it should result in quite a few wins.

Here's the 2006-2007 schedule:

Date	Opponent	Site
11/02/2006 (Thu)	Wayne State (exh)	Ann Arbor
11/05/2006 (Sun)	Michigan Tech (exh)	Ann Arbor

Date	Opponent	Site
John Thompson Challenge		
11/10/2006 (Fri)	Central Connecticut State	Ann Arbor
11/11/2006 (Sat)	Davidson	Ann Arbor
11/12/2006 (Sun)	Eastern Michigan	Ann Arbor
11/15/2006 (Wed)	Wisconsin-Milwaukee	Ann Arbor
11/17/2006 (Fri)	Harvard	Ann Arbor
11/22/2006 (Wed)	Youngstown State	Ann Arbor
11/25/2006 (Sat)	Maryland-Baltimore County	Ann Arbor
ACC/Big Ten Challenge		
11/27/2006 (Mon)	North Carolina State	Raleigh, NC
12/02/2006 (Sat)	Wofford	Ann Arbor
12/07/2006 (Thu)	Miami (OH)	Oxford, OH
12/09/2006 (Sat)	Delaware State	Ann Arbor
12/16/2006 (Sat)	Northern Illinois	Ann Arbor
12/23/2006 (Sat)	UCLA	Los Angeles, CA
12/28/2006 (Thu)	Army	Ann Arbor
12/30/2006 (Sat)	Georgetown	Ann Arbor
01/03/2007 (Wed)	Illinois	Ann Arbor
01/06/2007 (Sat)	Northwestern	Evanston, IL
01/13/2007 (Sat)	Purdue	West Lafayette, IN
01/17/2007 (Wed)	Penn State	Ann Arbor
01/20/2007 (Sat)	Purdue	Ann Arbor
01/24/2007 (Wed)	Wisconsin	Madison, WI
01/27/2007 (Sat)	Indiana	Bloomington, IN
01/31/2007 (Wed)	Iowa	Ann Arbor
02/06/2007 (Tue)	Ohio State	Columbus, OH
02/10/2007 (Sat)	Minnesota	Ann Arbor
02/13/2007 (Tue)	Michigan State	East Lansing, MI
02/17/2007 (Sat)	Indiana	Ann Arbor
02/21/2007 (Wed)	Illinois	Champaign, IL
02/24/2007 (Sat)	Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN
02/27/2007 (Tue) or 02/28/2007 (Wed)	Michigan State	Ann Arbor
03/03/2007 (Sat)	Ohio State	Ann Arbor
Big Ten Tournament		
03/08/2007 (Thu)	First Round	Chicago, IL
03/09/2007 (Fri)	Quarterfinals	Chicago, IL
03/10/2007 (Sat)	Semifinals	Chicago, IL
03/11/2007 (Sun)	Finals	Chicago, IL

Of the non-conference opponents, only North Carolina State, UCLA, and Georgetown should present any real challenges. Some of the non-conference opponents are going to be very easy to beat (Central Connecticut State, Davidson, Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Youngstown State, Maryland-Baltimore County, Wofford, and Delaware State), and a few of them will be a little tougher (Eastern Michigan, Harvard, Miami (OH), Northern Illinois, and Army). Still, it's not unrealistic to think about Michigan going 12-3 or 13-2 in their non-conference schedule.

Once they get to the Big Ten portion of their schedule, things will start to get interesting. As usual, they'll play 16 Big Ten games, 8 at home and 8 on the road. Of the 8 home Big Ten games, they should be able to win 5 of them (Penn State, Purdue, Iowa, Minnesota, and Michigan State), but the other 3 will be tough (Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio State). Of the 8 away Big Ten games, they should be able to win 3 of them (Northwestern, Purdue, and Minnesota), but they'll have a much tougher time against the other 5 (Wisconsin, Indiana, Ohio State, Michigan State, and Illinois). Incidentally, the 4 teams that the Wolverines only play once this season are Northwestern (away), Wisconsin (away), Penn State, and Purdue, so they don't get many breaks there.

So, if Michigan can go 13-2 in their non-conference schedule, and 8-8 in the Big Ten, that's an overall record of 21-10, which should get them into The Big Dance. Of course, they could easily drop all 3 of their tougher non-conference games, and finish 7-9 or 6-10 in the Big Ten, which would put them "on the bubble" (19-12 or 18-13) once again. We'll know a lot more once the non-conference schedule is complete.

Meet The Wolverines

As far as players go, Michigan will have a good starting five (Dion Harris, Jerret Smith, Lester Abram, Ron Coleman, and Courtney Sims), but nowhere near the depth that they've had the last few years. They'll have Brent Petway and Jevohn Shepherd as the players with the most experience on the bench, and a bunch of new guys. We fans have gotten spoiled having three good big men available (Courtney Sims, Graham Brown, and Chris Hunter), and now the Wolverines are down to just one. We also got spoiled having a point guard (Daniel Horton) who could score 30 points every now and then, and we're not going to see that from Jerret Smith. The new guys might develop into a pleasant surprise, but until we see them play in real game situations, there's no way to tell.

The big story for Michigan this year is all the newcomers. Coach Tommy Amaker brought in five true freshmen this year, to go with one redshirt freshman, and two transfers (who will have to sit out this year). The true freshmen are K'Len Morris, DeShawn Sims, Reed Baker, Anthony Wright, and Ekpe Udoh. The redshirt freshman is Kendric Price, and the transfers are C.J. Lee and Zack Gibson. The other newcomer is a walk-on, David Merritt. All of these players, and the returning players, are described in more detail below.

Here are all the players currently listed on the roster, grouped by eligibility:

Freshmen

Reed Baker (#10)
Height: 6' 1"
Weight: 175
Position: Guard
Comments: Baker is at Michigan to be a point guard, but he can also shoot very well. He looked good out there in the Maize and Blue Scrimmage.

K'Len Morris (#3)
Height: 6' 4"
Weight: 185
Position: Wing
Comments: Morris is considered to be somewhat of a question mark. Some analysts didn't think he was Big Ten material, but Coach Amaker took a chance on him. He appeared to fit in nicely during the Maize and Blue Scrimmage.

Kendric Price (#21)
Height: 6' 8"
Weight: 200
Position: Forward
Comments: Price red-shirted last season, and still has 4 years of eligibility left. He's tall and agile, and he should help out a lot this year.

DeShawn Sims (#4)
Height: 6' 8"
Weight: 225
Position: Forward
Comments: Sims is the most highly rated of the incoming freshmen. He's tall and powerful, and he's a great scorer. He should give Michigan some badly needed muscle underneath.

Ekpe Udoh (#22)
Height: 6' 10"
Weight: 240
Position: Forward
Comments: His name is pronounced "Epp-Ay You-Doe". He's tall, and he's tough, and the word is that he's been pushing Courtney Sims in practice. He will provide some badly needed height and muscle underneath.

Anthony Wright (#12)
Height: 6' 6"
Weight: 235
Position: Forward
Comments: Wright is a big, solid guy, with a great shooting touch. He's a good 3-point shooter, and a good rebounder.

Sophomores
Phillip DeVries (#40)
Height: 6' 10"
Weight: 225
Position: Forward
Comments: DeVries is a walk-on, and he didn't get into any games last season. He looked pretty smooth out there in the Maize and Blue Scrimmage. He provides some more height and muscle underneath.

Zack Gibson (#25)
Height: 6' 10"
Weight: 220
Position: Center
Comments: Gibson is a transfer from Rutgers, where he didn't play much during his freshman year. He'll have to sit out this season, and he'll have 3 years of eligibility left.

Jevohn Shepherd (#15)
Height: 6' 5"
Weight: 210
Position: Forward
Comments: Shepherd is very fast, and a good leaper. He played in 26 games last season, with 3 starts. He did OK for a freshman, but he needs to play with more confidence this season.

Jerret Smith (#1)
Height: 6' 3"
Weight: 195
Position: Guard
Comments: Smith is a pure point guard, and he did pretty well at it last season. He missed a few games due injury and illness, but he's fully recovered now. He's an important part of the team this year, as the only point guard with any game experience.

Juniors
Ron Coleman (#24)
Height: 6' 6"
Weight: 210
Position: Wing
Comments: Coleman was an important part of last season's team, and he'll be even more important this season. He's got a nice shot, good speed, good leaping ability, and good court awareness.

C.J. Lee (#2)
Height: 6' 0"
Weight: 180
Position: Guard
Comments: Lee is the other transfer on the team this year. He played for 2 years at Manhattan College, where he never started, and had miniscule stats. He'll have to sit out this season, and he'll have 2 years of eligibility left.

David Merritt (#30)
Height: 5' 10"
Weight: 170
Position: Guard
Comments: Merritt is a walk-on. I'm sure he'll just be a practice player throughout his career, with maybe one or two brief game appearances in blowouts.

Seniors
Lester Abram (#32)
Height: 6' 6"
Weight: 200
Position: Wing
Comments: After missing most of his original junior season due to a shoulder injury, Abram was red-shirted. He came back healthy as a red-shirt junior last season, and he did a great job. He's back for his 5th year senior season, and he's the team captain. As such, he's going to be expected to lead this team, both on and off the court. He's fast, he can jump, and he's got a great shot. I expect big things from him this season.

Dion Harris (#5)
Height: 6' 3"
Weight: 205
Position: Guard
Comments: Harris had a good, solid junior season. He's going to be the "go to guy" on the team this season. He's a shooting guard who can also drive to the basketball. He has good ball-handling skills, and can fill in at point guard if necessary. His biggest weakness is a poor shooting percentage.

Brent Petway (#23)

Height: 6′ 8″
Weight: 210
Position: Forward
Comments: Petway had a shortened junior season, due to being declared academically ineligible for the fall semester. He's back for his senior season, and he's finally going to get a chance to start and play a lot of minutes. We'll see if he can maintain his incredible energy for the whole season, with all that playing time. He's a tall, powerful player, with great speed. He's also the most exciting dunker on the team, maybe in the nation. He has steadily improved his offense, including his outside shots. He's a monster on defense, with many incredible blocked shots.

Courtney Sims (#44)
Height: 6′ 11″
Weight: 245
Position: Forward
Comments: Sims is the tallest player on the team, and he's a great shot-blocker, and a tough defender, but he needs to be a little more passionate and aggressive on the court. He tends to disappear out there. In the past, he's always had Graham Brown and Chris Hunter around to bail him out when he's had a bad game, but that won't be the case this season. He needs to be much more consistent. The team needs him.

Michigan has a lot of talent again this year, but a lot of it is untested. They have a lot of mid-sized (6′6″ – 6′8″) players, but not a lot of really big guys. If Courtney Sims gets into foul trouble, or gets injured, or is having one of his "disappearing" days, they don't have a lot of options. They also don't have a lot of experience at point guard. Still, they have enough talent to beat most of their non-conference opponents, and hopefully go 8-8 in the Big Ten.

The Upcoming Week

As you can see in the schedule above, Michigan has 2 games this week: on Thursday (11/02/2006) at 7:00 p.m., they play their first exhibition game, against Wayne State, then on Sunday (11/05/2006) at 2:00 p.m., they play their second and final exhibition game, against Michigan Tech. Both games are in Crisler Arena. Come on out and cheer on the Wolverines, and check out the newcomers.

Go Blue!