03/19/2007 – Week #21 – A Miserable Ending To A Mediocre Season

The Week In Review

The University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games last week in the National Invitation Tournament (NIT), and they won one and lost one. On Tuesday (03/13/2007), they beat Utah State (68-58), then on Thursday (03/15/2007), they lost to Florida State (87-66). The win and the loss leave Michigan with a final record of 22-13.

However, that wasn't the big news this week; the big news was that on Saturday (03/17/2007), Tommy Amaker was fired as head coach. While this action wasn't much of a surprise, I still think it's a shame. I'm not sure that anyone knows exactly what needs to be done to get Michigan back into the ranks of the elite teams in college basketball, so I'm not sure that replacing Amaker will necessarily improve the situation. However, there aren't a lot of options available to Athletic Director Bill Martin, and he was under a lot of pressure to make this change. I just hope it achieves the desired results.

I like Amaker as a coach and as a person. I thought he represented Michigan well, and he coached Michigan with class and dignity through some tough times. I don't like coaches who scream and get all emotional on the sidelines, like Bob Knight and Tom Izzo. I like a coach who keeps his cool under pressure. Maybe Amaker wasn't the best coach at recruiting blue-chip players, or getting the most from his players, or running practices, or coaching in game situations, or whatever his failings are thought to be, but I admired the way he did his job.

Coaching basketball at Michigan is a tough job, for a few reasons:

- Basketball will always be a "poor stepchild" to football at Michigan. Michigan football has a much better tradition than Michigan basketball, and there are certainly more UM football fans than UM basketball fans.
- Even before the "improvements" are made to Michigan Stadium (don't get me started on that subject), the football facilities are already much better than the basketball facilities. Crisler Arena either needs to be significantly renovated, or replaced. The basketball program also needs a state-of-the-art practice facility.
- There will always be a lot of media attention directed at the Michigan basketball program, thanks to the Eddie Martin scandal. Until Michigan gets back on top, there will be lots of pressure on whoever is coaching to get there, sooner rather than later.
- Michigan is always going to have to compete with the Evil Empire (aka Michigan State) for both in-state and national recruits. Currently, MSU is winning that battle more often than not.

Everyone who wanted to see Amaker replaced harped on his perceived lack of success in the 6 seasons he was the head coach. While it's true that he never got Michigan into the NCAA Tournament, there are other ways to measure success, and Amaker did well in those areas. He ran a good, clean program, and he recruited good, polite kids to play at Michigan. I would rather lose games with classy players than win games with thugs.

Looking back on his tenure in Ann Arbor, Amaker had some decent numbers:

- An overall record of 109-83 (0.568). He's the 4th winningest coach in school history.
- A Big Ten record of 43-53 (0.448), including 3-7 vs. Michigan State.
- 4 winning seasons.
- 3 seasons with 20+ wins.

- 3 NIT appearances.
- An NIT record of 12-2 (0.857).
- 1 NIT championship. He was the first African-American coach to win a national championship.

I don't know who is going to be coaching Michigan next year, but I certainly wish him well. I'll be hoping as hard as anyone that he does well, but I'll still feel that Amaker should have been given a little more time to get the program back on top.

Back to the two games that were played this week:

The Utah State game was entertaining. The teams traded the lead back and forth until Michigan went ahead for good (22-21) with about 9 minutes left in the 1st half. The Wolverines built up a couple decent little leads before halftime, but USU kept coming back. Michigan closed the half strong, and took a 12-point lead (40-28) into the locker room.

It looked like Michigan had the game comfortably in hand with about 12 minutes to go. They were up 52-43, and had successfully held off a couple mini-runs by Utah State. USU went on a quick 7-0 run to pull within 2 (52-50) with about 9 minutes left, and things were looking dicey. The Aggies (great nickname, huh?) made it a 1-point game (54-53) with about 8 minutes left, and they had a couple chances to go ahead, but they couldn't convert, and Michigan built the lead back up to 13 points (66-53) with a nice 12-0 run of their own. By the time USU scored again, with 1 minute left, it was way too late, and UM won easily.

The Florida State game was just sad. The Wolverines played like they just didn't care any more. They started out well enough, and had a nice 16-8 lead. Then the game started to slip away, and once it started to slip, Michigan couldn't do a thing about it. The last time it was tied was at 23-23, but FSU was up 41-30 at halftime, and the 2nd half was even worse. It was a lousy ending to a mediocre season.

Game Statistics

Let's look at the shooting statistics from the Utah State game:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	24-58 (41.4%)	6-17 (35.3%)	14-17 (82.4%)
Utah State	23-55 (41.8%)	7-18 (38.9%)	5-6 (83.3%)
Advantage	Utah State	Utah State	Utah State

This is a rarity: Utah State had (slightly) better shooting stats across the board, but they lost by 10 points. The difference is in the number of free throws taken: 17 for Michigan vs. 6 for Utah State. The 9 extra points from the line almost completely account for the 10-point margin of victory for Michigan.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	39	15	10	5	5
Utah State	30	15	12	1	3
Advantage	Michigan	Even	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan

Most of these stats are too close to matter, except for Rebounds: a +9 rebounding edge is very helpful. It was also nice to see Michigan take care of the basketball.

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	20-48 (41.7%)	6-16 (37.5%)	20-27 (74.1%)
Florida State	32-54 (59.3%)	7-14 (50.0%)	16-24 (66.7%)
Advantage	Florida State	Florida State	Michigan

Looking at these stats, Michigan shot pretty well, but Florida State shot really well. They did a little better than FSU from the free-throw line, but that wasn't nearly enough to keep them in the game.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	32	6	21	4	5
Florida State	23	17	14	3	15
Advantage	Michigan	FSU	FSU	Michigan	FSU

Sure, Michigan out-rebounded FSU, but look at some of those other stats: losing 17-6 in Assists, 21-14 in Turnovers, and 15-5 in Steals. That's ugly.

Individual Statistics

Coach Amaker went with the starting lineup that he used for the two Big Ten Tournament games: Lester Abram, Dion Harris, Brent Petway, Courtney Sims, and Jerret Smith. Here's how the starters did this week:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	USU	FSU	USU	FSU	USU	FSU	USU	FSU
Lester Abram	5-11	3-6	0-2	1-2	2-4	7-8	12	14
Dion Harris	3-14	6-13	2-8	3-8	2-2	0-0	10	15
Brent Petway	3-4	1-1	0-0	0-0	0-0	2-4	6	4
Courtney Sims	1-4	3-6	0-0	0-0	2-3	5-6	4	11
Jerret Smith	3-6	1-3	3-5	1-1	6-6	4-4	15	7
Totals	15-39 38.5%	14-29 48.3%	5-15 33.3%	5-11 45.5%	12-15 80.0%	18-22 81.8%	47	51

As a group, the starters had a pretty good week. Their percentages are good, and they scored a decent number of points.

Individually, both Abram and Harris hit double figures in both games this week. Sims and Smith both had one good game each, and Petway played pretty well, but didn't score much.

Amaker played a lot more bench players than usual in both games, and he put them in very early in the Utah State game, including little-used David Merritt and Kendric Price. Reed Baker had a minor injury, so he didn't play against Utah State, and he only played 3 minutes against Florida State.

Here's how the bench players did this week:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	USU	FSU	USU	FSU	USU	FSU	USU	FSU

Reed Baker	DNP	0-2	DNP	0-2	DNP	0-0	DNP	0
Ron Coleman	1-3	0-0	1-2	0-0	0-0	0-0	3	0
David Merritt	0-0	2-4	0-0	1-1	0-0	0-0	0	5
Kendric Price	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-2	0	0
Jevohn Shepherd	0-0	1-2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2
DeShawn Sims	6-11	1-6	0-0	0-1	2-2	0-0	14	2
Ekpe Udoh	2-5	2-5	0-0	0-1	0-0	2-3	4	6
Totals	9-19 47.4%	6-19 31.6%	1-2 50.0%	1-5 20.0%	2-2 100.0%	2-5 40.0%	21	15

As a group, the bench players didn't contribute much. They didn't shoot very well, and they didn't chip in many points. Michigan needs much more production from their bench players to win consistently.

Individually, DeShawn Sims was the only bench player to have a good game this week, although it was great to see Merritt get to play some significant minutes, and to take (and make) a few shots.

The Big Picture

Here are the final 2006-2007 schedule/results:

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Score	Record
11/02/2006 (Thu)	Wayne State (exh)	Ann Arbor	W	85-51	0-0
11/05/2006 (Sun)	Michigan Tech (exh)	Ann Arbor	W	85-50	0-0
John Thompson Challenge					
11/10/2006 (Fri)	Central Connecticut State	Ann Arbor	W	60-40	1-0
11/11/2006 (Sat)	Davidson	Ann Arbor	W	78-68	2-0
11/12/2006 (Sun)	Eastern Michigan	Ann Arbor	W	80-51	3-0
11/15/2006 (Wed)	Wisconsin-Milwaukee	Ann Arbor	W	66-59	4-0
11/17/2006 (Fri)	Harvard	Ann Arbor	W	82-50	5-0
11/22/2006 (Wed)	Youngstown State	Ann Arbor	W	65-56	6-0
11/25/2006 (Sat)	Maryland-Baltimore County	Ann Arbor	W	66-54	7-0
ACC/Big Ten Challenge					
11/27/2006 (Mon)	North Carolina State	Raleigh, NC	L	67-74	7-1
12/02/2006 (Sat)	Wofford	Ann Arbor	W	83-49	8-1
12/07/2006 (Thu)	Miami (OH)	Oxford, OH	W	62-56	9-1
12/09/2006 (Sat)	Delaware State	Ann Arbor	W	70-43	10-1
12/16/2006 (Sat)	Northern Illinois	Ann Arbor	W	67-52	11-1
12/23/2006 (Sat)	UCLA	Los Angeles, CA	L	92-55	11-2
12/28/2006 (Thu)	Army	Ann Arbor	W	62-50	12-2
12/30/2006 (Sat)	Georgetown	Ann Arbor	L	51-67	12-3
01/03/2007 (Wed)	Illinois	Ann Arbor	W	71-61	13-3 (1-0)
01/06/2007 (Sat)	Northwestern	Evanston, IL	W	58-46	14-3 (2-0)
01/13/2007 (Sat)	Purdue	West Lafayette, IN	L	53-67	14-4 (2-1)
01/17/2007 (Wed)	Penn State	Ann Arbor	W	77-57	15-4 (3-1)
01/20/2007 (Sat)	Purdue	Ann Arbor	W	71-55	16-4 (4-1)
01/24/2007 (Wed)	Wisconsin	Madison, WI	L	58-71	16-5 (4-2)
01/27/2007 (Sat)	Indiana	Bloomington, IN	L	61-76	16-6 (4-3)
01/31/2007 (Wed)	Iowa	Ann Arbor	L	62-69	16-7 (4-4)
02/06/2007 (Tue)	Ohio State	Columbus, OH	L	63-76	16-8 (4-5)
02/10/2007 (Sat)	Minnesota	Ann Arbor	W	82-80	17-8 (5-5)
02/13/2007 (Tue)	Michigan State	East Lansing, MI	L	44-59	17-9 (5-6)
02/17/2007 (Sat)	Indiana	Ann Arbor	W	58-55	18-9 (6-6)
02/21/2007 (Wed)	Illinois	Champaign, IL	L	42-54	18-10 (6-7)

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Score	Record
02/24/2007 (Sat)	Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN	W	62-51	19-10 (7-7)
02/27/2007 (Tue)	Michigan State	Ann Arbor	W	67-56	20-10 (8-7)
03/03/2007 (Sat)	Ohio State	Ann Arbor	L	61-65	20-11 (8-8)
Big Ten Tournament					
03/08/2007 (Thu)	Round 1 – Minnesota	Chicago, IL	W	49-40	21-11
03/09/2007 (Fri)	Round 2 – Ohio State	Chicago, IL	L	62-72	21-12
National Invitation Tournament (NIT)					
03/13/2007 (Tue)	Round 1 – Utah State	Ann Arbor	W	68-58	22-12
03/15/2007 (Thu)	Round 2 – Florida State	Tallahassee, FL	L	87-66	22-13

The season is over, and it didn't end very well. Look at the last 6 weeks: L-W, L-W, L-W, W-L, W-L, and W-L. Michigan didn't win 2 games in the same week since mid-January, when they beat Penn State and Purdue. After that, they had a lousy 4-game losing streak, followed by the L-W/W-L stuff. They never got any sort of momentum going.

Check back next week for a complete end-of-the-season wrap-up, including final grades, and a look ahead to next season.