10/29/2007 – Week #01 – A Fresh Start

A New Beginning

Welcome back to "Nothing But 'Net" for the 2007-2008 University of Michigan men's basketball season. Once again, it seems way too early for basketball season to start, but the season is right around the corner. The first (and only) exhibition game is this Thursday (11/01/2007), and the first game is the next Friday (11/09/2007).

Once again, I'm really looking forward to following and rooting for the Wolverines this season. It should be a very interesting season. As I'm sure everyone knows by now, Michigan fired Tommy Amaker on March 17th 2007, and hired John Beilein (pronounced "Bee-Line") to replace him on April 3rd 2007. Since Beilein has taken over, there have many significant changes in the program, especially with respect to conditioning and attitude. We'll see if these changes translate into a more competitive team, and eventually, into more wins.

That's the key word: "eventually". Beilein has made many changes, and worked very hard to build relationships with the area high school coaches (something Amaker wasn't crazy about), but it's unrealistic to expect results overnight. The big question is, how long of a "honeymoon period" is reasonable? Just my opinion: 2 full seasons. Give him a chance to bring in a few of his own recruiting classes, and build up some of those relationships with high school coaches. If there isn't a noticeable improvement after 2 full seasons, then the rabid "fire the coach" crowd can start warming up.

Looking Back

Actually, last season wasn't too bad, but it just wasn't good enough to save Amaker's job. Michigan finished 22-13 (8-8 in the Big Ten [tied for 7th place, with MSU]), and lost in the 2nd round of the Big Ten Tournament and the National Invitation Tournament (NIT). Michigan won most of the games that they were expected to win, lost most of the games that they were expected to lose, and won about half of the "toss up" games. That wasn't quite good enough.

This season, Michigan will once again play a mixture of those 3 types of games ("should win", "should lose", and "toss up"). I know it seems obvious, but Michigan must win all of the "should win" games, they should try to sneak out a few upsets in the "should lose" games, and they should win more than half of the "toss up" games. I'll break down the schedule below.

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 missed, probably. In alphabetical order, they are:

- Lester Abram - Les had a pretty disappointing senior season. He had a few good games, but most of the time he was pretty ineffective out there. In his career, Les had some big games, and he showed some leadership, but he never really achieved his full potential.

- Dion Harris - Dion always had a low shooting percentage, but he had any even tougher time than usual last season. He ran the point pretty well, but he did even better when Jerret Smith ran the point and Dion switched to shooting guard. In his career, Dion also had some very big games, and he also showed some leadership, but he was very inconsistent.

- Brent Petway - Brent was more effective coming off the bench as a "sparkplug" his first 3 seasons. Last season, when he was a starter, he played well enough, but he didn't fire the team and the crowd up as much. In his career, Brent played hard every game. He didn't have a very good overall game, but he was very good at some things.

- Courtney Sims - Inch for inch, Courtney was the softest big man in the country for his whole career. When he played tough, which wasn't very often, he did very well, but he had a bad tendency to disappear out there. He is probably Michigan's all-time leader in squandered potential.

So, why did I say "they will be missed, probably" in the previous section? Because there have been stories in the media lately accusing some of the seniors on last season's team of just "phoning it in" too much of the time. I hate to say it, but it sure looked that way to me some of the time. While this season's team will miss the physical talents of the departed seniors, they will probably be better off without their "who cares" attitude.

Besides the four players lost to graduation, there are three more players who are not returning:

- Reed Baker – He transferred to Florida Gulf Coast University. As a true freshman last season, he was a good 3-point shooter, but he was pretty inconsistent, which isn't unusual for a true freshman. When he was "on", he had a great 3-point shot. When he was "off", forget it. He was a little slow on defense, and he was often hesitant when he tried to run the point.

- Phillip DeVries – As a sophomore, Phil only played in 1 game last season, for a total of 3 minutes. He didn't attempt a shot. He was on the team as a practice player, and he decided not to return to the team for his junior year. It doesn't appear that he would have played much this season (or next), so I can't blame him for leaving the team.

- Kendric Price – As a red-shirt freshman, Kendric only played in 8 games, for a total of 22 minutes, and scored a total of 9 points. He has great athletic ability, but still needs some work on his overall game. He couldn't pass the ball-handling tests for this season's team, and decided to transfer. He hasn't announced where he will be going.

Of these three players, only Baker really contributed at all last season. It's a shame that he chose to leave, but he is definitely replaceable.

OK, enough about the players who are gone, let's talk about what happened last season. The Wolverines went into the 2006-2007 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
11/02/2006 (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

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Score	Record
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	55-92	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)
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	66-87	22-13

As you can see, Michigan finished with a very respectable 22-13 record, including 8-8 in the Big Ten. However, their 21 wins at the end of the regular season weren't quite enough to get into The Big Dance. They did OK in the 1st round of the NIT, but they really looked terrible in their final game, at Florida State.

Looking Forward

It's hard to know what to expect from this season's team, since there are so many changes, including a new coaching staff, seven departed players, and seven-and-a-half new players. You'll see what I mean about the "half player" below.

Here's the 2007-2008 schedule:

Date	Opponent	Site	Time
11/01/2007 (Thu)	Ferris State (exh)	Ann Arbor	7:00 p.m.
11/09/2007 (Fri)	Radford	Ann Arbor	7:00 p.m.
11/11/2007 (Sun)	Brown	Ann Arbor	Noon
11/15/2007 (Thu)	Georgetown	Washington, D.C.	7:30 p.m.
Carrs/Safeway Great Alaska Shootout			
11/21/2007 (Wed)	Butler	Anchorage, Alaska	7:30 p.m.

11/23/2007 (Fri)	Eastern Washington or Virginia Tech	Anchorage, Alaska	TBA
11/24/2007 (Sat)	Championship Round	Anchorage, Alaska	TBA
ACC/Big Ten Challenge			
11/28/2007 (Wed)	Boston College	Ann Arbor	7:15 p.m.
12/01/2007 (Sat)	Harvard	Boston, Mass.	5:30 p.m.
12/08/2007 (Sat)	Duke	Durham, N.C.	2:00 p.m.
12/12/2007 (Wed)	Oakland	Ann Arbor	7:00 p.m.
12/15/2007 (Sat)	Central Michigan	Ann Arbor	2:00 p.m.
12/22/2007 (Sat)	UCLA	Ann Arbor	2:00 p.m.
01/02/2008 (Wed)	Wisconsin	Ann Arbor	7:00 p.m.
01/05/2008 (Sat)	Purdue	West Lafayette, Ind.	2:00 p.m.
01/08/2008 (Tue)	Indiana	Ann Arbor	7:00 p.m.
01/12/2008 (Sat)	Northwestern	Evanston, Ill.	5:30 p.m.
01/16/2008 (Wed)	Illinois	Champaign, Ill.	8:00 p.m.
01/19/2008 (Sat)	Iowa	Ann Arbor	7:00 p.m.
01/22/2008 (Tue)	Wisconsin	Madison, Wis.	6:00 p.m.
01/27/2008 (Sun)	Michigan State	East Lansing, Mich.	Noon
01/31/2008 (Thu)	Minnesota	Ann Arbor	7:00 p.m.
02/05/2008 (Tue)	Ohio State	Columbus, Ohio	7:00 p.m.
02/09/2008 (Sat)	Penn State	Ann Arbor	4:00 p.m.
02/14/2008 (Thu)	Iowa	Iowa City, Iowa	8:00 p.m.
02/17/2008 (Sun)	Ohio State	Ann Arbor	1:00 p.m.
02/21/2008 (Thu)	Minnesota	Minneapolis, Minn.	8:00 p.m.
02/23/2008 (Sat) or 02/24/2008 (Sun)	Illinois	Ann Arbor	TBA
02/26/2008 (Tue)	Northwestern	Ann Arbor	9:00 p.m.
03/01/2008 (Sat)	Penn State	State College, Pa.	8:00 p.m.
03/08/2008 (Sat) or 03/09/2008 (Sun)	Purdue	Ann Arbor	TBA
Big Ten Tournament			
03/13/2008 (Thu)	First Round	Indianapolis, Ind.	TBA
03/14/2008 (Fri)	Quarterfinal	Indianapolis, Ind.	TBA
03/15/2008 (Sat)	Semifinal	Indianapolis, Ind.	TBA
03/16/2008 (Sun)	Championship	Indianapolis, Ind.	3:30 p.m.

Unlike last season, this season's non-conference slate is pretty challenging, with Georgetown, Butler, Virginia Tech (maybe), Boston College, Duke, and UCLA all on the schedule. To make it even more challenging, several of those games are on the road, and some of them are really on the road, in Anchorage, Alaska. The team is going to get lots of frequent flyer miles this season. Looking at the non-conference portion, it looks like Michigan should win at least 6 of the 12 games (Radford, Brown, at least one game in Alaska, Harvard, Oakland, and Central Michigan), and maybe as many as 8 (a second win in Alaska, and maybe Boston College). I don't think Michigan will win all 3 games in Alaska, the games at Georgetown and Duke are sure losses, and the home game vs. UCLA doesn't look very promising. Let's split the difference and say that they'll go 7-5 in the non-conference portion.

Once they get to the Big Ten portion of their schedule, things will start to get interesting. This season, the Big Ten switched from 16 conference games to 18 games, 9 at home and 9

on the road. Even with 18 games, the schedule is "unbalanced", since not every team plays every other team twice, playing two teams only once. This season, Michigan only plays Indiana (in Ann Arbor) and Michigan State (in East Lansing) once. It will be weird to only play MSU once.

Of the 9 home Big Ten games, they should be able to win 5 of them (Iowa, Minnesota, Penn State, Northwestern, and Purdue). Things look pretty grim on the road: I can only see 3 wins (Northwestern, Minnesota, and Penn State), although they stand an outside chance at Purdue and Iowa. The home games vs. Wisconsin and Ohio State are almost certain losses, and the road games at Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan State, and Ohio State also look pretty hopeless. That leaves only a couple of "toss up" games: the home games vs. Wisconsin and Indiana. That all works out to a Big Ten record of anywhere from 8-10 to 11-7. Figure on 9-9. Add that to the 7-5 non-conference record, and we're looking at 16-14, which sure sounds like another trip to the NIT. On the optimistic end, if Michigan can do a game better in the non-conference schedule (8-4), and finish 11-7 in the Big Ten, that would give them a 19-11 record. If they did that, and won a couple games in the Big Ten Tournament, maybe they could sneak into the NCAA Tournament. It's not impossible, just unlikely. You'll see why in the next section.

Meet The Wolverines

The big news about this season's roster is the absence of a true big man. Michigan has Epke Udoh and Zack Gibson, and that's about it. In the past, Michigan has been blessed with some good true centers, often more than one:

1999-2000: Chris Young, Josh Asselin, Peter Vignier

2000-2001: Josh Moore, Chris Young, Josh Asselin

2001-2002: Chris Young

2002-2003: Graham Brown, Chris Hunter

2003-2004: Courtney Sims, Graham Brown, Chris Hunter, J.C. Mathis

2004-2005: Courtney Sims, Graham Brown, Chris Hunter, J.C. Mathis

2005-2006: Courtney Sims, Graham Brown, Chris Hunter

2006-2007: Courtney Sims, Ekpe Udoh

Except for the 2001-2002 season (when they went 11-18), Michigan has always had at least 2 true centers on the team. This season will be a lot tougher inside.

Other than the lack of a true big man inside, Michigan has a pretty good roster this season. There are lots of versatile players, in all different sizes (except for "Really Tall"). There are good guards, wings, and forwards. The big trick for Beilein is going to be finding the right combinations.

As I mentioned above, Michigan has seven-and-a-half new players this season. The "half player" isn't really new, he's K'Len Morris, who is back from a season-ending shoulder injury he suffered early last season, which got him a medical redshirt year. The other seven players are made up of another redshirt freshman (Anthony Wright), two transfer students

who had to sit out last season (Zack Gibson and C.J. Lee), two walk-on freshmen (Adam Block and Eric Puls), and two scholarship freshmen (Kelvin Grady and Manny Harris).

The returning "regulars" are Ron Coleman, Jevohn Shepherd, DeShawn Sims, Jerret Smith, and Ekpe Udoh. The only returning "sub" is David Merritt. This is a decent nucleus to build a young team (6 freshmen and 3 sophomores) around.

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

Freshmen

Adam Block (#20)
Height: 6' 1"
Weight: 180
Position: Guard
Comments: Adam is a walk-on from Allentown, PA. It looks like he's a good 3-point shooter, but I suspect that he's only on the team as a practice player.

Kelvin Grady (#44)
Height: 5' 11"
Weight: 170
Position: Guard
Comments: Yes, Kelvin is the younger brother of Kevin Grady, from the football team. He is very quick, and he's a very good 3-point shooter.

Manny Harris (#3)
Height: 6' 5"
Weight: 170
Position: Guard
Comments: Manny was Mr. Basketball for the state of Michigan last year. His given name is "Corperryale", but he prefers his nickname, "Manny". He's quick, he's a good shooter, he's tall (for a guard) so he can rebound, and he's a good defender. Note that he is 6 inches taller than Kelvin Grady, yet he weighs the same. He needs to put on about 15 pounds of muscle.

K'Len Morris (#5)
Height: 6' 4"
Weight: 185
Position: Wing
Comments: Coming out of high school, K'Len was considered to be somewhat of a question mark. He played in 7 games last season before injuring his shoulder, and he looked pretty good out there. He was awarded a medical redshirt year, so he still has freshman eligibility this season. He switched uniform numbers from #3 last season to #5 this season.

Eric Puls (#30)
Height: 6' 10"
Weight: 205
Position: Forward
Comments: Eric is a "preferred walk-on", and he'll definitely help out as a practice player. We'll see if he ever gets into the real games.

Anthony Wright (#12)
Height: 6' 6"

Weight: 235
Position: Forward
Comments: Anthony redshirted last year, so he has freshman eligibility. He's a big, powerful guy, with a great touch from 3-point range. He can really help the team this year.

Sophomores

Zack Gibson (#32)
Height: 6' 10"
Weight: 220
Position: Center
Comments: Zack is a transfer from Rutgers, where he didn't play much during his freshman year. He had to sit out last season, and he has 3 years of eligibility left. He switched uniform numbers from #25 last season to #32 this season.

DeShawn Sims (#34)
Height: 6' 8"
Weight: 225
Position: Forward
Comments: DeShawn was the most highly rated of last season's freshmen. He's tall and powerful, and he's a great scorer. He had some good games last season, and he should give Michigan some badly needed muscle underneath. He switched uniform numbers from #4 last season to #34 this season.

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 he played very well last year. He will provide some badly needed height and muscle underneath.

Juniors

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

Jevohn Shepherd (#15)
Height: 6' 5"
Weight: 210
Position: Forward
Comments: Jevohn is very fast, a good leaper ("Air Canada"), and a very good defender. He needs to work on his shot a little.

Jerret Smith (#1)
Height: 6' 3"
Weight: 195
Position: Guard

Comments: Jerret is a pure point guard, and he did pretty well at it last season. He will be Michigan's main point guard this season, and he needs to do well for Michigan to succeed.

Seniors

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

David Merritt (#11)
Height: 5' 10"
Weight: 170
Position: Guard
Comments: David is a walk-on. He's mostly a practice player, but he did get some significant playing time last season. He switched uniform numbers from #30 last season to #11 this season.

Usually, I can pretty much guess what the initial starting lineup will be, but not this season. There are too many new players, a whole new offense and defense, and a whole new coaching staff. If I had to guess, I'd guess that Udoh will start at center (backed by Gibson), with Coleman at wing (backed by Morris), Sims at forward (backed by Wright), Smith at point guard (backed by Lee), and Harris at shooting guard (backed by Grady). That's 10 deep right there.

The Upcoming Week

As you can see in the schedule above, Michigan has one game this week: on Thursday (11/01/2007) at 7:00 p.m., they play their first and only exhibition game, against Ferris State, in Crisler Arena. Come on out and cheer on the Wolverines, and check out the newcomers. I'm working as an usher again this season, so stop by Section 11 to say hello.

Go Blue!