02/25/2008 – Week #18 – Good News/Bad News

The Week In Review

The University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games last week, and they won one and lost one. On Thursday (02/21/2008), they lost at Minnesota, 69-60, then on Saturday (02/23/2008), they beat Illinois in Crisler Arena, 49-43. The win and the loss leave Michigan with a record of 9-18, 5-10 in the Big Ten. The loss to Minnesota snapped Michigan's 3-game winning streak, but the win over Illinois meant that they have now won 4 of their last 5 games, which is pretty good, especially considering how dismal their record was just 3 weeks ago.

Michigan actually played pretty well at Minnesota, right up until the last 9 minutes. The Wolverines had a slim 1-point lead (35-34) at halftime, and they led by 5 points (49-44) with about 13:00 left in the game. They were still up by one point (52-51) with 9:22 left, then they went on another of their miserable "offensive vacations". Over the next 7 minutes, they got outscored 15-4, and that was the game. It's a shame that they didn't do better down the stretch, because they put themselves in a good position to win the game.

The Illinois win was ugly, but they all count the same. Michigan played a very sloppy, ragged game, with lots of missed layups and bricked 3-point shots, but as poorly as UM played, Illinois played even worse. It's hard to believe that it was only 3 seasons ago (2004-2005) that Illinois only lost one regular season game, and played in the National Championship game. It just goes to show you how quickly things can change in college basketball, and how hard it is to stay on top, if/when you manage to get there.

Once again, the game was close at halftime, with Illinois up by 2 points (24-22). Illinois led for the first 11 minutes of the 2nd half, and it was tied up (37-37) with 5:01 left when Michigan finally went ahead for good, 39-37. Illinois put up a good fight down the stretch, but Michigan made their free throws, and won a tight game.

If you look at the schedule, you can see one possible reason for Michigan's sloppiness in the Illinois game: they played a 9:00 game in Minnesota on Thursday, then played an afternoon game at home on Saturday. That's a pretty tight turnaround, and the Wolverines looked tired and sluggish out there at times.

Game Statistics

First, let's look at the shooting statistics from the Minnesota game:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	22-70 (31.4%)	5-26 (19.2%)	11-12 (91.7%)
Minnesota	24-47 (51.1%)	10-24 (41.7%)	11-21 (52.4%)
Advantage	Minnesota	Minnesota	Michigan

This one is a no-brainer: the points at the free-throw line cancel each other out, even if Michigan shot a much better percentage, but the 5 extra 3-pointers by Minnesota made all the difference. Michigan lives and dies with the 3-point shot, and in this case, they died.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	42	10	14	1	8
Minnesota	36	12	18	7	9

Advantage	Michigan	Minnesota	Michigan	Minnesota	Minnesota

What do these stats tell us? Michigan had more possessions than Minnesota, with the 6 extra rebounds and the 4 less turnovers. So, what did Michigan do with all those extra possessions? They shot a lot of shots (70), but still made 2 less baskets overall than Minnesota. That's a good way to lose a game.

Next, let's look at the shooting statistics from the Illinois game:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	17-56 (30.4%)	5-21 (23.8%)	10-13 (76.9%)
Illinois	16-50 (32.0%)	6-19 (31.6%)	5-9 (55.6%)
Advantage	Illinois	Illinois	Michigan

Michigan made one more field goal, but Illinois made one more 3-pointer. Where did UM win the game? At the free-throw line, where they made more free throws than Illinois attempted.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	43	9	10	7	5
Illinois	36	11	16	2	4
Advantage	Michigan	Illinois	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan

Once again, Michigan had more possessions than Illinois, thanks to a +7 in rebounds, a –6 in turnovers, and a +5 in blocked shots. That's why they won the game.

Season 3-Point Shooting

Here's my theory: Michigan should win a game if they can shoot at least 20 3-pointers, and hit at least 40% of them. Of course, they can still win the game when they shoot less than 20 3-pointers, or when they hit less than 40% of them. I'm just saying that they should win the game if they do shoot 20 and make 40%. Let's see how they that works this season:

Date	Opponent	3-Point Shooting	Result	Fits Theory?
11/09/2007	Radford	7-23 (30.4%)	W	N/A
11/11/2007	Brown	12-24 (50.0%)	W	Yes
11/15/2007	At Georgetown	5-18 (27.8%)	L	Yes
11/21/2007	Butler (neutral site)	8-20 (40.0%)	L	No
11/23/2007	Eastern Washington (neutral site)	10-27 (37.0%)	W	N/A
11/24/2007	Western Kentucky (neutral site)	5-17 (29.4%)	L	Yes
11/28/2007	Boston College	9-25 (36.0%)	L	Yes
12/01/2007	At Harvard	5-20 (25.0%)	L	Yes
12/08/2007	At Duke	6-19 (31.6%)	L	Yes
12/12/2007	Oakland	7-17 (41.2%)	W	N/A
12/15/2007	Central Michigan	4-8 (50.0%)	L	Yes
12/22/2007	UCLA	6-31 (19.4%)	L	Yes
01/02/2008	Wisconsin	5-18 (27.8%)	L	Yes
01/05/2008	At Purdue	4-18 (22.2%)	L	Yes
01/08/2008	Indiana	8-28 (28.6%)	L	Yes
01/12/2008	At Northwestern	8-26 (30.8%)	W	N/A

Date	Opponent	3-Point Shooting	Result	Fits Theory?
01/16/2008	At Illinois	8-27 (29.6%)	L	Yes
01/19/2008	Iowa	11-28 (39.3%)	L	Yes
01/22/2008	At Wisconsin	7-21 (33.3%)	L	Yes
01/27/2008	At Michigan State	8-31 (25.8%)	L	Yes
01/31/2008	Minnesota	6-25 (24.0%)	L	Yes
02/05/2008	At Ohio State	9-26 (34.6%)	L	Yes
02/09/2008	Penn State	6-18 (33.3%)	W	N/A
02/14/2008	At Iowa	7-19 (36.8%)	W	N/A
02/17/2008	Ohio State	10-24 (41.7%)	W	Yes
02/21/2008	At Minnesota	5-26 (19.2%)	L	Yes
02/23/2008	Illinois	5-21 (23.8%)	W	N/A
Totals		191-605 (31.6%)		19-1

The theory continues to hold. The Minnesota game is yet another good example. If Michigan doesn't get their 3-point shots, and make a good percentage of them, they're going to have a tough time.

Individual Statistics

Coach Beilein went with his latest starting lineup in the Minnesota game, but he started Anthony Wright instead of Ron Coleman in the Illinois game.

Here's how the starters did this week:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	Minn	Ill	Minn	Ill	Minn	Ill	Minn	Ill
Ron Coleman	1-2	Bench	1-2	Bench	1-2	Bench	4	Bench
Kelvin Grady	3-6	4-10	1-3	2-5	1-1	2-2	8	12
Manny Harris	6-16	4-14	0-1	1-3	4-4	5-6	16	14
DeShawn Sims	6-19	2-11	2-11	1-4	2-2	2-2	16	7
Ekpe Udoh	1-9	3-6	0-1	0-0	2-2	1-2	4	7
Anthony Wright	Bench	2-10	Bench	1-7	Bench	0-0	Bench	5
Totals	17-52 32.7%	15-51 29.4%	4-18 22.2%	5-19 26.3%	10-11 90.9%	10-12 83.3%	48	45

As a group, the starters had a lousy week. Their percentages are miserable, except for free throw shooting in both games, and they didn't score very many points in either game.

Individually, only Harris hit double figures in both games, although Grady came close. Sims scored a decent number of points, but he had to take a LOT of shots to do it. Actually, so did Harris, Udoh, and Wright. Only Grady had a decent week shooting. Coleman didn't do much in his one game as a starter.

Even though he was the high scorer in both games, Harris almost cost Michigan the Illinois game. He was just trying to do too much by himself. I know that it's tough for a scorer to know when he's having an "off" game and go into "pass instead of shoot" mode, but that's what he needed to do. I don't think he's trying to pad his own stats, and I honestly believe that he's just trying to do whatever he can to help the team win, but sometimes he gets "tunnel vision" out there, and forgets that he has 4 other teammates out there with him. Similarly, Sims and Wright need to realize when they're not hot, and pass instead of shooting. I know that there's a school of thought that says that good shooters just need to "shoot their way out of a slump", but there has to be some point when even a good shooter

in a slump gives it a rest. Fortunately for Michigan, Harris managed to score just enough points to win the game for Michigan, but he almost cost UM the win.

My biggest complaint about all the Michigan players over the last 3 weeks has been how often they have all missed easy-to-medium-hard layups. Both Harris and Grady missed point-blank layups in the last minute of the Illinois game; fortunately, Illinois wasn't able to capitalize on these miscues.

One more thing: Ekpe Udoh has played in all 27 games so far this season, and he has had at least one blocked shot in 25 of them. He got shut out in the home game against Wisconsin on 01/02/2008, and again this past Thursday at Minnesota. He was awesome again in the Illinois game, with 5 blocks. He now has 81 blocks for the season.

As far as the bench players go, Coach Beilein only went 4-deep this week. I didn't realize it when I wrote last week's article, but David Merritt injured his knee in the Ohio State win on 02/17/2008, and had season-ending surgery on it. That makes the Michigan bench a little shorter.

Here's how the bench players did:

Player	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
	Minn	Ill	Minn	Ill	Minn	Ill	Minn	Ill
Ron Coleman	Starter	0-0	Starter	0-0	Starter	0-0	Starter	0
Zack Gibson	2-7	1-4	1-5	0-2	1-1	0-0	6	2
C.J. Lee	0-2	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	0
Jevohn Shepherd	2-2	1-1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-1	4	2
Anthony Wright	1-7	Starter	0-3	Starter	0-0	Starter	2	Starter
Totals	5-18 27.8%	2-5 40.0%	1-8 12.5%	0-2 0.0%	1-1 100.0%	0-1 0.0%	12	4

As a group, the bench players had a terrible week. Their shooting percentages were awful, and they didn't chip in many points.

Individually, none of the bench players contribute much. Gibson chipped in a few points in the Minnesota game, and Shepherd had a nice block in the Illinois game, but that was about it. Michigan needs more help from the bench in the future.

Big Ten This Week

Here are the current Big Ten standings, after Week #8 of league play:

Team	Big Ten			Overall		
	Wins	Losses	Percent	Wins	Losses	Percent
Wisconsin	13	2	0.867	23	4	0.852
Indiana	12	2	0.857	23	4	0.852
Purdue	12	2	0.857	21	6	0.778
Michigan State	10	4	0.714	22	5	0.815
Ohio State	8	6	0.571	17	10	0.630
Minnesota	7	7	0.500	17	9	0.654
Iowa	5	10	0.333	12	16	0.429
Michigan	5	10	0.333	9	18	0.333
Penn State	4	10	0.286	12	14	0.462
Illinois	3	12	0.200	11	17	0.393

Northwestern	0	14	0.000	7	18	0.280

Looking at the standings, there are some things that seem pretty certain:

- One of the top 3 teams (Indiana, Wisconsin, and Purdue) is going to win the Big Ten title. MSU is out of the race.
- Only the top 4 teams stand a chance for an NCAA Tournament bid, barring a major upset in the Big Ten Tournament.
- Only 2 other teams (Ohio State and Minnesota) seem likely to get NIT bids. Penn State still has a chance, but they still have 2 games left against Big Ten contenders (Wisconsin and Indiana). Everyone else is staying home, once again barring a major upset in the Big Ten Tournament.

It's going to be pretty sad if only 6 Big Ten teams get into postseason play, and 2 of them are in the NIT.

Here are the results from last week's games:

Tuesday (02/19/2008)
Purdue lost at Indiana, 77-68
Northwestern lost at Iowa, 53-51

Wednesday (02/20/2008)
Penn State lost at Michigan State, 86-49
Wisconsin won at Illinois, 71-57

Thursday (02/21/2008)
Michigan lost at Minnesota, 69-60

Saturday (02/23/2008)
Illinois lost at Michigan, 49-43
Iowa lost at Michigan State, 66-52
Indiana won at Northwestern, 85-82

Sunday (02/24/2008)
Penn State lost at Minnesota, 75-68
Wisconsin won at Ohio State, 58-53

The home teams did pretty well this week, going 7-3. The 3 losses were all to the Big Ten contenders.

There were no real surprises this week as far as the results went, but there was a big surprise when Indiana bought out Kelvin Sampson's contract and parted ways with him in the middle of the season. He got caught allegedly committing 5 major NCAA rule violations, then lying about it. Even though Indiana is in the thick of the Big Ten race, this distraction could really hurt them down the stretch.

Here are the games scheduled for the upcoming week (Week #9):

Tuesday (02/26/2008)
Northwestern at Michigan
Ohio State at Indiana

Wednesday (02/27/2008)
Iowa at Penn State
Minnesota at Purdue

Thursday (02/28/2008)
Michigan State at Wisconsin

Saturday (03/01/2008)
Michigan at Penn State
Illinois at Iowa
Northwestern at Purdue
Ohio State at Minnesota

Sunday (03/02/2008)
Indiana at Michigan State

There are 2 big games this week, both involving Michigan State:

- Michigan State at Wisconsin on Thursday. MSU has to win both games this week to stay in contention for a high seed in the NCAA Tournament. Wisconsin is nearly unbeatable at home, and they need the win to stay in the Big Ten race.
- Indiana at Michigan State on Saturday. Once again, this is a must-win game for both teams. Indiana needs to win to stay in the Big Ten race, and MSU is tough at home.

Michigan has to win their home game against Northwestern on Tuesday. It would be very embarrassing to be the team that finally loses to Northwestern.

Here's the entire Big Ten schedule and results, with the teams in alphabetical order:

Team	Record	Wins	Losses	Remaining Games
Illinois	3-12	Michigan (H) Northwestern (H) Minnesota (A)	Ohio State (H) Penn State (H) Wisconsin (A) Indiana (A) Purdue (A) Ohio State (A) Michigan State (A) Purdue (H) Indiana (H) Penn State (A) Wisconsin (H) Michigan (A)	Iowa (A) Michigan State (H) Minnesota (H)
Indiana	12-2	Iowa (A) Michigan (A) Illinois (H) Minnesota (A) Penn State (H) Iowa (H) Northwestern (H) Illinois (A) Ohio State (A) Michigan State (H)	Wisconsin (A) Wisconsin (H)	Ohio State (H) Michigan State (A) Minnesota (H) Penn State (A)

		Purdue (H) Northwestern (A)		
Iowa	5-10	Michigan State (H) Michigan (A) Penn State (H) Ohio State (H) Northwestern (H)	Indiana (H) Wisconsin (A) Ohio State (A) Purdue (H) Indiana (A) Purdue (A) Wisconsin (H) Minnesota (A) Michigan (H) Michigan State (A)	Penn State (A) Illinois (H) Northwestern (A)
Michigan	5-10	Northwestern (A) Penn State (H) Iowa (A) Ohio State (H) Illinois (H)	Wisconsin (H) Purdue (A) Indiana (H) Illinois (A) Iowa (H) Wisconsin (A) Michigan State (A) Minnesota (H) Ohio State (A) Minnesota (A)	Northwestern (H) Penn State (A) Purdue (H)
Michigan State	10-4	Minnesota (H) Purdue (H) Ohio State (H) Minnesota (A) Northwestern (A) Michigan (H) Illinois (H) Northwestern (H) Penn State (H) Iowa (H)	Iowa (A) Penn State (A) Purdue (A) Indiana (A)	Wisconsin (A) Indiana (H) Illinois (A) Ohio State (A)
Minnesota	7-7	Northwestern (H) Penn State (A) Michigan (A) Northwestern (A) Iowa (H) Michigan (H) Penn State (H)	Michigan State (A) Indiana (H) Michigan State (H) Ohio State (A) Wisconsin (H) Illinois (H) Wisconsin (A)	Purdue (A) Ohio State (H) Indiana (A) Illinois (A)
Northwestern	0-14		Penn State (H) Ohio State (A) Minnesota (A) Michigan (H) Wisconsin (A) Michigan State (H) Illinois (A) Indiana (A) Minnesota (H) Michigan State (A) Ohio State (H) Purdue (H) Iowa (A) Indiana (H)	Michigan (A) Purdue (A) Iowa (H) Wisconsin (H)

Ohio State	8-6	Illinois (A) Northwestern (H) Iowa (H) Illinois (H) Minnesota (H) Penn State (A) Michigan (H) Northwestern (A)	Purdue (A) Michigan State (A) Iowa (A) Indiana (H) Michigan (A) Wisconsin (H)	Indiana (A) Minnesota (A) Purdue (H) Michigan State (H)
Penn State	4-10	Northwestern (A) Illinois (A) Michigan State (H) Illinois (H)	Minnesota (H) Wisconsin (H) Indiana (A) Purdue (H) Iowa (A) Ohio State (H) Purdue (A) Michigan (A) Michigan State (A) Minnesota (A)	Iowa (H) Michigan (H) Wisconsin (A) Indiana (H)
Purdue	12-2	Michigan (H) Ohio State (H) Iowa (A) Illinois (H) Penn State (A) Wisconsin (H) Iowa (H) Illinois (A) Penn State (H) Wisconsin (A) Michigan State (H) Northwestern (A)	Michigan State (A) Indiana (A)	Minnesota (H) Northwestern (H) Ohio State (A) Michigan (A)
Wisconsin	13-2	Michigan (A) Iowa (H) Illinois (H) Penn State (A) Northwestern (H) Michigan (H) Indiana (H) Minnesota (A) Iowa (A) Indiana (A) Minnesota (H) Illinois (A) Ohio State (A)	Purdue (A) Purdue (H)	Michigan State (H) Penn State (H) Northwestern (A)

With Indiana's win over Purdue last week, the Big Ten race got a lot tighter. Wisconsin is temporarily in 1st place alone, but only because they've played one extra game. It is essentially a 3-way tie for 1st.

Here's who the contenders have left to play:

Team	Games vs. Contenders		Games vs. Non-contenders	
	Home	Away	Home	Away

Indiana			Ohio State Minnesota	Michigan State Penn State
Purdue			Minnesota Northwestern	Ohio State Michigan
Wisconsin			Michigan State Penn State	Northwestern

It looks like Wisconsin has the easiest remaining schedule, since they only have 3 games left, but they still have to play "almost contender" MSU. So does Indiana, so Purdue may have the easiest remaining schedule.

The Big Picture

It's obvious that Michigan is improving as the season goes on, although some of their recent success has as much to do with an easier schedule as it does to improved play. UM played all the Big Ten contenders in the 1st half of the season, including Wisconsin twice. They've played the non-contenders in the 2nd half of the season, and they've done much better.

With only 3 regular season games left, Michigan stands a good chance of winning one (Northwestern in Ann Arbor), losing one (Purdue in Ann Arbor), and has a toss-up game at Penn State. So, they should finish the regular season either 10-20 or 11-19. Neither is a very good record, but it'll have to do as a foundation for next year.

Here's the 2007-2008 schedule/results:

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Score	Record
11/01/2007 (Thu)	Ferris State (exhibition)	Ann Arbor	W	78-40	0-0
11/09/2007 (Fri)	Radford	Ann Arbor	W	82-55	1-0
11/11/2007 (Sun)	Brown	Ann Arbor	W	72-57	2-0
11/15/2007 (Thu)	Georgetown	Washington, D.C.	L	74-52	2-1
Carrs/Safeway Great Alaska Shootout					
11/21/2007 (Wed)	Butler	Anchorage, Alaska	L	79-65	2-2
11/23/2007 (Fri)	Eastern Washington	Anchorage, Alaska	W	61-53	3-2
11/24/2007 (Sat)	Western Kentucky	Anchorage, Alaska	L	73-69	3-3
ACC/Big Ten Challenge					
11/28/2007 (Wed)	Boston College	Ann Arbor	L	77-64	3-4
12/01/2007 (Sat)	Harvard	Boston, Mass.	L	62-51	3-5
12/08/2007 (Sat)	Duke	Durham, N.C.	L	95-67	3-6
12/12/2007 (Wed)	Oakland	Ann Arbor	W	103-87	4-6
12/15/2007 (Sat)	Central Michigan	Ann Arbor	L	78-67	4-7
12/22/2007 (Sat)	UCLA	Ann Arbor	L	69-54	4-8
01/02/2008 (Wed)	Wisconsin	Ann Arbor	L	70-54	4-9 (0-1)
01/05/2008 (Sat)	Purdue	West Lafayette, Ind.	L	65-58	4-10 (0-2)
01/08/2008 (Tue)	Indiana	Ann Arbor	L	78-64	4-11 (0-3)
01/12/2008 (Sat)	Northwestern	Evanston, Ill.	W	78-68	5-11 (1-3)
01/16/2008 (Wed)	Illinois	Champaign, Ill.	L	75-57	5-12 (1-4)
01/19/2008 (Sat)	Iowa	Ann Arbor	L	68-60	5-13 (1-5)
01/22/2008 (Tue)	Wisconsin	Madison, Wis.	L	64-61	5-14 (1-6)
01/27/2008 (Sun)	Michigan State	East Lansing, Mich.	L	77-62	5-15 (1-7)
01/31/2008 (Thu)	Minnesota	Ann Arbor	L	77-65	5-16 (1-8)
02/05/2008 (Tue)	Ohio State	Columbus, Ohio	L	65-55	5-17 (1-9)
02/09/2008 (Sat)	Penn State	Ann Arbor	W	68-63	6-17 (2-9)
02/14/2008 (Thu)	Iowa	Iowa City, Iowa	W	60-52	7-17 (3-9)
02/17/2008 (Sun)	Ohio State	Ann Arbor	W	80-70	8-17 (4-9)
02/21/2008 (Thu)	Minnesota	Minneapolis, Minn.	L	69-60	8-18 (4-10)

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Score	Record
02/23/2008 (Sat)	Illinois	Ann Arbor	W	49-43	9-18 (5-10)
02/26/2008 (Tue)	Northwestern	Ann Arbor			
03/01/2008 (Sat)	Penn State	State College, Pa.			
03/08/2008 (Sat) or 03/09/2008 (Sun)	Purdue	Ann Arbor			
Big Ten Tournament					
03/13/2008 (Thu)	First Round	Indianapolis, Ind.			
03/14/2008 (Fri)	Quarterfinal	Indianapolis, Ind.			
03/15/2008 (Sat)	Semifinal	Indianapolis, Ind.			
03/16/2008 (Sun)	Championship	Indianapolis, Ind.			

The Upcoming Week

As you can see in the schedule above, Michigan plays two games this week. On Tuesday (02/26/2008, 9:00 p.m.), they play Northwestern in Crisler Arena, then on Saturday (03/01/2008, 8:00 p.m.), they play at Penn State. Both games are on the (useless) Big Ten Network, but you can come on down to Crisler for the Northwestern game, and check back here next week to see what happened, and why.

Go Blue!