03/24/2008 – Week #22 – Season Wrap-up, Final Grades, and Looking Ahead

Season Wrap-up

The 2007-2008 season is over for the University of Michigan men's basketball team, and it was pretty disappointing. Sure, Michigan had a new coach (John Beilein), with a new system on offense and defense, so a certain "learning curve" was expected, but their final record (10-22, 5-13 in the Big Ten) was a lot worse than most people expected. I don't think many people expected Michigan to make it to the NCAA Tournament, but an NIT bid seemed possible.

When I look at a season, I like to divide the games into 3 categories: games Michigan should win, games Michigan probably don't stand much chance of winning, and "toss up" games. In a successful season, Michigan would win all the "should win" games, some of the "toss up" games, and maybe one or two of the "should lose" games. Here's how this season's games were divided up in my mind:

- "Should Win" games (13): Radford, Brown, Eastern Washington, Harvard, Oakland, Central Michigan, Northwestern (home and away), Illinois (home), Iowa (home), Minnesota (home), Penn State (home and away).
- "Should Lose" games (10): Georgetown, Duke, UCLA, Wisconsin (home, away, tournament), Purdue (away), Ohio State (away), Indiana, Michigan State.
- "Toss Up" games (9): Butler, Western Kentucky, Boston College, Purdue (home), Iowa (away and tournament), Illinois (away), Ohio State (home), Minnesota (away).

This season, Michigan didn't come close to those expectations:

- "Should Win" games (7-6). They lost to Harvard, Central Michigan, Northwestern (home), Iowa (home), Minnesota (home), and Penn State (away). This was very disappointing.
- "Should Lose" games (0-10). They put up a good fight in some of these games, but didn't win any of them.
- "Toss Up" games (3-6). They only beat Iowa (away and tournament) and Ohio State (home). They lost the rest.

If they could have won all 13 of their "should win" games, they would have finished a much more respectable 16-16, and been invited to the NIT. I think that's what most people hoped for this year.

So, what happened? Why did they do so poorly, especially in their "should win" games? Was it lack of talent, poor coaching, a tough schedule, too much youth, or "growing pains"? I tend to think that it was mostly "growing pains", combined with a tough schedule (the 7th toughest in the nation) and too much youth. So far, people seem to be very patient with Beilein. The understanding seems to be: "it will take a couple years for Beilein to get the players he needs for his system, and to get everyone running his system well". In the meantime, the "fire the coach" crowd seems to be willing to wait and see, at least for now.

Here are the final 2007-2008 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

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Score	Record
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	Cambridge, 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)
02/23/2008 (Sat)	Illinois	Ann Arbor	W	49-43	9-18 (5-10)
02/26/2008 (Tue)	Northwestern	Ann Arbor	L	62-60	9-19 (5-11)
03/01/2008 (Sat)	Penn State	State College, Pa.	L	69-61	9-20 (5-12)
03/09/2008 (Sun)	Purdue	Ann Arbor	L	72-58	9-21 (5-13)
Big Ten Tournament					
03/13/2008 (Thu)	Iowa	Indianapolis, Ind.	W	55-47	10-21 (5-13)
03/14/2008 (Fri)	Wisconsin	Indianapolis, Ind.	L	51-34	10-22 (5-13)

As you can see, the highlight of the season was the 5-game stretch from 02/09/2008 (Penn State) to 02/23/2008 (Illinois), when Michigan won 4 out of those 5 games. There were too many lowlights.

Good/Bad Wins/Losses

Not all wins are good wins, and not all losses are bad losses. Sure, a win is a win, and a loss is a loss, but some wins can be discouraging, and some losses can be encouraging. I know, Michigan doesn't believe in "moral victories" in any of their sports, but I do. Therefore, I've gone back over the season, and found the good and bad wins, and the good and bad losses:

Good wins

Date	Opponent	Location	Score	Comments
12/12/2007	Oakland	Ann Arbor	103-87	This was our first (and only) glimpse of what the vaunted "Beilein Offense" looks like when it's played correctly.
01/12/2008	Northwestern	Evanston, IL	78-68	Michigan won on the road, in a Big Ten game. It was Beilein's first Big Ten victory.
02/14/2008	Iowa	Iowa City, IA	60-52	Another road win in the Big Ten,

				against a team that beat UM in Ann Arbor earlier in the season. UM came back after a miserable 1st half to dominate the 2nd half.
02/17/2008	Ohio State	Ann Arbor	80-70	This was probably the best win of the season. OSU was way down from last year's national-finalist team, but they were still pretty good.
02/23/2008	Illinois	Ann Arbor	49-43	Illinois is a mere shell of the team they were 2 years ago, but it was still a big win.
03/13/2008	Iowa	Indianapolis, IN	55-47	This was a big win because it came in the Big Ten Tournament. Winning a tournament game, any tournament game, is a big deal, and good practice for the future.

Good losses

Date	Opponent	Location	Score	Comments
12/22/2007	(#8) UCLA	Ann Arbor	69-54	This game was close most of the way. Michigan didn't stand a chance of winning, but they gave it a good shot.
01/22/2008	(#11) Wisconsin	Madison, WI	64-61	Michigan got within 1 point in the last 2:00, but they couldn't quite steal the upset.

Bad wins

None. There were no bad wins this year. There weren't enough wins, period.

Bad losses

Date	Opponent	Location	Score	Comments
12/01/2007	Harvard	Cambridge, MA	62-51	This is quite possibly the most embarrassing loss in UM basketball history, made worse by the fact that Harvard is coached by Tommy Amaker, the former UM coach.
12/08/2007	(#6) Duke	Durham, NC	95-67	This was a slaughter. Duke is very good, but still.
12/15/2007	Central Michigan	Ann Arbor, MI	78-67	Michigan should never lose to a Mid-American school. Ever. If the Harvard loss mentioned above isn't the most embarrassing loss in UM history, this one is.
01/19/2008	Iowa	Ann Arbor	68-60	Michigan is a better team than Iowa, but they sure didn't play like it in this one.
02/26/2008	Northwestern	Ann Arbor	62-60	Wait, I take it back: the Harvard and CMU losses weren't as embarrassing as this one. Ugh. This was Northwestern's only Big Ten win of the season.
03/14/2008	(#8) Wisconsin	Indianapolis, IN	51-34	Sure, Wisconsin was the regular

				season and Big Ten Tournament champs, but really… 34 points?

I listed 6 "good wins" and 6 "bad losses", but there were actually several more "bad losses" that I didn't bother listing. It was not a good season.

Season Statistics

The Athletic Department publishes complete statistics after every game, and they're very thorough and complete. They're also a bit much to digest. Here are the "stats lite" for this season.

First, let's look at the team shooting statistics for the season:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	709-1796 (39.5%)	228-731 (31.2%)	360-510 (70.6%)
Opponents	796-1776 (44.8%)	237-623 (38.0%)	335-489 (68.5%)
Advantage	**Opponents**	**Opponents**	**Michigan**

These stats show just what a tough season it was. Michigan's opponents took 20 less shots, and made 90 more baskets. Ouch. For an offense that lives and dies by the 3-pointer, shooting 31.2% (and giving up 38%) is bad news.

Next, let's check out the team non-shooting statistics for the season:

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	1079	390	412	160	199
Opponents	1135	483	435	101	195
Advantage	**Opp**	**Opp**	**Mich**	**Mich**	**Mich**

More bad news: getting out-rebounded by 56 rebounds for the season.

Now, let's look at the individual shooting stats for the season:

Player	Field Goals	3-Pointers	Free Throws	Points	
				Total	Per Game
Adam Block	0-0 (0.000)	0-0 (0.000)	0-0 (0.000)	0	0.0
Ron Coleman	54-143 (0.378)	23-73 (0.315)	14-22 (0.636)	145	4.8
Zack Gibson	68-141 (0.482)	12-45 (0.267)	26-36 (0.722)	174	5.4
Kelvin Grady	60-149 (0.403)	33-92 (0.359)	25-30 (0.833)	178	5.6
Manny Harris	159-417 (0.381)	42-132 (0.318)	156-191 (0.817)	516	16.1
C.J. Lee	24-72 (0.333)	13-45 (0.289)	6-8 (0.750)	67	2.1
David Merritt	10-26 (0.385)	7-14 (0.500)	4-7 (0.571)	31	1.6
K'Len Morris	8-25 (0.320)	5-16 (0.313)	3-5 (0.600)	24	2.2
Jevohn Shepherd	41-98 (0.418)	5-27 (0.185)	21-44 (0.477)	108	3.5
DeShawn Sims	149-377 (0.395)	43-142 (0.303)	54-78 (0.692)	395	12.3
Jerret Smith	6-10 (0.600)	4-6 (0.667)	4-4 (1.000)	20	4.0
Ekpe Udoh	76-174 (0.437)	6-16 (0.375)	33-56 (0.589)	191	6.0
Anthony Wright	54-164 (0.329)	35-123 (0.285)	14-29 (0.483)	157	5.1

Forget about the subs and scrubs, and look at the "regular" players. Most of the regulars shot at or above 40%, which is pretty good. Harris and Coleman were a bit below 40%,

and Sims was almost there. So, the shooting percentages for the regulars weren't too bad, but the scoring and points-per-game were weak. Only 2 players averaged double figures, and no one else was really close.

Finally, let's check out the individual non-shooting stats for the season:

Player	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Adam Block	1	0	0	0	0
Ron Coleman	97	39	31	4	7
Zack Gibson	88	11	25	22	13
Kelvin Grady	61	90	42	1	18
Manny Harris	135	86	115	7	45
C.J. Lee	44	41	20	0	24
David Merritt	27	17	11	0	3
K'Len Morris	12	5	10	0	3
Jevohn Shepherd	56	17	21	4	12
DeShawn Sims	173	29	60	24	31
Jerret Smith	10	6	6	1	2
Ekpe Udoh	160	29	36	92	27
Anthony Wright	102	20	28	5	14

The big stat that jumps out here is 115 turnovers by Harris. Sure, he scored a lot of points, and carried the team on his back at times, but he had a tendency to get a little too fancy sometimes. If he can learn to play a little more under control, he will help the team even more.

There is one more stat that jumps out: 92 blocked shots by Udoh. That's more than the rest of the team combined. He was awesome at that this season.

Team Honors

Regardless of the awards announced at the Basketball Bust, here are my awards for this year's team:

Most Valuable Player: Manny Harris

Best Defensive Player: Ekpe Udoh

Most Hustle: Kelvin Grady

Most Improved: DeShawn Sims

Final Grades

It's time for final grades for the team, and Coach Beilein:

Name	Midterm Grade	Final Grade	Comments
Freshmen			
Adam Block	Inc.	Inc.	Adam didn't play in enough games to see what he can do. He's on the team as a practice player.

Kelvin Grady	B	B	Kelvin played very well for a true freshman. He ran the offense pretty well, and he shot 3-pointers pretty well. He's often the fastest player on the floor for either team, and he can break almost any press by himself.
Manny Harris	A-	A-	Manny was everything he was expected to be. He shot well, he drove the lane, and he played good defense. He can be a little reckless sometimes, and he needs to get better at deciding when to pass and when to shoot.
K'Len Morris	C+	Inc.	K'Len looked OK in the 11 games he played in, before he left the program in mid-December for personal reasons.
Anthony Wright	C+	B-	After redshirting last season, we were eager to see how well Anthony could play. He's got a nice 3-point shot, but he needs to work on some other aspects of his game, including ballhandling, footwork, and help defense.
Sophomores			
Zack Gibson	B-	B-	Zack is another redshirt player, and he did pretty well out there. He played good, solid defense, and he's got a nice shooting touch. He needs to work on his footwork and his ballhandling a little.
DeShawn Sims	B+	B+	DeShawn was a real leader on the court, with good, if inconsistent, offense and solid defense. He needs to work on his consistency a little, and he needs to know when to abandon his outside shot and take the ball to the hole. He's too tall and physical to just play on the perimeter.
Ekpe Udoh	B-	B+	Ekpe is a great shot-blocker, and a rugged defender, but he needs to work on his ballhandling and his shot a little.
Juniors			
C.J. Lee	B-	B	C.J. is yet another redshirt player, and he did pretty well out there. He's fast, and he ran the offense pretty well. He's got a pretty good shot, but he seemed afraid to take it sometimes.
Jevohn Shepherd	C+	C	Jevohn is very energetic and athletic, and he's a tenacious defender, but he doesn't have a good complete game yet. He needs to work on his ballhandling and shooting.
Jerret Smith	B-	Inc.	Jerret looked OK in the 5 games he played in, before he was dismissed from the team in late December for disciplinary reasons.
Seniors			
Ron Coleman	B-	C+	Ron is a good solid player, but he tended to disappear out there. He's a good defender, but he's a really streaky shooter. Overall, he had a pretty disappointing senior season.

David Merritt	C-	B-	David played a lot more than expected, due to the absence of Jerret Smith. He did pretty well, and he was just starting to hit his stride when a knee injury sidelined him for most of the end of the season.
Coach			
John Beilein	B-	B	Compared to the last few coaches, he is so calm on the sidelines that it's hard to remember that he's there. That's not necessarily a bad thing. So far, his bench coaching seems to have been solid, with good use of the players he's got. It's too early to judge him on recruiting.

As you can see, almost all the player mid-term grades held even. Only Wright, Lee, and Merritt improved in the 2nd half.

Looking Ahead

Now that we've seen a year of "the Beilein system", we have a better idea of what it's all about. Beilein has been successful everywhere he's coached, and there's no reason to expect that he'll be successful at Michigan. I think it's just a matter of how long it will take.

Of course, the life-blood of any basketball program is the players. Michigan has a good core of young players returning next year, and they've all gotten a lot of valuable game experience. The Wolverines are only losing one player (Coleman), although Merritt is also a senior. However, I believe he still has at least one year of eligibility left, so he could conceivably be invited back for his redshirt senior year.

Besides the solid core of returning players, Michigan will have at least 4 new players next year. One is a transfer from Arizona, and the other 3 are incoming freshmen. Here's a quick look at all 4 of them:

Ben Cronin
7'0", 235 pounds, C
Syracuse, NY

Cronin could be the big man that Michigan needs. Udoh and Gibson did their best this season, but they were often out-matched by bigger, most powerful centers. Cronin should be able to hold his own in there.

Stuart ("Stu") Douglass
6'2", 180 pounds, G
Carmel, IN

He's a very good 3-point shooter, which is just what Michigan needs for the Beilein offense.

Zack Novak
6'4", 215 pounds, W
Chesterton, IN

He's also a very good 3-point shooter. Michigan needed more guards this season, and they're getting them for next season. It should be noted that Novak's high school runs the Beilein offense, so Novak is already very familiar with it.

Laval Lucas-Perry
6'2", 175 pounds, G
Flint, MI

LLP transferred from Arizona in December, so he'll have to wait until the Big Ten season starts next year to be eligible. However, he has been allowed to practice with the team since he transferred, so he's getting very familiar with the Beilein offense. He'll have 2.5 years of eligibility remaining.

Besides the 3 recruits and the transfer, Michigan will also have a redshirt freshman:

Eric Puls
6' 10", 205 pounds, F
Alpena, MI

Puls is a solid player, and could see some playing time next season. He sat out this season as a redshirt.

As you can see, there is reason to be optimistic. Be sure to check back in November, when I start writing columns for next season. Until then…

Go Blue!