12/08/2008 – Week #06 – An Encouraging Loss, And A Huge Win

The Week In Review

The University of Michigan men's basketball team played two games this week, both against ACC teams, and they lost the first and won the second. On Wednesday (12/03/2008), they lost at Maryland 75-70 (in the ACC/Big Ten Challenge), then on Saturday (12/06/2008), they beat (#4) Duke 81-73, in Crisler Arena. The loss and the win leave Michigan with a record of 6-2.

The loss at Maryland was encouraging because Michigan played pretty well, especially for their first game of the season in a hostile environment. The two games in Madison Square Garden for the 2K Sports Classic (against UCLA and Duke) were "neutral site" games, but the Maryland game was definitely an "away" game. The Wolverines played good steady ball, and controlled the game for most of the way, but they had a short lapse at the start of the 2nd half, and they lost their 6 point halftime lead (35-29) in just over a minute. By the time they stopped Maryland's 16-3 run, they were down by 7 points. Michigan managed to battle back, and regain the lead a couple times, but when Maryland went ahead 53-51 with 11:12 left, Michigan never led again. The key to the game was the 16-3 Maryland run right after halftime. If Michigan could have controlled that better, they might have won.

Enough talk about the encouraging loss, the real story this week (and this season) was the HUGE win over (#4) Duke in a sold-out Crisler Arena on Saturday. Duke came in undefeated, and they had beaten Michigan handily in the finals of the 2K Sports Classic just 15 days before, so Michigan faced quite a challenge. It was a great game, with lots of runs by both teams, and lots of ties (8) and lead-changes (4). Duke's biggest lead was 6 points (17-11) early in the 1st half, and Michigan eventually led by 10 (81-71) before Duke scored a meaningless basket at the end to make the final score 81-73.

Michigan won because they played better. They controlled the tempo of the game, and they confused Duke with their 1-3-1 zone. When Michigan lost to Duke back in November, Duke used lots of diagonal passes to beat the 1-3-1 zone, but UM cut those passes off this time around, and Duke was forced to throw long looping passes all the way over the defense, which gave the zone time to react. The only time Duke was effective against the zone was when they had 7'1" center Brian Zoubek in the game, but for some reason Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski kept pulling him out. He only played 14 minutes. I don't know why Krzyzewski didn't play him more, but I'm glad he didn't.

On offense, Michigan ran their offense patiently, and got lots of good looks at the basket. They drove to the basket with authority, and they got several nice back door cuts for easy baskets. They hit their outside jumpers, and they hustled for offensive rebounds and loose balls. They outplayed and outhustled Duke, and they deserved to win the game.

It was a great game, and the crowd really got into it, but in a positive way. The Maize Rage was in great form, and there was none of the brutish behavior we routinely see in the IdiotZZone in East Lansing. The rest of the Michigan crowd was loud and responsive, and even the large group of visiting Duke fans behaved themselves. Sure, the Maize Rage has a way to go before they catch up to the Cameron Crazies from Duke, but for this game at least, they should be proud of their effort.

Game Statistics

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	26-61 (42.6%)	12-29 (41.4%)	6-6 (100.0%)
Maryland	26-59 (44.1%)	5-21 (23.8%)	18-20 (90.0%)
Advantage	Maryland	Michigan	Michigan

How did Michigan lose this game, when they won most of the stats? Look at the 3-point shooting; how could Michigan make 7 more 3-pointers than Maryland and still lose the game? Maryland won the game at the free throw line. Sure, Michigan shot a better percentage than Maryland, but Maryland shot made 3 times as many free throws as Michigan. Those 12 extra points made up for the 7 extra points that Michigan got from 3-pointers.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	26	14	10	4	4
Maryland	43	14	11	3	5
Advantage	Maryland	Even	Michigan	Michigan	Maryland

Well, maybe the most significant stat isn't free-throw shooting, maybe it's Rebounds. Maryland dominated on the boards, and that led to 17 extra possessions, which is a huge difference in such a close game.

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	28-58 (48.3%)	7-16 (43.8%)	18-22 (81.8%)
Duke	31-65 (47.7%)	7-33 (21.2%)	4-6 (66.7%)
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan

Wow. I can't believe that Michigan actually won all of these stats convincingly. The big one is 3-point shooting. Sure, UM didn't get off the 20 3-pointers they should in order to win, but they did shoot over 40%, which is good. However, the real story is Duke's anemic 3-point shooting percentage. They certainly got their shots, they just kept bricking them. Until the last 3 minutes, Duke was 3-for-27 (11.1%) shooting 3-pointers, then they made 4 of their last 6 attempts to make it look a little better.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	35	16	11	1	6
Duke	34	20	13	4	6
Advantage	Michigan	Duke	Michigan	Duke	Even

These stats are a lot closer than the shooting stats, and they don't tell the story. The big stat was 3-point shooting.

Season 3-Point Shooting

The way UM's offense is set up, they need to get off at least 20 3-pointers, and hit at least 40% of them to win the big games. I'm not saying that they'll lose if they don't get 20/40, I'm just saying that if they do get 20/40, they'll win. Here's how things have gone so far:

Date	Opponent	3-Point Shooting	Result	Fits Theory?
11/06/2008	Saginaw Valley State (exhibition)	11-24 (45.8%)	W	Y
11/11/2008	Michigan Tech	8-24 (33.3%)	W	Y
11/12/2008	Northeastern	5-14 (35.7%)	W	Y
11/20/2008	UCLA	5-20 (25.0%)	W	Y
11/21/2008	Duke	6-22 (27.3%)	L	Y
11/25/2008	Norfolk State	9-27 (33.3%)	W	Y
11/29/2008	Savannah State	4-22 (18.2%)	W	Y
12/03/2008	Maryland	12-29 (41.4%)	L	N
12/06/2008	Duke	7-16 (43.8%)	W	Y
Totals		67-198 (33.8%)		8-1

For only the 2nd time in the Beilein Era (the Butler game last season and the Maryland game this week), the 40/20 Theory doesn't hold: Michigan shot at least 20 3-pointers against Maryland, and made more than 40% of them, but still lost. It's amazing.

Individual Statistics

Coach Beilein mixed up his regular starting lineup in both games. In both games, he (finally) started DeShawn Sims instead of Zack Gibson, and in the Duke game he also started Jevohn Shepherd instead of Anthony Wright. Don't get me wrong; I like Zack Gibson, but I still think Michigan is a better team with DeShawn Sims starting instead of him. Actually, if I were coaching this team, I'd start Sims and Gibson, and bring Wright off the bench. I'd probably also start Zack Novak instead of Stu Douglass. Still, it's hard to argue with Beilein's success so far this season.

Here's how the starters did:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	MD	Duke	MD	Duke	MD	Duke	MD	Duke
Stu Douglass	1-4	1-3	1-3	0-2	0-0	0-0	3	2
Manny Harris	5-15	8-15	1-5	1-1	4-4	0-0	15	17
David Merritt	0-1	1-1	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0	2
Jevohn Shepherd	Bench	1-6	Bench	0-2	Bench	1-3	Bench	3
DeShawn Sims	5-10	10-16	2-3	2-3	0-0	6-7	12	28
Anthony Wright	2-8	Bench	2-8	Bench	0-0	Bench	6	Bench
Totals	13-38 34.2%	21-31 67.7%	6-19 31.8%	3-8 37.5%	4-4 100.0%	7-10 70.0%	36	52

As a group, the starters did OK this week. Their percentages are pretty good, but they didn't score enough points in the Maryland game.

Individually, both Harris and Sims hit double figures in both games. Those 28 points that Sims had in the Duke game were a career-high. None of the other starters did much offensively.

Here's how the bench players did this week:

	Field Goals		3-Pointers		Free Throws		Points	
Player	MD	Duke	MD	Duke	MD	Duke	MD	Duke
Zack Gibson	1-3	1-2	0-0	0-0	0-0	2-2	2	4
Kelvin Grady	4-7	2-6	3-4	0-1	0-0	5-6	11	9
C.J. Lee	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	0-0	2-2	0	2

Zack Novak	4-8	4-8	3-5	4-7	1-1	2-2	12	14
Jevohn Shepherd	4-5	Starter	0-1	Starter	1-1	Starter	9	Starter
Anthony Wright	Starter	0-1	Starter	0-0	Starter	0-0	Starter	0
Totals	13-23 56.5%	7-17 41.2%	6-10 60.0%	4-8 50.0%	2-2 100.0%	11-12 91.7%	34	29

As a group, the bench players did very well this week. Their shooting percentages are excellent, and they scored a reasonable number of points.

Individually, Novak was the only bench player to hit double figures in both games, each time setting a new career-high. He played a key role in the Duke game, when he hit 2 big 3-pointers in a row to bring UM from 3 points down (53-50) to 3 points up (56-53) in less than 30 seconds with about 8 minutes left in the game. From that point on, UM never trailed.

Shepherd had a good game off the bench against Maryland, but none of the other bench players did very much.

The Big Picture

The Wolverines are already exceeding expectations. I figured that they would lose both games in New York City in the 2K Sports Classic finals, and I figured that they would lose to Duke on Saturday, but the managed to beat (#4) UCLA and (#4) Duke within 16 days. If they can win their next 4 non-conference games, and they should, they'll enter Big Ten play with a nice 10-2 record. Then, if they can go 9-9 in Big Ten play (not unreasonable), they'll have a final record of 19-12. I'm assuming they'll lose when they play at (#2) UConn in February. A record of 19-12 will definitely get them into the NIT, and if they can win a couple games in the Big Ten Tournament, they might even sneak into The Big Dance. Those 2 wins over Top 5 teams look awfully good on their "resume".

Here's the 2008-2009 schedule/results:

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Score	Record
11/06/2008 (Thu)	Saginaw Valley State (exh)	Ann Arbor	W	81-55	0-0
2K Sports Classic benefiting Coaches vs. Cancer					
11/11/2008 (Tue)	Michigan Tech	Ann Arbor	W	77-55	1-0
11/12/2008 (Wed)	Northeastern	Ann Arbor	W	76-56	2-0
11/20/2008 (Thu)	UCLA	New York, NY	W	55-52	3-0
11/21/2008 (Fri)	Duke	New York, NY	L	71-56	3-1
11/25/2008 (Tue)	Norfolk State	Ann Arbor	W	83-49	4-1
11/29/2008 (Sat)	Savannah State	Ann Arbor	W	66-64 (ot)	5-1
ACC/Big Ten Challenge					
12/03/2008 (Wed)	at Maryland	College Park, MD	L	75-70	5-2
12/06/2008 (Sat)	Duke	Ann Arbor	W	81-73	6-2
12/13/2008 (Sat)	Eastern Michigan	Ann Arbor			
12/20/2008 (Sat)	vs. Oakland	Auburn Hills, MI			
12/22/2008 (Mon)	Florida Gulf Coast	Ann Arbor			
12/29/2008 (Mon)	North Carolina Central	Ann Arbor			
12/31/2009 (Wed)	Wisconsin	Ann Arbor			
01/04/2009 (Sun)	Illinois	Ann Arbor			
01/07/2009 (Wed)	at Indiana	Bloomington, IN			
01/11/2009 (Sun)	Iowa	Ann Arbor			
01/14/2009 (Wed)	at Illinois	Champaign, IL			
01/17/2009 (Sat)	Ohio State	Ann Arbor			
01/20/2009 (Tue)	at Penn State	State College, PA			

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Score	Record
01/24/2009 (Sat)	Northwestern	Ann Arbor			
01/28/2009 (Wed)	at Ohio State	Columbus, OH			
01/31/2009 (Sat)	at Purdue	West Lafayette, IN			
02/05/2009 (Thu)	Penn State	Ann Arbor			
02/07/2009 (Sat)	at Connecticut	Storrs, CT			
02/10/2009 (Tue)	Michigan State	Ann Arbor			
02/15/2009 (Sun)	at Northwestern	Evanston, IL			
02/19/2009 (Thu)	Minnesota	Ann Arbor			
02/22/2009 (Sun)	at Iowa	Iowa City, IA			
02/26/2009 (Thu)	Purdue	Ann Arbor			
03/01/2009 (Sun)	at Wisconsin	Madison, WI			
03/07/2009 (Sat) or 03/08/2009 (Sun)	at Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN			
Big Ten Tournament					
03/12/2009 (Thu)	First Round	Indianapolis, IN			
03/13/2009 (Fri)	Quarterfinal	Indianapolis, IN			
03/14/2009 (Sat)	Semifinal	Indianapolis, IN			
03/15/2009 (Sun)	Championship	Indianapolis, IN			

The Upcoming Week

As you can see in the schedule above, Michigan only plays one game this week. On Saturday (12/13/2008, 4:00 p.m.) they play at home vs. Eastern Michigan. This is a game that Michigan should win handily, but you never know. Come on down to Crisler and cheer on the Wolverines.

Go Blue!