12/29/2008 – Week #09 – My Longest Title Ever: Happy Holidays, Happy New Year, Top 25, An Unimpressive Win, First-Trimester Grades, And Big Ten Preview

The Week In Review

As you can see, there's a lot to cover this week, so let's get started.

First of all, "Happy Holidays" to all my readers, and a "Happy New Year" as well. 2008 sure was interesting, and not always in a good way. In Michigan sports, there was the good (a 3rd straight Big Ten title for the baseball team), the bad (a 10-22 record for the men's basketball team), and the ugly (a 3-9 football season). In "the real world", we saw three important markets (jobs, housing, and stock) all tank in the same year. Let's hope that 2009 is a lot better all the way around.

Now for some good news: for the first time in almost 2 years, the University of Michigan men's basketball team is ranked in the AP Top 25! In the poll that came out last Monday (12/22/2008), Michigan was ranked #24. This is a big deal, since Top 25 teams get a lot more attention. Michigan has been close to being ranked for the last few weeks, and they finally cracked the Top 25.

Next, on to our "unimpressive win". The team only played one game this week, and they won it. On Monday (12/22/2008), they beat Florida Gulf Coast University (FGCU) 76-59, in Crisler Arena. The win raises Michigan's record to 9-2.

On the positive side, Michigan did win the game, but they didn't look very good doing it. They built up a nice 24-point lead (49-25) with 15:13 left in the 2nd half, and it looked like the game was over, then they tried their hardest to throw it all away. The next 10 minutes was some of the worst basketball Michigan has played this season. It looked a lot like the disorganized mayhem of last season. Michigan's shots stopped falling, FGCU couldn't miss, and the loose balls all went to FGCU. Next thing you know, it's an 8-point game (57-49) with 5:11 left. To their credit, the UM players didn't panic, and they finally stopped the bleeding and finished the game with a 19-10 run to win by 17.

Even though it was a ragged win, it was still a win. I suspect that the Michigan players were tired, since they just played two days before (Saturday 12/20/2008) against Oakland in The Palace Of Auburn Hills, and I also suspect that they had a minor "pre-holiday hangover". They certainly played like they just wanted to get the game over with and go on break.

Next on the agenda: first-trimester grades. There are at least 32 games this season, depending on how Michigan does in the Big Ten Tournament, and it breaks up nicely into 3 sections: the first 11 games, all non-conference, the first half of the Big Ten schedule, including one more non-conference game, and the second half of the Big Ten schedule, including another non-conference game and the Big Ten Tournament. See below for the first-trimester grades.

Finally, the Big Ten season starts next week, before the New Year. In all the years I've been following Michigan basketball, this is the first time I can remember a Big Ten game in December. So, it's time for a look at the Big Ten, here.

Back to a detailed look at the FGCU game:

Game Statistics

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	23-64 (35.9%)	12-42 (28.6%)	18-23 (78.3%)
FGCU	20-51 (39.2%)	10-20 (50.0%)	9-16 (56.3%)
Advantage	FGCU	FGCU	Michigan

How do you win a game by 17 points when you lose the stats battle this badly? Free-throw shooting. Michigan made more free throws than FGCU attempted.

Incidentally, the 42 3-pointers that Michigan took broke the old record (33) that they set two games ago (12/13/2008) against Eastern Michigan. Unfortunately, they didn't break the record they set in that same game for made 3-pointers (16). 12-for-42 shooting is pretty weak.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	42	15	15	2	7
FGCU	38	13	26	3	7
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan	FGCU	Even

Sure, Michigan won almost all the stats, and they won the game by 17 points, but when you compare the Assists and Turnovers in this game to the last two games (24 assists and 5 turnovers in each), you can see how much sloppier this one was. It was very fortunate that FGCU committed 26 turnovers.

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. In the past, I counted a win where UM didn't hit 20/40 as "fits the theory", but no more. To fit my theory, they either have to hit 20/40 and win, or hit less than 20/40 and lose. If they win, but fail to hit 20/40, that doesn't fit my theory.

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	N
11/12/2008	Northeastern	5-14 (35.7%)	W	N
11/20/2008	UCLA	5-20 (25.0%)	W	N
11/21/2008	Duke	6-22 (27.3%)	L	Y
11/25/2008	Norfolk State	9-27 (33.3%)	W	N
11/29/2008	Savannah State	4-22 (18.2%)	W	N
12/03/2008	Maryland	12-29 (41.4%)	L	N
12/06/2008	Duke	7-16 (43.8%)	W	N
12/13/2008	Eastern Michigan	16-33 (48.5%)	W	Y
12/20/2008	Oakland	13-29 (44.8%)	W	Y
12/22/2008	Florida Gulf Coast	12-42 (28.6%)	W	N
Totals		108-302 (35.8%)		4-8

Well, they certainly got off more than 20 3-pointers vs. FGCU, but they certainly didn't hit anywhere near 40% of them. I guess they can win even if they don't hit 20/40.

Individual Statistics

Coach Beilein used his latest starting lineup again. Here's how the starters did:

Player	Field Goals	3-Pointers	Free Throws	Points
Stu Douglass	3-6	2-5	4-4	12
Manny Harris	2-9	2-8	0-0	6
David Merritt	0-3	0-3	2-2	2
Jevohn Shepherd	1-3	0-1	2-2	4
DeShawn Sims	7-12	2-3	4-5	20
Totals	13-33 39.4%	6-20 30.0%	12-13 92.3%	44

As a group, the starters did fairly well this week. Their percentages are decent, and they scored a reasonable number of points.

Individually, Douglass and Sims were the only starters to hit double figures. Douglass played a good, solid game, but Sims was outstanding, with 20 rebounds to go with his 20 points.

For the first time this season, and only the 5th time in his career, Harris failed to hit double figures. He had 6 points at halftime, and couldn't score in the 2nd half. Still, he did what he could out there by leading the team with 5 assists.

Merritt did what was expected from him, and Shepherd had another unimpressive game.

Here's how the bench players did this week:

Player	Field Goals	3-Pointers	Free Throws	Points
Zack Gibson	0-3	0-2	0-1	0
Kelvin Grady	5-12	4-10	0-0	14
C.J. Lee	1-3	0-2	2-2	4
Laval Lucas-Perry	3-5	2-3	2-3	10
Zack Novak	1-8	0-5	2-4	4
Totals	10-31 32.3%	6-22 27.3%	6-10 60.0%	32

As a group, the bench players did pretty well. Their shooting percentages are acceptable, and they scored a reasonable number of points.

Individually, both Grady and Lucas-Perry hit double figures. They both hit key 3-pointers in the last 5:00 of the game, when FGCU had closed the gap to just 8 points.

Lee and Novak both contributed, but Gibson didn't do much. Once again, Anthony Wright didn't play. I don't know what's up with him. I don't know if he's injured, or being disciplined, or if he has just not been productive enough lately.

First-Trimester Grades

Here are the first-trimester grades:

Player	Grade	Comments
Freshmen		

Ben Cronin	Inc.	Ben only played in 2 games, for a total of 10 minutes, and now he's going to be redshirted for this season due to a hip injury that requires surgery. He'll still have freshman eligibility next season.
Stu Douglass	B	Stu has had some good games, and some forgettable games, which is normal for a freshman. He's got a great 3-point shot, and he runs the floor well and plays good defense. He just needs to get a little more consistent.
Laval Lucas-Perry	Inc.	Laval has only played in 2 games since becoming eligible after transferring from Arizona. He has looked very good in those 2 games, but he still gets an "Incomplete". If I had to give him a grade based on the 2 games he has played in, I would give him an "A-".
Zack Novak	B	When Stu Douglass isn't playing well, Zack Novak usually is, and vice versa. They are almost completely interchangeable. Zack is a slightly better jumper and defender than Stu.
Corey Person	Inc.	Corey hasn't played in any games, so we haven't seen what he can do. He's on the team as a practice player.
Eric Puls	Inc.	Eric hasn't played in enough games to see what he can do. He's on the team as a practice player.
Sophomores		
Kelvin Grady	B	Kelvin has played pretty well coming off the bench. He runs the offense well, he's very fast, and he's shot 3-pointers well.
Manny Harris	A	Manny was very good last season, and he has been fabulous this season. He shoots well, he can drive the lane, he rebounds well, and he plays good defense. Most importantly, he's a leader on the floor.
Anthony Wright	C+	Anthony began the season as a starter, but he has moved further and further down the bench as the season has gone on. 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.
Juniors		
Zack Gibson	B-	Zack has done pretty well this season. He's the tallest player on the team, with Ben Cronin out. He plays 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	A	DeShawn is the most improved player this season. He has been a real leader on the court, with good offense and defense. He's been a beast on the boards, often playing against the biggest players on the opposing teams.
Seniors		
C.J. Lee	B-	C.J. is fast, and he runs the offense pretty well. He's got a pretty good shot, but he seems afraid to take it sometimes. He needs to be more aggressive out there.
David Merritt	B	David has started all 11 games, and he's done a nice job out there. He runs the offense very well, and he can bring the ball upcourt against heavy pressure. When he does shoot, he shoots pretty well.
Jevohn Shepherd	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.
Coach		
John Beilein	B+	Coach Beilein has really turned things around, after a rough first season. He went out and got a couple players who are a good fit for his system, and he's done a good job teaching that system to the whole team.

These are pretty good grades, which makes sense since UM has played pretty well so far.

Big Ten Preview

I've spun off my Big Ten Report to a separate article for this season.

The Big Picture

Michigan won another game they should have won, and they won it by 17 points. They still have one more winnable non-conference games left before they start Big Ten play.

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	W	91-60	7-2
12/20/2008 (Sat)	vs. Oakland	Auburn Hills, MI	W	89-76	8-2
12/22/2008 (Mon)	Florida Gulf Coast	Ann Arbor	W	76-59	9-2
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			
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)	at Minnesota	Minneapolis, MN			

Date	Opponent	Site	Result	Score	Record
or 03/08/2009 (Sun)					
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 plays three games this week. On Monday (12/29/2008, 7:00 p.m., Big Ten Network) they play North Carolina Central University, on Wednesday (12/31/2008, 2:00 p.m., ESPN2) they play Wisconsin, and on Sunday (01/04/2009, noon, Big Ten Network) they play Illinois. All three games are in Crisler Arena. Come on down to Crisler, and cheer on the Wolverines.

Go Blue!