Nothing But 'Net – Week #10 (01/05/2009) – A Rollercoaster Week

The Week In Review

After the University of Michigan men's basketball team beat Duke back on 12/07/2008, head coach John Beilein warned the media that the rest of the season would be a rollercoaster, which he even demonstrated with hand-waving motions. Now we're starting to see what he means. The team played three games this week, and they won two and lost one of them. It was like a rollercoaster: they "won ugly", then looked pretty bad in their loss, then looked pretty tough in their win. On Monday (12/29/2008), they beat North Carolina Central University (NCCU) 77-57, on Wednesday (12/31/2008), they lost to Wisconsin 73-61, then on Sunday (01/04/2009), they beat Illinois 74-64. All three games were in Crisler Arena. The 2-1 record for the week leaves Michigan with a record of 11-3 (1-1 in Big Ten play).

The NCCU game was supposed to be a "cupcake" game, and it was, but Michigan played a pretty sloppy game, and didn't dominate the way they were expected to. They kept building up respectable 16-18 point leads, then they watched them shrink back down to 6-8 points. To their credit, once they got the lead in the game, they never surrendered it, but they also took a long time to sew the game up.

The Wisconsin game was a pretty dreary affair. Wisconsin started the game on fire, hitting 9 of their first 10 shots, including two 3-pointers. They also hit all 8 of their free throws in the 1st half. On the flip side, Michigan started the game cold, hitting only 4 of their first 13 shots. So, Wisconsin jumped out to an early double-digit lead, and never trailed the rest of the way. Michigan got the lead down to 5 (26-21) in the 1st half, and 7 (46-39) in the 2nd half, but Wisconsin was ahead by at least 10 points for most of the game.

The Illinois game was a lesson in how Michigan can win a "toss up" game (like the Wisconsin game): control the tempo of the game. Wisconsin just plain ran away with the game on Wednesday, but Michigan did a much better job of controlling the game on Sunday against Illinois. Illinois led for most of the game, but Michigan kept the score close, and once the Wolverines took the lead late in the game, they did a great job of finishing it up.

Game Statistics

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	24-61 (39.3%)	9-30 (30.0%)	20-30 (66.7%)
NCCU	24-67 (35.8%)	5-15 (33.3%)	4-5 (80.0%)
Advantage	Michigan	NCCU	NCCU

Here's a deceptive stat: UM shot 66.7% at the free-throw line, and NCCU shot 80%. So, where did Michigan win the game? At the free-throw line. Even though they shot a lousy percentage, Michigan still scored 16 more points there than NCCU did.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	42	17	11	4	9
NCCU	42	13	17	2	9
Advantage	Even	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan	Even

These stats are too close to make much difference. It was free-throw shooting that won the game for Michigan.

Moving on, let's look at the shooting statistics from the Wisconsin game:

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	20-51 (39.2%)	8-24 (33.3%)	13-19 (68.4%)
Wisconsin	27-46 (58.7%)	6-14 (42.9%)	13-17 (76.5%)
Advantage	Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Wisconsin

Wisconsin won all three of the shooting stats, and that's why they won the game. They just shot better than Michigan.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	26	12	7	2	2
Wisconsin	30	14	8	1	3
Advantage	Wisconsin	Wisconsin	Michigan	Michigan	Wisconsin

These stats are too close to make much difference. The real story here is the shooting stats.

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

Team	Field goals	3-Pointers	Free throws
Michigan	26-53 (49.1%)	11-27 (40.7%)	11-14 (78.6%)
Illinois	28-62 (45.2%)	6-19 (31.6%)	2-3 (66.7%)
Advantage	Michigan	Michigan	Michigan

Michigan won all three of the shooting stats, and that's why they won the game. These stats are all big, but the biggest of all is 3-point shooting.

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

Team	Rebounds	Assists	Turnovers	Blocks	Steals
Michigan	30	18	8	3	6
Illinois	33	23	8	2	3
Advantage	Illinois	Illinois	Even	Michigan	Michigan

These stats all balance each other out. The key stats are the shooting stats.

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

Date	Opponent	3-Point Shooting	Result	Fits Theory?
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
12/29/2008	North Carolina Central	9-30 (30.0%)	W	N
12/31/2008	Wisconsin	8-24 (33.3%)	L	Y
01/04/2008	Illinois	11-27 (40.7%)	W	Y
Totals		136-383 (35.5%)		6-9

The Wisconsin and Illinois games offer perfect examples of the importance of the 3-pointer in Michigan's offense: they shot less than 40% against Wisconsin and lost, then they shot better than 40% against Illinois and won.

Individual Statistics

Coach Beilein used three different starting lineups this week. He used the lineup he had used for a few games in a row (Stu Douglass, Manny Harris, David Merritt, Jevohn Shepherd, and DeShawn Sims) in the NCCU game, then he started Zack Novak in place of Shepherd in the Wisconsin game. He started Novak again in the Illinois game, but he started Laval Lucas-Perry instead of Douglass.

Here's how the starters did:

	Field Goals			3-Pointers			Free Throws			Points		
Player	NCCU	Wisc	Ill	NCCU	Wisc	Ill	NCCU	Wisc	Ill	NCCU	Wisc	Ill
Stu Douglass	3-8	0-5	Bench	1-5	0-3	Bench	0-1	0-0	Bench	7	0	Bench
Manny Harris	7-18	3-13	6-15	2-5	0-2	0-5	13-16	3-4	4-4	29	9	16
Laval Lucas-Perry	Bench	Bench	4-10	Bench	Bench	3-7	Bench	Bench	2-2	Bench	Bench	13
David Merritt	0-1	1-2	1-1	0-1	0-1	0-0	2-2	0-0	0-0	0	2	2
Zack Novak	Bench	7-11	4-5	Bench	5-8	3-4	Bench	1-2	0-1	Bench	20	11
Jevohn Shepherd	2-4	Bench	DNP	0-1	Bench	DNP	0-2	Bench	DNP	4	Bench	DNP
DeShawn Sims	6-11	5-6	4-11	2-4	1-1	3-6	3-4	3-4	2-2	17	14	13
Totals	18-42 42.9%	16-37 43.2%	19-42 45.2%	5-16 31.3%	6-15 40.0%	9-22 40.1%	18-25 72.0%	7-10 70.0%	8-9 88.9%	57	45	55

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

Individually, three of the starters hit double figures in every game they started: Lucas-Perry, Novak, and Sims. Of course, only Sims started all three games; Novak started two games, and Lucas-Perry started one.

Sims played well in all three games. He shot well, including 3-pointers, he played good defense, and he got lots of rebounds.

Novak had a career-high with his 20 points in his first career start, against Wisconsin, and he played very well in both games he started. He shot well, he hustled, he played very good defense, and he got lots of rebounds.

Lucas-Perry also played well in his first career start, against Illinois. He shot well, he ran the offense pretty well, and he played pretty good defense.

Even though he didn't hit double figures in all three games he started, Harris had a pretty good week. He almost matched his career-high (30 points) in the NCCU game, and he was the high scorer in the Illinois game. However, he struggled in the Wisconsin game, and it cost Michigan any shot at winning the game. As goes Harris, so goes Michigan this season.

Douglass had a mediocre game against NCCU, and a lousy game against Wisconsin. Merritt did what was expected from him, and Shepherd had another unimpressive game.

Here's how the bench players did this week:

	Field Goals			3-Pointers			Free Throws			Points		
Player	NCCU	Wisc	Ill	NCCU	Wisc	Ill	NCCU	Wisc	Ill	NCCU	Wisc	Ill
Stu Douglass	Starter	Starter	0-0	Starter	Starter	0-0	Starter	Starter	0-0	Starter	Starter	0
Zack Gibson	2-6	1-2	4-5	0-3	0-1	1-1	0-0	0-1	1-2	4	2	10
Kelvin Grady	0-4	0-2	3-6	0-4	0-1	1-4	0-1	0-0	2-3	0	0	9
C.J. Lee	0-1	1-2	0-0	0-1	1-1	0-0	2-2	0-0	0-0	2	3	0
Laval Lucas-Perry	3-6	2-8	Starter	3-4	1-6	Starter	1-2	6-8	Starter	10	11	Starter
Zack Novak	1-2	Starter	Starter	1-2	Starter	Starter	0-0	Starter	Starter	3	Starter	Starter
Eric Puls	0-0	DNP	DNP	0-0	DNP	DNP	0-0	DNP	DNP	0	DNP	DNP
Jevohn Shepherd	Starter	0-0	DNP	Starter	0-0	DNP	Starter	0-0	DNP	Starter	0	DNP
Anthony Wright	0-0	DNP	DNP	0-0	DNP	DNP	1-2	DNP	DNP	1	DNP	DNP
Totals	6-19 31.6%	4-14 28.6%	7-11 63.6%	4-14 28.6%	2-9 22.2%	2-5 40.0%	4-7 57.1%	6-9 66.7%	3-5 60.0%	20	16	19

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

Individually, only Lucas-Perry hit double figures in every game in which he came off the bench. In fact, he has hit double figures in all 5 games he has played for Michigan. He has earned his spot in the starting lineup.

The rest of the bench players are a real mixed bag. Gibson was the only other bench player to hit double figures, in the Illinois game, but he didn't do much in the other 2 games. Grady almost hit double figures in the Illinois game, but he was terrible in the other 2 games. Douglass and Novak didn't do much in their only non-starting games this week. Lee was ineffective in all 3 games. Puls only played for a few minutes in one game, and didn't take a shot.

Then there are the two former starters who have worked their way so far down the bench that they don't even get in the game very often: Shepherd and Wright. Shepherd actually started one game this week (NCCU), came off the bench in the next game (Wisconsin), and never got in at all in the Illinois game. Wright came off the bench against NCCU, and didn't get in the other two games. I don't know what's up with these two players, but I hope they can get back into the mix, and soon.

Big Ten Report

My weekly Big Ten Report is now a separate article, here.

The Big Picture

Michigan won their "should win" game this week, and split their "toss up" games. This puts them solidly on track to earn at least an NIT bid, and maybe even sneak into the NCAA Tournament. There's still a lot of basketball left to be played, but so far Michigan is slightly exceeding expectations.

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	W	77-57	10-2
12/31/2009 (Wed)	Wisconsin	Ann Arbor	L	73-61	10-3 (0-1)
01/04/2009 (Sun)	Illinois	Ann Arbor	W	74-64	11-3 (1-1)
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) 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 plays two games this week. On Wednesday (01/07/2009, 6:30 p.m., Big Ten Network) they play at Indiana, and on Sunday (01/11/2009, 11:30 a.m., Big Ten Network) they play Iowa, in Crisler Arena. Come on down to Crisler, and cheer on the Wolverines.

Go Blue!