03/27/2000 - 1999-2000 Season Wrap-Up, Final Grades, and Awards

The 1999-2000 season is now officially over for the University of Michigan men's basketball team, so it's time for a wrap-up, final grades, and awards.

Overview

It certainly was an interesting season, with a lot of news, both good and bad. On the positive side, the freshman class played very well, and many of the returning players improved from last year. On the negative side, UM suffered through one of their longest losing streaks in history, and their worst defeat in history. They only beat 2 teams that were ranked in the Top 25 at one time or another (Purdue and Illinois), and only one of them was ranked at the time (Illinois). Their final record was 15-14 (6-10 in the Big Ten). After a 9-2 start, the Wolverines had a rough time, going 9-12 the rest of the way, including the infamous 7-game losing streak and first round losses in the Big Ten Tournament and the NIT.

Certainly, the loss of Jamal Crawford for almost half of the season (12 games) hurt the team, but that wasn't the whole story. In some of the losses, UM hung around for a while, then ran out of gas at the end. That isn't too worrisome. It was the games where they had a poor start, got way behind early, and never made a serious run at getting back in the game that were depressing. Some of the blame has to be placed on the coaching, and some of it on the players themselves. With a young team like this, it wasn't surprising that the offense was simplified, which made it easier to defend against. The team didn't have much control over that, but they did have control over their level of intensity and determination. They didn't quit often, but they did quit occasionally. That's where coaching comes in.

Most wins are good wins, and most losses are bad losses, but there are such things as bad wins, and good losses. UM had some of each this season:

Good wins:

At Georgia Tech (12/01/1999) Score: 80-77 (Quality opponent)
Home vs. Colorado State (01/02/2000) Score: 87-80 (Quality opponent)
At Purdue (01/08/2000) Score: 88-86 (2 OT) (Big road win)
Home vs. #22 Illinois (01/16/2000) Score: 95-91 (OT) (Big win)

Bad wins:

Home vs. UDM (11/23/1999) Score: 66-62 (Barely escaped with a win)
Home vs. Kent (12/08/1999) Score: 75-73 (Barely escaped with a win)
At Northwestern (02/26/2000) Score: 61-55 (OT) (Barely escaped with a win)

Good losses:

Home vs. #14 Duke (12/11/1999) Score: 97-104 (Within 2 points near the end)
Home vs. #21 Purdue (02/24/2000) Score: 75-78 (Almost pulled it out)

Bad losses:

At Boston College (12/19/1999) Score: 71-89 (18 points)
At Indiana (01/25/2000) Score: 50-85 (35 points)
Home vs. MSU (02/01/2000) Score: 62-82 (20 points)
Home vs. OSU (02/06/2000) Score: 67-88 (21 points)
At Illinois (02/09/2000) Score: 59-75 (16 points)
At Wisconsin (02/16/2000) Score: 59-75 (16 points)

At MSU (03/04/2000) Score: 63-114 (51 points - New UM record)
Big Ten Tournament vs. Penn State (03/09/2000) Score: 66-76 (10 points)
NIT at Notre Dame (03/15/2000) Score: 65-75 (10 points)

Final Grades
The final grades are in, and they're not as good as the mid-term grades. Only a couple of the players (Gavin Groninger and Josh Asselin) improved in the second half of the season, and most of them slid a little.

Class	Name	Mid-Term Grade	Final Grade
Fresh	Leland Anderson	Inc (B-)	C
Fresh	LaVell Blanchard	A	A
Fresh	Jamal Crawford	A-	Inc (A-)
Fresh	Kevin Gaines	A	B+
Fresh	Gavin Groninger	B-	B
Soph	Leon Jones	B+	B-
Soph	Chris Young	B+	B+
Junior	Josh Asselin	B-	B
Junior	Brandon Smith	A	B
Senior	Peter Vignier	C-	C-
Coach	Brian Ellerbe	N/A	C+

Awards
Most Improved: Chris Young
Least Improved: Peter Vignier
Most Consistent: LaVell Blanchard
Least Consistent: Brandon Smith
Most Hustle: Chris Young
Most Exciting: Jamal Crawford
Best Defender: Kevin Gaines
Rookie of the Year: LaVell Blanchard

Comments
Leland Anderson - Leland had his moments when he played well, and we could see flashes of his potential, but usually he looked lost on the court. A deep thigh bruise cost him several games, and limited his game time.

LaVell Blanchard - LaVell was the Big Ten Newcomer/Freshman of the Year, and he deserved it. He had a couple "off" games, but usually delivered a quality performance. He's a great rebounder, and a shooter, and a quiet leader.

Jamal Crawford - Jamal was one of the most exciting players in college basketball, until he was suspended. He's fast, he's a good shooter, a vocal leader, and he brought incredible enthusiasm to the team and the fans. He was missed.

Kevin Gaines - Kevin did a very good job of running the point. Once Jamal was out of the picture, he occasionally tried to do too much, and made more

mistakes than usual. His shooting was inconsistent, but he was another quiet leader on the floor. He is certainly the fastest player on the team, maybe in the whole league.

Gavin Groninger - Gavin came out of his shell in the second half of the season, and showed us some talents that he hadn't used in the first half. His 3-point shooting was wildly inconsistent, but when he was "on", he was quite a weapon.

Leon Jones - Leon was inconsistent. He had some pretty good games, then he would vanish for several games in a row. The team really could have used some production and some leadership from him, especially once Jamal was suspended, and he didn't deliver it.

Chris Young - Chris played hard every minute he was on the floor. He occasionally made mental or physical errors, but his heart was in the right place, and he tried as hard as he could. He often took on players much bigger than he is, and played them even. He's a true Michigan Man.

Josh Asselin - Josh was inconsistent. When he was good, he was unstoppable, and he won a couple of games almost singlehandedly. When he was "off", he was a non-factor. He and Leon Jones and Brandon Smith were the three guys who could have provided some production and some leadership when Jamal was suspended, and none of them delivered it.

Brandon Smith - Brandon was inconsistent. His first few games back from his knee injury, he played better each time out, and was on the way to becoming a weapon and a leader. Then he leveled off, and even regressed. He's another player who could have contributed some production and some leadership when Jamal was suspended, and he didn't deliver it.

Peter Vignier - Peter saved his best games for the very end of the season, and showed us what he was capable of doing. Unfortunately, he didn't do it much during the first 26 games of the season, or the other 3 years of his career. His poor hands and slow feet cost him lots of playing time.

Brian Ellerbe - Brian did a great job recruiting the freshman class, and he did a pretty good job of developing them into players. The simplified offense he was forced to run for most of the season was too easy to defend, and it was a problem. The team defense was woeful, and needs to be shored up for next season. He did a pretty good job of bench coaching, with decent substitutions and timeouts. I don't think his game preparations were as good as they needed to be, and I don't think he did enough to motivate the team, especially in the depths of the 7-game losing streak.

Conclusions

The best thing that happens to freshmen is that they become sophomores. This year's team showed a lot of talent, but some of it was pretty raw. Next year, everyone will be a little bit better, and some players will be a lot better. After serving the last 2 games of his 14 game suspension, Jamal Crawford will rejoin the team, and that will help a lot. As a whole, the team will be better next year, and should be a contender for a bid to the NCAA Tournament, and perhaps for the Big Ten crown.

Have a nice summer. Go Blue!