11/14/2000 – Week #01 - The Exhibition Games

Yes, I'm back for another year of basketball reporting for UMGoBlue.COM!

Things are going to be a little different this year. Instead of reporting on each game right after it's played, I'm going to write a summary article once a week, on Monday, describing the previous week. However, these articles will be more than just a rehash of the details of the games, which you can get elsewhere (UMGoBlue.com, "The Ann Arbor News", etc.). I'm going to look at trends, for the week and the whole season. I'm going to track individual players, and follow their progress. I'm going to look at The Big Picture.

There's another thing that's different this year: I'm back in school at UM! After a short (22 year) gap since I got my undergrad degree from UM in 1978, I'm enrolled in the School of Information http://www.si.umich.edu , working on my Masters in Human-Computer Interaction (HCI). It's fun, it's exciting, it's very interesting, and it's a ton of work. I'm going to school part-time, working full-time, and trying to keep up with my other responsibilities around the house and with my family. Whew! So, if I'm a day late getting my article posted on the site, that's probably why.

Enough administrivia. On to basketball! This year's team promises to be pretty exciting and competitive. I don't think they have the talent or the depth to challenge for the Big Ten title (yet), but an upper-division finish isn't out of the question. They might get thumped by 40 or 50 points by some of the bullies on their schedule, but they could also sneak up and upset some of them as well.

I don't intend to dwell on it, but I do have to say at least once how frustrating it is to think about how good the team could have been this year, if Kevin Gaines and Jamal Crawford were on it. Toss in Brandon Smith, and we were looking at a team that could have contended for the Big Ten crown, and been in the Top 10. There, I got it out of my system (for now).

The Wolverines played two games in the last week, both exhibitions. On Tuesday (11/07/2000), they lost 71-70 to a cobbled together version of the Grand Rapids Hoops CBA team, and on Sunday (11/12/2000), they beat up on Wayne State 82-56. I didn't get to see the Grand Rapids game (too much homework), but I did go to the WSU game. My initial impressions: They look good, but a little green. It looks like they're going to take a while to "gel" into a team. They have some good talent at every position, and pretty good depth.

The four new freshmen are all impressive, especially Josh Moore and Bernard Robinson, Jr. Avery Queen is fun to watch, and a real sparkplug out there. Maurice Searight has potential, but it's too early to tell about him yet. Coach Ellerbe tried many different lineup combinations, and some of them worked a lot better than others. Josh Moore has good hands, and moves his feet pretty well for a big man. Make that a HUGE man. He does a good job of using his size to clog up the middle, and he's got a nice catch-and-shoot move under the basket.

The group of returning players is also solid. LaVell Blanchard sat out both exhibition games with a mild ankle sprain, but he's the leader of this team. Josh Asselin is the only senior, and he's capable of becoming a leader as well. Gavin Groninger, Leon Jones, and Chris Young are all solid players who can have a big game at any time.

The non-conference schedule begins on Friday (11/17/2000), when UM travels to Rochester, MI for a game against Oakland University. That's the only game between now and next Monday. See you then.