11/28/2000 – Week #03 - The Early Non-Conference Games Cont'd

This was a much better week for the UM basketball team. They won both of their games, and they looked good doing it. Everyone got to play in both games, and lots of players played well. The scores were 92-78 vs. Western Michigan on Tuesday (11/21/2000) and 98-83 vs. Wagner on Saturday (11/25/2000). This improves UM's record to 2-1. In both games, UM could have won by bigger margins, but coach Brian Ellerbe put the scrubs in and that kept the margin down. The competition wasn't much different than Oakland, but the intensity level was a lot better for the last two games. The other important thing this season seems to be: focus. The Wolverines didn't have it (at all) vs. Oakland, and they lost. They did have it since then, and they've won. Both games were games they could have lost, but they didn't. They did the right thing: got ahead early, and stayed ahead. If either opponent had managed to get ahead by 6 or 8 points, I'm afraid UM might have panicked and lost their focus.

In both games LaVell Blanchard played well, but in a quiet way. He hit some big 3-pointers, but he was so calm about it, it didn't get the team very excited. It's hard to find fault with someone who plays as well and as consistently as LaVell does, but he could really help get the rest of the team fired up if he showed a little more emotion out there. Gavin Groninger is the same way. He got a lot of quiet points vs. WMU as well. Sure, the quiet points count, but not as much as the spectacular points. That was the reason the Fab Five were so popular: they went for style points whenever they could. They would rather have a spectacular monster dunk for 2 points than a calm 3-pointer. As a fan, I tend to agree with them, but I can see why many basketball purists (and coaches) like the "boring" points.

Besides the players scoring "quiet" points, there have also been some players who have vanished for long stretches already this season. They get out there, put in their minutes, and don't contribute much. In the WMU game, Leon Jones was invisible, and Josh Asselin didn't do much. In the Wagner game, they both did better, but Gavin Groninger and Maurice Searight disappeared. That's OK, since UM has a pretty long and deep bench this year, but it would be encouraging to see more consistency.

Avery Queen is another player who hasn't been very consistent. He had the best game of his short career vs. Wagner, but before then, his shooting had been pretty dismal. Let's hope he's starting to find his game.

Bernard Robinson Jr. played two good, steady games, and Maurice Searight played well vs. WMU. I think they'll really help the team this year, although both of them could easily make a Big Mistake at a Crucial Point In The Game, and cost the team a win or two. I can excuse that when they're just freshmen.

Josh Moore played well in both games, and is a welcome addition to the team. The big story of the season so far is Chris Young. He had a great game against WMU, and another good game against Wagner. All of his points were "loud", and they really helped fire up the team. Blanchard and Groninger may have scored more points, but Young was the leader out there, especially for the WMU game.

The schedule gets a lot harder now:

Tue	Nov 28	Wake Forest (ESPN)	Ann Arbor, MI	7:00 PM
Sat	Dec 2	Maryland	Washington, D.C.	1:00 PM
Sun	Dec 3	St John's/G. Washington	Washington, D.C.	3:00/5:00 PM

Sat	Dec 9	Duke (ESPN)	Durham, N.C.	9:00 PM

If they can win 2 of the next 4 games, they'll be in great shape. I don't hold out much hope for the Duke game, but maybe Wake Forest and Geo. Washington. Even 1-3 would be OK. 0-4 would be understandable, but not very encouraging.

I'll be back next week to write about the first 3 of those 4 games. See you then.