01/23/2001 – Week #11 - A Week On The Road In The Big Ten

They finally did it. UM finally won a road game. In the Big Ten. Against a ranked team. I don't believe it.

That was the good news last week. The bad news was the loss at Ohio State. Still, for a young team that's struggling, especially away from home, any win is a big win, and a win on the road against a ranked Big Ten opponent is HUGE. I was afraid that their only road win this season would be at Northwestern, but now they could end up winning a couple.

The Wolverines played two games on the road this week, and they won one and lost one. The loss was on Thursday (01/18/2001) at Ohio State, 78-61. The win was on Saturday (01/20/2001) at Iowa, 70-69. Michigan's record stands at 8-8 overall, 2-3 in the Big Ten.

The OSU game was disappointing, since UM hung with the Buckeyes most of the way, then faded down the homestretch. A crucial moment in the game came with about 8 minutes to go, when UM got within 5 points and stole the ball. Leon Jones drove to the basket, got hammered, but the refs didn't call it, and OSU went the other way and hit a quick 3-pointer. That was a 5-point swing, and it changed the complexion of the game. Looking at the stats from the game, a few things jump out at me:

- It was encouraging to see Josh Asselin continue his recent good play. He only had one basket, but he hit 13 out of 14 free throws, which is incredible.

- I think Bernard Robinson Jr. is going to be a star before he's done at Michigan. He's playing very well for a freshman. Not as well as LaVell Blanchard did last year, or Gary Grant, or Mike McGee, or 3 of the Fab Five (Rose, Webber, and Howard), but well.

- Josh Moore: 4 minutes, 0-2 shooting, 0 rebounds, 1 foul. What's up with him? He was just starting to hit his stride before Christmas, and now he's just disappeared.

- An 18-0 OSU run at the start of the game. UM has got to do something about stuff like this. The 34-2 run at the start of the Duke game was about as bad a stretch as I can ever remember. This could be a long season.

- We've got to get some scoring from everyone, not just 2 or 3 guys:

Josh Moore	0
Leon Jones	0
Avery Queen	0
Chris Young	5
Gavin Groninger	5
Maurice Searight	6

  That's 16 points for 6 players. LaVell Blanchard, Bernard Robinson Jr., and Josh Asselin scored all the rest. UM needs some scoring balance.

- 25% (3-12) shooting 3-pointers is pretty lame. They should be able to do a lot better than that.

The Iowa game was a completely different story. UM jumped out to a 10-0 lead to start the game, and managed to stay ahead the whole game. Iowa made it close, and managed to cut a 9-point lead down to 1 point in the last 2:00 of the game, but UM hung on and won, barely.

The difference between the games was that against Iowa, UM played with intensity, focus, emotion, and poise. If they can do that, they can hang with most of the teams in the league, and maybe in the country. When they play flat and unfocused, they're in big trouble. As I've said several times this season, the key element is poise. When they play with poise, they stand a chance. When we get rattled, it's over.

It was scary listening to the last 2:00 of the game. I was pretty sure that 9 points was enough of a lead at that point, and I was right, but just barely. The flurry of Iowa shots (and misses) in the last 5 seconds was very tense, but fortunately, none of them went in.

Obviously, LaVell Blanchard was super. He had a great game, and was the difference for UM. He set a new career high, with 30 points. Josh Asselin also had a good game, and so did Bernard Robinson Jr. I just wish Bernard would shoot a better percentage. He's been having a lot of 4-14 games lately. Once again, UM didn't get much scoring outside of those 3 guys, but it was just enough.

Check out Josh Moore again: 6 minutes, 0 points, 3 rebounds, 3 turnovers, 5 FOULS! He's fouled out of way too many games, often in 6 minutes of less. He's much better than that, and I wish he'd snap out of his slump and start contributing.

Another guy who should be contributing more is Gavin Groninger. He should be averaging in double digits, with the skills he's got.

It's a little past the middle point in the season (16 games played, at least 12 left to go), so it's time for...

Mid-Term Grades (Regulars only)

Class	Name	Grade	Comments
Freshman	Moore, Josh	C-	Needs to learn to play without fouling.
Freshman	Queen, Avery	B-	Needs to improve offense, free throws.
Freshman	Robinson Jr., Bernard	B	Needs to take (and make) better shots.
Freshman	Searight, Maurice	C+	Wildly inconsistent.
Sophmore	Blanchard, LaVell	A	The heart of the team. An All-American.
Sophmore	Groninger, Gavin	B-	Needs to improve offense.
Junior	Jones, Leon	C+	Great defense, non-existent offense.
Junior	Young, Chris	B	Good hustle, good heart. Overachieving.
Senior	Asselin, Josh	A-	Steadily improving. Needs to be a leader.
Coach	Ellerbe, Brian	B-	Good recruiter, decent bench coach.

The Wolverines finally get to play another home Big Ten game on Thursday, vs. Illinois. Show up, make noise, and see if UM can pull off another upset.