02/20/2001 – Week #15 - An Encouraging Win, A Disappointing Loss

And the beat goes on...

The Wolverines played 0.500 ball again this week, winning a game that they weren't supposed to (#24 Iowa, 95-85, on Wednesday 02/14/2001), and losing a game they were supposed to win (Minnesota, 93-75, on Saturday 02/17/2001). This leaves UM with a 4-8 record in the Big Ten, 10-13 overall. The loss to Minnesota pretty much guarantees that Michigan won't be playing in the post-season.

The Iowa win was very encouraging. UM had 6 players in double figures, they had some nice scoring balance, they had a 39-33 rebounding edge, and they shot 54% for the game. All very impressive stats.

The Big Three (LaVell Blanchard, Bernard Robinson Jr., and Josh Asselin) all did their jobs, and they finally got some help, which is why UM got 95 points. Why can't Gavin Groninger hit double figures every game? Why can't Avery Queen hit double figures most games? Why can't UM shoot 50% from 3-point range every game? They've got the talent; why can't they get the consistency? When this team plays up to their abilities, they can beat anyone in the country. Anyone. When they play their normal "zombie" game, they can lose to Oakland and Penn State. They can give up 34-2 runs to Duke. Sigh.

It's all about focus. It's all about intensity. It's all about toughness. Mental toughness. If they can get focused, they can win the rest of their games, and make some noise in the Big Ten Tournament. It's probably too little too late, but it would still be encouraging for next year.

On the other hand, the Minnesota game was one of their less inspired performances. However, I still think the big story was how hot Minnesota was from 3-point range. 14-24 is amazing. The Gophers hit 4 or 5 in a row at the beginning of the game to open up a decent lead, and UM spent the rest of the half just trying to catch up. The 2nd half was lousy. Check out UM's 3-point shooting in the 2nd half: 0-9. You're not going to win many games shooting like that.

LaVell Blanchard played OK, but not as well as usual. He got 17 points, but a lot of them were when the game was getting out of reach. UM needed him to step up and hit some big baskets when the game was still winnable. Josh Asselin had a sub-par game. Bernard Robinson Jr. did OK, but in an individual way. He has occasional games where he isn't much of a team player. Chris Young did his best, which is all we can ask of him. He tries so hard, and he occasionally gets rewarded for it, but not often enough. Gavin Groninger contributed again, but he and Avery Queen really hurt the team with their lousy 3-point shooting. Groninger was 1-6 and Queen was 1-7. They can both do a lot better than that. Leon Jones was great from the free throw line, going 6-6, but 0-4 from the floor, all 3-point attempts. Josh Moore and Maurice Searight never got in the game.

Michigan has 2 more home games left this season, both during Spring Break. They have a full week off before the Purdue game on Saturday (02/24/2001), then they play Northwestern next Wednesday (02/28/2001). They should be able to beat Northwestern, but the Purdue game is going to be tough. Tune in next week to see how they did, and why.