03/05/2001 – Week #17 - The End of the Regular Season

The Wolverines played two games this week, on Wednesday (02/28/2001) vs. Northwestern, and on Saturday (03/03/2001) at Michigan State. They lost both games, and looked terrible doing it. The score of the Northwestern game was 75-70, and the MSU game was 78-57. The good news is that the regular season is now over. The bad news is that they still have to go lose one more game in the Big Ten Tournament, which starts this Thursday (03/08/2001) in Chicago. They might be able to win their first round game, but the way they're playing lately, there's no way they'll win more than one. The two losses leaves UM with a final regular season record of 10-17 overall, 4-12 in the Big Ten, good for 10th place.

The Northwestern debacle was one of the 3 or 4 most embarrassing losses I can remember in the 27 years I've been watching UM play. There is no way UM should have lost that game, with the superior talent they have. It was a simple case of massive underachievement. It was a terrible way to end the home schedule, and a real shame, since it ruined Senior Night for Josh Asselin and Mike Gotfredson. UM looked like one of those lousy teams they used to beat up in the preseason back in "the good old days", like Chicago State or Florida International. They just flat-out sucked. They let Northwestern run the same back-door cut lay-up drill 15-20 times. They never figured it out. It worked every time NU ran it. It was truly pathetic.

LaVell Blanchard played hard the whole game, and gave it his all. He missed the key shot in the last minute, but that's the way the ball bounces. Josh Asselin did OK, but Coach Ellerbe left him sitting on the bench way too long in the 2nd half, for no apparent reason. Bernard "B-Rob" Robinson Jr. did fine, and had some great shots. Avery Queen actually played pretty well. Other than that, everyone else had a lousy game.

The MSU game on Saturday wasn't as bad as it could have been, although a loss is still a loss. The Wolverines got a lot closer than they have the last few times they've played State. It's a shame that LaVell Blanchard had such a lousy game. When he hit a 3-pointer early, I was hopeful that he'd have a big game, but he only had one more basket the whole game, and it was only a 2-pointer. At least B-Rob picked up some of the slack. Josh Asselin (1 FG, 0 rebounds) had a lousy game, as well as Leon Jones (2 points) and Gavin Groninger (0 points). Chris Young and Josh Moore played OK, but Moore's 5 fouls hurt us. He's got to work on that over the summer. Avery Queen did OK.

I can't begin to tell you how disappointed I am in how this season has ended. It's just so sad. UM has got so much talent, but they can't seem to play together as a team. Most of the players don't seem very motivated. The plays they run are weak. It's just a bad scene, from top to bottom.

Just one more game, maybe two, then UM gets to do some major soul-searching. I can't believe Ellerbe's going to be around next year, so we'll have to wait and see who the new coach is. Hopefully, he can breathe some fire into these guys, and get them to produce up to their potential. If they did that, they'd be a 3rd or 4th place team in the Big Ten, and looking at an NCAA bid. They underachieved badly this season, especially in the Big Ten portion of the schedule. The team often looked bored and unmotivated. The set plays they ran stunk. They were occasionally pretty good in transition, and they actually played some good stretches of defense. Fouls and turnovers cost them a few close games, and bad decisions cost them a chance in many others.

I know the outlook is pretty bleak right now, but I'm confident that UM will be back, as good as ever. I don't know when it's going to happen, or even when the tide is going to finally start to turn, but it will happen. Michigan just has too much of a tradition of excellence to stay down for too long. Keep the faith.

Oh by the way, if the always-classy Spartan fans in your lives give you too much of a hard time, remind them about the overall series record between UM and MSU (UM leads, 88-63). That should shut them up, at least for a while.

I'll be back next week to tell you what happened at the Big Ten Tournament, and to wrap up the season. If, by some miracle, UM wins the Big Ten Tournament and goes to the NCAA Tournament, I'll eat a printed out copy of this week's article on the Diag at noon next Monday.