03/12/2001 – Week #18 - One And Done

Well, it's over: one of the more disappointing UM basketball seasons in recent memory. UM lost to Penn State in the first round of the Big Ten Tournament on Thursday (03/08/2001), 82-80. They lost in the last second of the game, and they played pretty well, but it's still a loss. UM ended up with a final season record of 10-18, which is miserable.

Yeah, I was there for the even-worse 1981-82 season when UM went 8-19. In fact, I went to every home game, and this season was even more disappointing. Talk about a lousy finish: the Wolverines lost 9 out of their last 10 games. On January 27th, UM won their second road game in a row, beating Northwestern 72-65. That evened their record at 9-9 (3-4 in the Big Ten). From that point onward, UM only won one more game, at home vs. Iowa on February 14th. Most of the losses were double-digit affairs. It was not pretty.

In the Penn State game, LaVell Blanchard (22 points) and Bernard Robinson Jr. (23 points) played well, and so did Josh Asselin (16 points), Chris Young (11 points), and Avery Queen (6 points). That should have been enough, but it wasn't. Check out that bench scoring: Josh Moore (2 points). That's it. Gavin Groninger and Leon Jones got 0 points each, and no one else even got in the game. I'm very impressed with Blanchard's 13 rebounds, but where were Asselin (3 rebounds) and Young (5 rebounds)?

UM underachieved almost all season, with a few glimpses of how good they could be if they played up to their potential. They beat Iowa twice, including once on the road, and they beat Indiana. They gave Wisconsin and Illinois a scare, and they played even with Wake Forest and St. John's for most of the game. On the other hand, they had some miserable losses: at Oakland, Penn State (twice), and home vs. Northwestern. They lost the predictable games: MSU (twice), Duke, Maryland, Illinois (twice), and Wisconsin, some of them miserably (Duke, MSU, Maryland).

The next order of business in my end-of-the-season wrap-up is the dreaded final grades:

Class	Name	Grade	Comments
Freshman	Moore, Josh	C-	Too many fouls, too many poor decisions, poor free-throw shooting. Needs lots of work over the summer. Has tremendous potential.
Freshman	Queen, Avery	C	Decent play-making, too many turnovers, poor free-throw shooting. Will get better with more experience, practice, and coaching.
Freshman	Robinson Jr., Bernard	A-	An excellent freshman season, good slashing, good free-throw shooting, decent 3-point shooting, good scoring ability. A keeper!
Freshman	Searight, Maurice	D	Poor scoring, too many discipline problems. Didn't play for the last 8 or 9 games. Will probably transfer.

Sophmore	Blanchard, LaVell	A	The heart and soul of the team. When he had a (rare) bad game, the whole team suffered. Good scoring, decent shooting percentage, good free-throw shooting, good 3-point shooting. Not vocal enough to be one of the leaders this team needs.
Sophmore	Groninger, Gavin	C	A very disappointing, inconsistent season. Showed flashes of his true potential, then sunk back to mediocrity. Can still be a big contributor in the future, if he can develop some consistency.
Junior	Jones, Leon	C	Did he play this year? Too many "invisible" games. Poor/slow decision making, lousy scoring ability. Good defensive work at times. Must improve and be a leader next year. Can still contribute.
Junior	Young, Chris	B+	The guy gave his all, every minute of every game. A true Michigan Man (tm). Good rebounding, good shooting percentage, good free-throw shooting, good hustle, good leadership. A joy to watch!
Senior	Asselin, Josh	B-	Another inconsistent player, throughout his whole career. Showed tremendous potential, but seldom lived up to it. Had some great games, but couldn't get the consistency. Good rebounding, good free-throw shooting, decent shooting, decent leadership.
Coach	Ellerbe, Brian	C-	I said it before, and I'll say it again: he sure can recruit 'em, but he just can't coach 'em. He managed to bring in several great recruiting classes and get them to underachieve their way to 10th place in the Big Ten. Poor motivator, poor decision-maker, especially in the clutch. Gets way too emotional in the heat of battle, and gets the whole team depressed.

I can't believe that Ellerbe will be back next year, so the question is: who's next, and how soon can UM get him in and going? They've got a strong team returning for next year, and a good crop of recruits. All they need is a good coach to teach and motivate them, and they'll be back in the upper half of the Big Ten again, sooner than most people expect.

Well, that's it for another season. It's been fun, but not as much fun as it would have been if UM had played up to their potential. As all UM fans have gotten used to saying, "Wait 'til next year!"