11/19/2001 – Week #3 - The Start of the Regular Season

The University of Michigan men's basketball team opened the regular season at home on Friday night (11/16/2001) vs. Oakland University, and they won, 81-73. The Wolverines looked pretty good in stretches, and managed to build an 18 point lead at halftime. After halftime, they didn't look as good, and they let Oakland sneak back into the game. The good news is that they didn't panic, they regrouped, and they put on a late 11-0 run to put the game away. I credit this poise to Coach Amaker, who seems to be having a steadying influence on the whole team. Where Ellerbe would panic and get all emotional in the same circumstances last year, Amaker kept his cool, and the team did too. We'll see if everyone can continue to remain cool when the level of competition goes up.

Several UM players had good games, led by LaVell Blanchard and Gavin Groninger. Blanchard finally played, after missing both exhibitions, and he looked OK, but not in mid-season form. He looked a little rusty at times, but he should be able to shake that off. He did end up with another double-double (17 points and 14 rebounds), and his 14 rebounds were a new career high for him.

Groninger was the leading scorer, with 19 points, on very good shooting (7-for-11). After a mediocre exhibition game against the Nike Elite, it was good to see Groninger get his scoring back up there.

Besides Blanchard and Groninger, Bernard Robinson, Jr., Chris Young, and Josh Moore also played well. B-Rob was the only other UM player in double figures, with 15 points, and Young and Moore chipped in 7 and 8 points, respectively. Moore deserves special mention for his free-throw shooting (4-for-4) and his field-goal shooting (2-for-2). He did pick up 4 fouls in 14 minutes, and Young fouled out in 15 minutes, which is a problem. Fortunately, UM has one more reasonably good post player, in freshman Chuck Bailey. Bailey did all right on Friday, even though he only scored 3 points, all on free-throws. He filled in when Young and Moore were in foul trouble, and he held the fort.

The other freshman who played, Dommanic Ingerson, wasn't much of a factor, with 2 points, and Leon Jones had another unproductive game, with 5 points. It will help a lot when they get their games going, and can chip in some points and rebounds. Mike Gotfredson had 3 points, on a 3-pointer, but he wasn't much of a factor. Incidentally, that basket was only the second of Gotfredson's career. Avery Queen chipped in 2 points, and did a decent job of running the offense. As usual, he had trouble defending a taller opponent, which is going to be a problem all year. UM needs him in there to run the offense, and bring the ball upcourt quickly, but he's a liability when he's matched up against a guard who's 6-8 inches taller than he is, an many of them will be.

The good news is that UM beat Oakland, who beat them to open the season last year. Oakland is a pretty good team, and it was a good early season test.

If UM can learn something from the game, and show steady improvement, they'll be in good shape for the tougher tests ahead. They have another relatively easy game on Tuesday (11/20/2001) at home vs. Fairfield. Come on down and see how they do. They're a fun team to watch.

Besides the home game on Tuesday, they also play on Friday (11/23/2001) at Western Michigan University. That will be a tougher test, since it's their first road game, and WMU is a pretty good team.

I'll be back next week to analyze the results of the next two games. Have a happy Thanksgiving.

Go Blue!