11/26/2001 – Week #4 - A Good News/Bad News Week

It was indeed a good news/bad news week for the University of Michigan men's basketball team. On Tuesday night (11/20/2001), they throttled Fairfield University, 88-59, then they came back and lost to Western Michigan (a MAC team, of all things) on Friday (11/23/2001), 73-79. As good as they looked on Tuesday vs. Fairfield, they looked that bad vs. WMU on Friday. Maybe they ate too much turkey on Thursday. Who knows?

Let's start with the good news: the Fairfield game. It was a game that UM should have won handily, and they did. The big star was Dommanic Ingerson. Who? You know, Dommanic Ingerson, the 6'4" freshman guard from Santa Barbara, CA. He had the best game of his young career, with 23 points, including 6-for-8 shooting on 3-pointers. 18 of those points came in the second half, when he went on his own personal scoring run, and the team kept feeding him. It's great having a streaky shooter like that on the team, when he's hot.

Gavin Groninger (15 points), LaVell Blanchard (11 points), and Bernard Robinson Jr. (11 points) all played well, and helped the cause. B-Rob didn't have a very good shooting day (4-for-11), but he played hard. Josh Moore had another solid showing, with more points (6) than fouls (5). He continued his high shooting percentage (2-for-3), following his 2-for-2 showing in the first game of the season. Chris Young chipped in 7 points, Avery Queen had 4 points, and Chuck Bailey, the other contributing freshman player, scored 9 points.

Incidentally, there was some bad news on the day of the Fairfield game: Leon Jones broke his thumb that day, and will be out for 3-4 weeks.

Now for the really bad news: the Western Michigan game. True, it was UM's first road game, and WMU is tough at home, but come on, they're a MAC team! We should be able to beat them in street shoes. I didn't go to the game, but I listened to it on the radio, and read it about it afterwards.

Stop me if you've seen this scenario some other time this weekend (hint, think football): UM plays a terrible first half, their opponents play their best half of the season, and UM gets way behind at halftime. The Wolverines come out in the second half and slowly close the gap, only to fall short at the very end. Well, the basketball team did just that: they fell behind by 19 at halftime, and 22 in the early part of the second half, then rallied to pull within 3 points (with the ball) with 1:10 left to go in the game. Unfortunately, it was not to be. They didn't score on that possession, and WMU pulled further ahead, and won it going away. It was encouraging that the Wolverines fought back when they were so far down, but it was discouraging that they got so far down to a team they should have beaten.

As I mentioned, Western played way over their heads in the first half. They shot 72% (18-for-25), including 77% (10-13) from 3-point range. The second half was more like it, with 33% shooting (8-for-24), and 2-for-10 on 3-pointers. However, the lead they built up in the first half was just enough. UM did exactly the opposite: they shot terribly in the first half (9-for-29, 31%), including 1-for-9 (11%) on 3-pointers. In the second half, they did much better: 16-for-30 (53%), and 6-for-14 (43%) from 3-point range.

Dommanic Ingerson wasn't the leading scorer this game, but he came close. He had 13 points, and Gavin Groninger had 16. Chuck Bailey had his best game to date, with

13 points, 7 rebounds (5 offensive), and only 2 fouls. The other UM player in double figures was B-Rob, with 11. LaVell Blanchard had a poor showing, shooting 3-for-11 (0-for-5 on 3-pointers), and ended up with 8 points. UM needs a lot more production from him. Chris Young is still struggling to find his offensive touch, and was held to 6 points. Avery Queen had 3 points, and so did Josh Moore.

Despite the mixed week, things are looking OK for Michigan. It would have been nice to win both games, but the loss could turn into a learning experience. UM is going to play a lot tougher teams in a lot more hostile environments, and they need to learn how to deal with it. Amaker seems to have them pointed in the right direction, but they need to progress steadily.

I'm impressed with the early play of the young players, especially Dommanic Ingerson and Chuck Bailey. We already knew what B-Rob could do, and Josh Moore seems to be improved over last year. Combined with a solid group of upperclassmen, this team has a lot of weapons. Amaker has done a lot of substituting, and tried lots of combinations. When Leon Jones returns, UM will have 10 players who play regularly, with Rotolu Adebiyi as the 11th man, able to go in and bang with the big boys on the other team, and put in some quality minutes. It's nice to have so much depth, considering what a big problem that has been in the recent past. On the other hand, you can only play 5 guys at once, and the trick is getting the right 5 guys out there at the right time.

The Wolverines continue their road tour of MAC schools on Wednesday (11/28/2001) at Bowling Green, then play nationally ranked (#17) Boston College at home on Saturday (12/01/2001). The BC game is at 2:30, and is on national TV (CBS). Come on down to Crisler, and make some noise.

Oh, and speaking of noise, I should make some mention of the Maize Rage this season. On the whole, they're putting in a good effort, and trying to make the crowd a factor in Crisler. Since it's still a work in progress, I won't be too critical, but I would like to put in my 2 cents worth of caution: while it may sound like a good idea to try to emulate the Cameron Crazies or the morons in the IdiotZZone, keep in mind that we are Michigan, and we don't want to embarrass the school the way they do up in East Lansing. Make it loud, have some fun, but try to show some class. Leave the low-rent stuff for our green-and-white friends. 'Nuff said.

Go Blue!