12/31/2001 – Week #9 - A Season On The Brink

Yes, it's come to this already: the UM men's basketball team is at a moment of truth. The season is already on the brink. The red flags are out. It's time to put up or give up.

Why all the cliches? Because they've had 9 games (and 2 more exhibition games) to show some (any?) improvement over the last couple of years, and they haven't done it. Sorry, but it's true. Sure, it takes a while for a team to adjust to a new coach, and a new "system", but after 11 games, this team doesn't look any closer to adjusting than they did way back in the first exhibition game against EA Sports.

Ignoring the exhibition games, they've played 6 games at home, and won 4 of them. That sounds pretty good, until you look at who they've beaten: Oakland, Fairfield, IUPU-Fort Wayne, and Eastern Michigan. That sounds like an MSU football schedule. Granted, the two games that they've lost at home were against quality opponents, especially Duke, but they were still losses. So, they're 4-2 at home, which isn't bad, but their overall record is now 4-5, thanks to their sterling record on the road: 0-3. Two losses to MAC teams (Western Michigan and Bowling Green), and now a loss to San Francisco.

Ah, the San Francisco game; how memorable! They lost on Saturday (12/29/2001) by a score of 55-47. 47 points in a 40 minute basketball game; isn't that special? At halftime, they had 18 points, and 24 minutes into the game, they had 22 points.

Smooth, huh? Dommanic Ingerson played a pretty good game, and he was the only one. He had 16 points, on 6-of-10 shooting. Bernard Robinson, Jr. had 13 points, but shot 5-for-18. LaVell Blanchard had 12 points, but shot 2-13. The only other Wolverines who scored were Avery Queen, with 4 points on 2-for-6 shooting, and Chuck Bailey, with 2 points on 1-for-3 shooting. Chris Young went 0-for-9, with no free throw attempts, Leon Jones went 0-for-4, and 0-for-2 from the line, and Gavin Groninger and Rotolu Adebiyi both went 0-for-1. As a whole, the team shot 16-for-65 (24.6%). Take away Ingerson's 6-for-10, and they went 10-for-55 (18.1%). Blanchard missed his first 9 shots, before he finally got his first field goal with about 8 minutes to go in the game. He's turning into the Amazing Disappearing All-American. When the team needs him to step up and get things going in the right direction, he's nowhere to be found. He was non-existent in the Duke game, with 0 points in the first 24 minutes. Even in the games where he's scored a reasonable number of points, they've been unimportant points. I like the guy, a lot, and I know he's a very talented ballplayer, but he's having a miserable season, and I just hope he can snap out of it, and get back into his normal groove. The team needs him.

Well, San Francisco must be pretty good, right? Wrong. They were 3-7 coming into the game, and they played almost as poorly as UM. If Michigan had played even an average game, they would have won by 10-15 points. But, they played their worst game of this season, and lost by 8. So, was this loss as bad as the butt-whippings by Duke and MSU last year? No, not really. They only lost by 8, and they didn't give up 100+ points, but San Francisco is no Duke.

Is this season already in the toilet? Probably, but not definitely. There's still time to turn things around, but it's got to start happening pretty soon. The fans and the media (including me) don't have unlimited patience, and it would really help to start seeing some improvement. A win on the road would be a big step in the right direction. A good start in the Big Ten would really help. I don't know how the team is

taking all this adversity, but I sure hope that they can continue to believe in Amaker and his new system, and not give up. Once they give up, the season is over.

On to the Big Ten season. The games start right away, with Michigan playing on the road again (oh no!) on Wednesday (01/02/2002) at Penn State, and then again at home (yay!) on Saturday (01/05/2002) against Purdue. Now, Penn State isn't exactly having a banner year; in fact they're the only other team in the Big Ten with a losing record, at 4-7. However, Michigan hasn't proven that they can beat anyone on the road this season, so it's going to be a tough game. Purdue is off to a decent start, at 8-6, so it's a good thing the game's in Crisler.

The current Big Ten standings look like this (all non-conference games):

Team	Record
Illinois	11-2
Ohio State	8-2
Iowa	11-3
Northwestern	8-3
Minnesota	7-3
Michigan State	9-4
Indiana	7-5
Purdue	8-6
Wisconsin	7-6
Michigan	4-5
Penn State	4-7

I don't expect the standings to look quite like that once Big Ten action gets going. Here's how I expect things to end up:

Team	Big Ten Record
Illinois	13-3
Iowa	12-4
Michigan State	11-5
Indiana	11-5
Ohio State	10-6
Minnesota	8-8
Purdue	7-9
Wisconsin	7-9
Michigan	6-10
Penn State	2-14
Northwestern	1-15

Who will Michigan beat? Probably Northwestern (twice), Penn State (twice), Wisconsin (in Ann Arbor), and Minnesota (in Ann Arbor). Maybe Purdue (in Ann Arbor), instead of the game at Penn State.

I'll be back next week to report on the first week of the Big Ten schedule, hopefully with better news. Come on out to the Purdue game on Saturday, and see if we can't root the Wolverines on to a victory.

Go Blue!