**03/11/2002 – Week #19 - The End, Part 2**

It's all over for the University of Michigan men's basketball team for this season, but they didn't go down without a fight. They won their first round game in the Big Ten Tournament against Northwestern on Thursday (03/07/2002), 72-51, and they hung with Ohio State in the next round on Friday (03/08/2002), before losing 75-68. The win and the loss left UM with a final season record of 11-18 (5-11 in the Big Ten), which is slightly better than last year's 10-18 record. The Northwestern game was one of the best games UM has played this year, and it is one of their few post-season wins in recent years.

The OSU game was a lot closer than 7 points, and Michigan had a chance to pull within 1 point in the last minute, before the game got away from them.
The big story in both games was the sudden reappearance of LaVell Blanchard. After sleepwalking through most of his junior year, LaVell showed up big time for both games, and carried the Wolverines to one win, and almost carried them to another. All the things I've commented on and complained about all season long suddenly disappeared. He played like he cared what happened. He played with heart and emotion. He was a leader. That's what I've been talking about all season. It was great to finally see it. Now, if only he can keep it going for next year...

In the Northwestern game, Blanchard was the leading scorer, with a season-high 26 points, on 9-for-14 shooting, including 5-for-7 from 3-point range. That's what he's capable of doing, game in and game out. If he had done that all year, UM would be looking at a #8 seed in the NCAA Tournament, instead of watching the games at home. Chris Young also had a strong game against Northwestern, with 14 points and 10 rebounds. The only other Wolverine in double figures was Dommanic Ingerson, with 13 points. Leon Jones helped out with 9 points, Bernard Robinson, Jr. had 8 points, and Herb Gibson had 2 points.

In the OSU game, Blanchard continued his strong play, with 24 points and 7 rebounds. Having back-to-back games over 20 points was great, and it's what we should expect from him regularly. He started the season as an All-American pick, and ended up as a 3rd team All Big Ten performer. He'll get a chance to show us the real LaVell Blanchard next year.

Chris Young had another strong game against OSU, with 10 points on 4-for-5 shooting. With the loss, Chris ended his career at Michigan, but he won't be forgotten. He's one of the true Michigan Men (tm). If UM had 5 guys like him on the team every year, they'd never lose more than a couple games. Chris played hard every minute of every game for all 4 years he was here. He played over his head a lot of the time. He really wanted to do well, and he wanted UM to do well. He cared, always, and he showed it. He's one of my all time favorite players, with Gary Grant and Thad Garner. I'm really going to miss him.

The only other Wolverine in double figures against OSU was B-Rob, with 10 points. Unfortunately, he only shot 3-for-14, which really hurt the cause. He needs to take (and make) better shots for UM to succeed. Leon Jones ended his career with 4 points, and Mike Gotfredson ended his with 5 points.

In the final analysis, it was a decent season for Michigan, but not as good as it could have been. I've mentioned it before, but there were 5 games that could have changed the whole season, and they all ended up as losses. They were games that UM could have, and should have won. If they had won them, they would have ended

up with a record of 16-12, and they would be playing in the NIT Tournament this week. The 5 games I'm talking about were the games at Western Michigan, at Bowling Green, at a "neutral site" (Oakland, CA) against San Francisco, at Colorado State, and at home against Northwestern. They were all disappointing losses, and they're the kind of games that UM needs to start winning. With the core players returning next year, and the 5 strong recruits coming in, things look promising. Of course, it isn't realistic to expect too much from freshmen, and Michigan is going to be without an experienced big man, so it may be a couple of years before we start seeing better records and some tournament appearances.

Stop by next week for my season wrap-up, including final grades, highlights and lowlights, and an in-depth look at the returning players and the incoming freshmen.

Go Blue!