03/26/2002 – The Ed Martin Scandal, Again...

Just when you thought it was safe to start hoping that the University of Michigan men's basketball program was headed in the right direction, the long-running, almost-forgotten Ed Martin Scandal pops back up.

Before I go any further, let me insert the appropriate legalese: so far, everything is still at the "allegedly" stage. Nothing has been definitely proven or admitted to. I'll try to put all the appropriate "allegedly"s in what I say, but if I mess up and forget a couple, it doesn't mean that I think any of the allegations are necessarily true, until they are proven or disproved.

If what has been alleged turns out to be true, the UM men's basketball program of the Fab Five era, through the Louis Bullock era, will rank right up there as one of the most corrupt programs ever, in any college sport. The amount of money alleged to have changed hands is staggering: $616,000. Compared to the millions that 3 of the 4 players allegedly involved are making, it's petty cash, but for college athletics, it's an enormous sum.

Now, as I pointed out to Phil Callihan, the Editor-In-Chief of UMGoBlue.com, an illegal payment is an illegal payment, regardless of the amount. As he pointed out right back to me, the numbers mentioned here are the highest ever alleged, so it does make a difference.

Do I think the allegations are true? Who cares what I think? I'll tell you anyway: it wouldn't surprise me. Temptation is everywhere in college athletics, and the rest of the world, and a certain number of people are going to yield to it. If the allegations are true then Ed Martin was a very big temptation. I'm not surprised that he managed to find young athletes who were willing to be tempted.

A better question is: do I think that the 4 players mentioned (Chris Webber, Maurice Taylor, Robert Traylor, and Louis Bullock) are the only players that he managed to tempt? My answer, and it's only a guess, is that there are probably more. Who are they, and how much did they get? I have no idea. Again, it's only a hunch.

So, what's going to happen to the Michigan program? What makes sense? What would be fair? At this point, no one knows what the NCAA will do about this whole situation. A lot of it depends on what comes out of the court proceedings for Ed Martin. It also depends on how much UM admits to, and how much UM self-punishes. My guess, and it's only a guess, it that UM is looking at something like:

- 2-3 years of probation
- 1-2 years of no post-season appearances
- 1-2 years of no TV
- Lose 1 or 2 scholarships for 1-2 years
- Forfeit a bunch of wins and tournament titles
- Pay back a bunch of tournament money

That's a healthy slap, but it will get it over with. Michigan will probably lose some recruits, and it'll take Coach Amaker an extra 2 or 3 years to turn the program around, but it'll be over.

Sort of. From now on, Michigan will always be grouped with the other famous renegade programs, like UNLV and Kentucky. UM's time on the "light side" is over. That's what makes me the saddest.

Jim Carty had an excellent column in Saturday's "Ann Arbor News" (Michigan should ban Webber Forever). He suggests that UM completely detach themselves from Chris Webber. Completely and publicly. He offers many good reasons, and I agree with him. I think that Webber used UM, and has dragged Michigan into the dirt. He should no longer be welcome at Michigan.

The big lesson here is: don't celebrate your athletic achievements too much, at least not right away. Wait 10 years, to see if everything turns out to be on the level. I wouldn't be the least bit surprised to see other recently successful programs stripped of their basketball championships someday. Don't be too proud of your program, because you can never be 100% sure that it's everything that it appears to be on the surface.

College athletics is a mess. I have no idea what to do about it. For now, I think the best Michigan can do is to try to make the best of a bad situation, and ride out the storm. It'll be over, eventually, and better days are ahead. It may be grim and ugly for a while, but Michigan will eventually be back on the right track, doing things the right way, and succeeding.

Chin up, until then.

Go Blue!