11/04/2002 – Week #01 – New Beginnings

Yes, Welcome back to "Nothing But 'Net" for the 2002-2003 season. Did you miss me? I knew it! ;-)

It seems so early, but basketball season has already started. The 2002-2003 UM men's basketball team played an exhibition game on Friday (11/01/2002) evening, vs. Wayne State. It was a game that they should have won, and they did, by the score of 79-68. The team didn't look particularly sharp, but they did give some hints of their potential. As expected, two of the veterans, Bernard Robinson, Jr. and LaVell Blanchard, led the way. They both scored 18 points, with B-Rob adding 9 rebounds, to Blanchard's 7 rebounds. Neither of them played a great game, but they got the job done. The only other UM player in double figures was freshman Lester Abram, with 13 points and 7 rebounds. He played a solid game, especially for a freshman. Chuck Bailey added 9 points off the bench, and Gavin Groninger chipped in 6 points. No one else had more than 5 points, although a lot of players got to play and score: freshman Chris Hunter (3 points), Avery Queen (3 points), freshman Daniel Horton (5 points), and freshman Graham Brown (4 points). Dommanic Ingerson played for 3 minutes and did not score, but came out with a bruised knee. The other player who will get significant playing time this season, Rotolu Adebiyi, did not play against Wayne State. As a team, UM shot OK: 43% from the floor, 42% from 3-point range, and 79% from the free throw line. They barely out-rebounded the shorter WSU team, 42-39, which is a little worrisome. They also committed too many turnovers (24), but they can work on that.

So, what's up with all these new freshmen? There are 6 of them, but one of them is a walk-on (Sherrod Harrell), and one of them will be red-shirted this season (Amadou Ba). The other 4 are going to be able to contribute right away. The star of the freshman class is point guard Daniel Horton, from Cedar Hill, Texas. He played 15 minutes against Wayne State, and had 5 points (on 1-5 shooting) and 4 turnovers. He'll get into his groove soon enough. He's got good size (6'3") and a nice shot. Two of the freshmen started against Wayne State: forward Lester Abram, from Pontiac, Michigan, and center Chris Hunter, from Gary, Indiana. Abram had a good game, and he's going to be a good solid player for UM. He's only 6'6", so he's really more of a tall guard than a short forward. Chris Hunter, on the other hand, is 6'11", and he's going to be a legitimate force in the middle for UM. It all depends on how quickly he can adjust to the college game. He's a little bit light (210 pounds) for a Big Ten center, so he might get pushed around a little bit under there, but he appears to be fairly agile, which helps a lot. Physically, he reminds me a lot of Maceo Baston: tall and thin. The other big freshman is 6'9" Graham Brown, from Mio, Michigan. He's built a lot like Chris Young, and even looks a little like him. Sherrod Harrell didn't play against Wayne State, so I don't have much to say about him, yet. Incidentally, it's significant how many of the regulars are from the state of Michigan this year: Abram, Brown, Blanchard, Bailey, and Adebiyi. That's 5 out of 11. It's important that Coach Amaker can recruit in Michigan, so a certain other Big Ten coach in the state doesn't get all the talent.

The next question is: how do things look for this season. The answer is: pretty good. Michigan has a good mix of seasoned veterans and exciting newcomers. The trick is going to be getting the right combinations out on the floor at the right times, and developing the freshmen. They'll go as far as Blanchard and B-Rob can carry them. UM has good forwards and guards, but the 3 guys who are legitimate centers (Chuck Bailey, Chris Hunter, and Graham Brown) are a question mark. Bailey always plays

hard, but he's undersized at 6'7". The other 2 guys are freshmen, and they'll need some playing time and experience before they can compete in the Big Ten.

I'll be back next week to look at each of the Wolverines in more detail, and to make my predictions for the upcoming season. There aren't any games in the next week, with the next game being the final exhibition game vs. Nike Elite on Friday 11/15/2002.

Finally, even though I'm the basketball guy and not the football guy, I just can't resist saying a word or two about the UM-MSU football game over the weekend.

Wasn't that a great game? If there was ever a team that deserved to have their butts whipped it was MSU, after that unforgivable, tainted mess in East Lansing last year. They should be embarrassed to consider that a victory. A program with any class would have forfeited, rather than steal a win due to a corrupt clock operator. Shame on them! They deserved to get whipped on Saturday. I hope it haunts each and every one of them for the rest of their lives.

No, I don't have any bitterness about last year's game. ;-)