11/18/2002 - Week #03 – The End of the Exhibition Season

The University of Michigan men's basketball team played its second, and final, exhibition game on Friday (11/15/2002) vs. Nike Elite. UM won, 81-77, and looked pretty good doing it. They shot better (50% from the floor, 40% from 3-point range) than in the first exhibition game two weeks ago vs. Wayne State, and they cut down on their turnovers as well (16 vs. 24 last game). LaVell Blanchard (21 points, 9 rebounds) scored 17 points in the first half, and Bernard Robinson, Jr. (23 points, 7 rebounds) scored 18 points in the second half. LaVell played the first 10 minutes of the game like he was on fire. In fact, he may have taken a few ill-advised shots, and hogged the ball a little, but that's OK. I'd rather see him try too hard, than be too passive, like he was much of last year. Two of the other starters hit double figures: Lester Abram (15 points) and Daniel Horton (11 points). Horton shot more than a point guard usually does (3-for-8), but all 3 of his baskets were 3-pointers (3-for-6). Abram looked sharp again, scoring 13 of his 15 points in the second half.

Coach Amaker started 3 freshmen (Abram, Horton, and Chris Hunter), along with Blanchard and B-Rob. Hunter had a decent game, with 4 points and 6 rebounds. He had a tough time guarding the Nike Elite center, James Felton, who scored 23 points and grabbed 4 rebounds. Felton is about the same height (6'11") as Hunter, but he weighs about 50 pounds more than Hunter, and he used his extra bulk to push Hunter around a bit underneath. This could be a problem all year. Hunter has to learn how to use his agility to get in the right position to neutralize a bigger, heavier opponent. As it was, Felton got Hunter into foul trouble (4 fouls), and Blanchard had to guard Felton for a lot of the second half. LaVell was giving up 4 inches to Felton, but he did a pretty good job on him. Unfortunately, it really slowed LaVell down on the offensive end, and he only scored 4 points in the second half. That's why Hunter has to use his agility, and stay out of foul trouble. UM doesn't have enough depth or experience at center to afford to have Hunter in foul trouble.

The bench wasn't much of a factor in this game. Gavin Groninger hit a 3-pointer, and Avery Queen and Chuck Bailey each had 2 points. That was it. This is another important factor for the upcoming season: bench scoring. 7 points is not going to make it against the big boys. For the second game in a row, Dommanic Ingerson played (2 minutes) but did not attempt a shot. It'll really help the bench a lot when he gets his game back in gear. He was a very exciting player off the bench last year, and the team is going to need him. Gavin Groninger should also be able to kick in more than 3 points. He can be a deadly 3-point shooter once he finds his shot, and he needs to be a senior leader out there.

On to the preseason games. Michigan travels to the U.S. Virgin Islands to play in the Virgin Islands Paradise Jam preseason tournament. It's a 3-day tournament, with 6 teams in 2 brackets. The first day (Saturday 11/23/2002), UM plays St. Bonaventure at 7:30 (EST). The second day (Sunday 11/24/2002), Michigan plays Virginia Tech, also at 7:30 (EST). The last day (Monday 11/25/2002) is the championship round. The other 3 teams in the tournament are Brigham Young, Kansas State, and Toledo. I'd expect UM to win on Saturday and Sunday, and play in the championship game on Monday vs. Kansas State. However, since this column covers each Monday – Sunday, I'll only be talking about the first 2 games next week. Stop on by and see what happened, and why.

Go Blue!