12/16/2002 - Week #07 – Back In The Win Column, Finally!

The University of Michigan men's basketball team finally broke into the win column last week, after losing the first 6 games of the season. In fact, they won twice in a row, for the first time since last January. These two wins raise their season record to 2-6. The two wins were both at home, against Bowling Green (83-57) on Wednesday (12/11/2002), and against Charleston Southern (84-53) on Saturday (12/14/2002). The win against Charleston Southern was predictable, but the win against Bowling Green was not a sure thing. In fact, given Michigan's disappointing 0-2 record against MAC teams going into the game, the win over Bowling Green looks even bigger. BGSU isn't one of the powers in the MAC, but they're not bad either.

The Wolverines played much better this week, with improved shooting percentages, improved rebounding margins, and reduced turnovers. UM shot 50% (31-for-62) against Bowling Green, and a season-high 54% (33-for-61) against Charleston Southern. The Wolverines out-rebounded BGSU 40-21, and CSU 38-32. After committing more than 20 turnovers in most of the first 6 games, Michigan only committed 15 and 16 in the two games. These are all key indicators of improvement as a team.

Individually, a few players had a good week, a few had one good game, and one had one good half. In the "good week" category, LaVell Blanchard had 23 and 24 points (and 10 and 7 rebounds) in the two games, with decent shooting (9-for-16 and 8-for-13), and Bernard Robinson, Jr. had 20 and 13 points, on very good shooting (8-for-12 and 6-for-9). In the "one good game" category, 3 players had good games against Charleston Southern: Graham Brown had 14 points (6-for-7 shooting), Lester Abram had 13 points (5-for-11 shooting), and Chuck Bailey had 8 points (4-for-4 shooting). It should be noted that Bailey is now shooting 14-for-16 for the year, which is amazing. Finally, in the "one good half" category, there's Daniel Horton. He had 24 points in the first half of the Bowling Green game, and ended up with 26 points, a new career-high. He shot a respectable 9-for-16, including 4-for-9 on 3-pointers, and he still managed to dish out 4 assists. He had a much rougher time against Charleston Southern, when he scored 0 points on 0-for-7 shooting. But, that's the way it goes with freshmen.

Once again, bench scoring was a problem against Bowling Green, as only 3 bench players scored: Sherrod Harrell, Chris Hunter, and Chuck Bailey each had 2 points, for a not-so-grand total of 6 points. Things were much better against Charleston Southern, with everyone who played scoring, except Horton. Rotolu Adebiyi scored his first 2 points of the season, Harrell and Gavin Groninger both had 3 points, and Chris Hunter had 4 points, along with the 8 points for Bailey that I mentioned above. That's 20 points off the bench, which is more like it. Of course, it would be nice to get Groninger back into his earlier form and turn him into a weapon, but I don't know what to suggest to make that happen.

There was more good news this week: no one quit or was dismissed from the team! After 2 weeks in a row of losing a key player, that is good news. As I've said so many times in the past, the biggest thing this program (not just this team) needs is some stability and continuity. The bleeding has got to stop, now. No more new scandals. No more defections. No more dismissals. Everyone has to keep their noses clean, and start playing with desire and pride. When that happens, things will start to turn around. Coach Amaker has brought in a great nucleus for the future, with even more promising players already signed up for next season. This season is a perfect learning opportunity for the freshmen, with no post-season pressure, and

lots of playing time to go around. They will be battle-tested veterans by the start of next season.

The preseason schedule continues for the Wolverines. Due to finals, they only play one game in the next week. On Saturday (12/21/2002), they play Vanderbilt, in Ann Arbor, at 2:30 p.m. Come on out and see if Michigan can extend their win streak to 3. This is another game that they can win, and some crowd support would sure help.