12/23/2002 - Week #08 – A Three Game Winning Streak!

The University of Michigan men's basketball team continued its winning ways last week, winning its third game in a row, after losing the first 6 games of the season. This latest win raises their season record to 3-6. The win was at home against Vanderbilt (70-66) on Saturday (12/21/2002). It was certainly the best game that the Wolverines have played so far this year, which is an encouraging sign.

The Wolverines played very well against Vanderbilt. It was a seesaw game, with both teams getting and losing 9-point leads. UM jumped out to a 10-1 lead, then managed to fall behind by 9, 30-21. An impressive Michigan run just before halftime managed to cut the deficit to 3, 32-29. In the second half, the Wolverines got the lead back, and never gave it up, although it did get close, at 58-57, late in the game. Michigan held them off, and played with a lot of poise in the last few minutes.

There was a key moment in the game, in the second half. Bernard Robinson, Jr. was leading a fast break, and instead of dishing the ball off to one of his wings, he kept it and drove straight to the hoop. It wasn't the best decision, and he got called for an offensive foul. The call by Ted Valentine was questionable, and Coach Amaker questioned it, vigorously. He didn't get it reversed, but he did get the next 4 or 5 calls that could have gone either way. The questionable call also fired up the crowd and the rest of the team. In the end, it was the turning point of the game.

Individually, 3 of the UM starters hit double figures, led by LaVell Blanchard with 19 points. Once again, his shooting percentage wasn't that hot (4-for-12), but he was 10-for-10 shooting free throws. Daniel Horton had 17 points (on 5-for-16 shooting), and he was also perfect (7-for7) from the free throw line. The third starter in double figures was Lester Abram, with 13 points on 3-for-8 shooting. As you can probably guess, the team shooting percentage wasn't very good: 38% (20-for-52).

Besides the 3 starters in double-figures, the other 2 did pretty well. B-Rob and Graham Brown each had 7 points, with good shooting percentages (3-for-4 and 3-for-6, respectively). Once again, bench scoring was a problem, as only 2 bench players scored: Gavin Groninger had 5 points, including a rare 3-pointer, and Chuck Bailey had 2 points, on 1-for-1 shooting. Bailey is now shooting 15-for-17 for the season, which is amazing.

So, what's up with this team? Are they as bad as a 0-6 start would indicate, or they as good as they've looked in the last 3 games? The win against Charleston Southern last week wasn't very impressive, and the win against Bowling Green was a little more encouraging, but the win against Vanderbilt is one to be proud of, and to build on. I'd like to think that the team is finally starting to mesh, and that the freshmen are finally starting to get more comfortable out there. The next few games will tell us much more. Now that finals are out of the way, they play several games over the break, before the Big Ten schedule starts. On Monday (12/23/2002), they play Eastern Michigan, in Ann Arbor, at 7:00 p.m. Then, on Saturday (12/28/2002), they play at UCLA. In the first week of the new year, they play 2 more home games, against San Francisco (Thursday 01/02/2003) and IUPUI (Saturday 01/04/2003). This is a nice mix of games against teams of various levels, and it should give us a good indication of how far Michigan has really come. Normally, a game against EMU would be looked at as an automatic win, but not this year. Eastern is off to one of the best starts they've had in a long time, and they just got JaQuan Hart eligible for them. He's sure to have a big chip on his shoulder about being snubbed by Michigan, and I wouldn't be surprised if he had a big game against the Wolverines,

kind of like Ryan Sidney did for Boston College last year. That, combined with UM's less-than-stellar record vs. the Mid American Conference, makes this game a toss-up.

As far as the rest of the non-conference games go, I think it's too much to ask this team to fly out to LA, and beat UCLA at Pauley. Write that one off. However, the home games against San Francisco and IUPUI are both very winnable. Assuming they can beat EMU, that would leave Michigan's non-conference record at 6-7, which isn't that hot, but pretty good considering the 0-6 start.

Come on out and see if Michigan can extend their win streak to 4. The students are out of town, and some general public crowd support would sure help.