12/01/2003 – Week #04 – The Early Non-Conference Season

The University of Michigan men's basketball team rolled on, winning two non-conference games last week. This improves their season reconrd to 3-0. On Wednesday (11/26/2003), they thumped High Point, 84-49, in Crisler Arena, then on Sunday (11/30/2003), they snuck by Butler, 61-60 (in overtime), at a "neutral site": Conseco Field House in Indianapolis, which is just across town from Butler's campus. The win over High Point was expected, but the game with Butler was a toss-up.

The High Point game went exactly as I expected. Michigan's height and depth were too much for them, and the game was an easy blowout. UM got an early 21-2 lead, and never looked back. The lead got as high as 40 points, before Coach Amaker put in the scrubs. Michigan outshot them (54% to 31%) and outrebounded them (47 to 33), which is a sure recipe for success. About the only negative from the game was the number of turnovers (22). They didn't hurt Michigan in this game, but they could cost them a game or two down the road.

Looking back at my prediction for the Butler game, I got it exactly right:

"Butler is a good mid-major team that regularly makes it to the NCAA Tournament. They've had some good teams in the past, and they'll present quite a challenge for a young Michigan team making its first road trip. I expect a close game, with some sloppy play from UM, but in the end I expect Michigan to pull out the win."

It was a close game, with a lot of sloppy play from UM, especially in the 2nd half, but Michigan did pull out the win. Michigan started the game strong, and pulled away early. They built an 11-point lead, and were still up by 9 at halftime, 32-23. The 2nd half was a disaster, with too many turnovers and unforced errors. Michigan was lucky to get the game into overtime, and lucky again to win it. Daniel Horton sunk 2 free throws to send the game into overtime, then sunk 2 more free throws with 6.9 seconds left in overtime to win it.

Michigan had much more height, depth, and talent than Butler, and they should have won the game going away, but sloppy play, turnovers, and offensive fouls kept them from building on their halftime lead. Butler shot terribly in the 1st half (7-for-24, 29%), but did much better in the 2nd half (10-for-23, 44%). Michigan did the opposite, shooting 52% (12-for-23) in the 1st half, then 39% (7-for-18) in the 2nd. As expected, UM owned the boards, 35-26, but turnovers (21) were a problem again.

For the week, only Horton and Chris Hunter scored in double figures for both games. Horton was the high scorer for UM in both games, getting 18 points against High Point, and 16 points against Butler. Hunter had 10 points in both games. Bernard Robinson, Jr. only had 6 points against High Point, but he had 11 against Butler. Lester Abram had 11 points against High Point, and 7 in the Butler game. The 5th starter, Courtney Sims had 7 and 6 points, respectively.

Coach Amaker seems to have settled on a starting lineup, now that the season is underway. He shuffled things around a lot during the exhibition season, but now he seems to have settled on Abram, Horton, Hunter, Robinson, and Sims for his starting lineup. That may change when Graham Brown is fully recovered from his sore ankle.

The bench players contributed in both games this week. Dion Harris had 14 points against High Point, and 7 in the Butler game. He continues to play well, and seems capable of running the team when Horton needs a rest. Brent Petway had another great game against

High Point, scoring 12 points on 5 dunks and a lay-in. He only had 2 points against Butler, but he still played pretty well. He needs to work on his defense a little bit, and his ball-handling skills. J.C. Mathis played well against High Point, and scored 6 points, but he didn't do much against Butler, with 0 points in only 5 minutes of action. Graham Brown played in both games: 8 minutes against High Point, and 21 minutes in the Butler game. He finally scored his first points of the season, getting 2 points against Butler. Sherrod Harrell played, but didn't score, in both games. Everyone played in the High Point game, but none of the other bench players scored.

The Butler game is actually the start of an important 3-game series for Michigan. On Tuesday (12/02/2003) they play North Carolina State in Crisler Arena, then they hit the road again for another tough game at Vanderbilt on Saturday (12/06/2003). These are all quality opponents, and they'll all challenge this young Michigan team. The N.C. State game is the 3rd-place game in the Big Ten-ACC Challenge, and it will be on national TV. Come on out for the game on Tuesday, and cheer on the Wolverines. They're fun and exciting to watch, and this is a big game. A good, loud crowd would really help.

Go Blue!