11/22/2004 – Week #03 – The Start Of The Regular Season

The University of Michigan men's basketball team started its regular season this past week, with three home victories. On Monday (11/15/2004), they beat Binghamton, 59-46, in the 1st round of the Preseason National Invitation Tournament (NIT). Then, on Wednesday (11/17/2004) they beat Colorado, 69-60, in the 2nd round. Finally, on Friday (11/19/2004), they beat Sacramento State (SSU), 70-49. The game on Friday wasn't part of the Preseason NIT.

These three victories start UM off with a 3-0 record, which is nice, but not unexpected. The two wins in the Preseason NIT send them to Madison Square Garden for the Final Four, on Wednesday (11/24/2004) and Friday (11/26/2004). As I mentioned last week, no team has ever won the Postseason NIT and the Preseason NIT in the same calendar year, but UM has a chance to do it. The game on Wednesday is against (#10) Arizona, and the game on Friday will be either the Championship game against the winner of the (#2) Wake Forest vs. Providence game, or the Consolation game against the loser. It might be too much to expect Michigan to be able to beat Arizona this early in the season, and I expect Wake Forest to handle Providence pretty easily, so I wouldn't be surprised to see UM beat Providence in the Consolation game. That would be OK, since the game experience will help Michigan in the long run.

Looking back on the games this past week, they were all good tune-ups for the Wolverines. Binghamton put up quite a fight, and led for almost the entire 1st half, and the first couple minutes of the 2nd half, before Michigan kicked up their defensive effort and shut them down. It was encouraging that the Wolverines never got discouraged or acted scared when the got down by double-digits (29-17) with 3:49 left in the first half. They methodically chipped away at the lead, and got it down to just 4 points (32-28) at halfway, then tied it up early in the 2nd half, and went ahead for good on an awesome dunk by Brent Petway. UM won the game going away. They outscored Binghamton 31-14 in the 2nd half.

The Colorado game was even more impressive. Michigan jumped out to an early 14-2 lead, and built it up as high as 24-8 before Colorado started chipping away at it. UM managed to get the lead back up to 15 points (40-25) at halftime, and extended the lead to 19 points with about 5 minutes left in the game. Normally, that would be more than enough, but Colorado put on a furious rally, and cut the lead back to 7 points (65-58) with about a minute left. Michigan managed to hold the fort for the last minute, and won by 9 points, 69-60.

The Sacramento State game was Michigan's 3rd game in 5 days, which is a lot of basketball. Besides being tired, the Wolverines were also short-handed. Lester Abram and Graham Brown both missed the game, due to injuries. Brown left the Colorado game late in the 2nd half when he got elbowed in the head by one of the Colorado players. It wasn't done intentionally, but it knocked Brown out of the game, and he sat out the SSU game with a mild concussion. Abram hurt his sore shoulder, and sat out the game because of it. In their places, Sherrod Harrell started for Abram, and Petway started for Brown.

The game itself was close for the 1st half, with Michigan leading 34-31 at halftime, but once again UM turned up the defense in the 2nd half, and outscored SSU 36-18, for a final score of 70-49. It was encouraging to see Michigan win fairly easily without two of their regular starters.

Let's take a look at some of the interesting stats from the games. The one that really jumps out at you in the Binghamton game is Michigan's free-throw shooting percentage:

91.3% (21-for-23). That's awesome. Binghamton only shot 68.8% (11-for-16). Those 10 points were a big part of the final margin of victory.

The rest of the stats for the Binghamton game were pretty close. Michigan shot 37.2% (16-for-43) from the field, which isn't very good, but they held Binghamton to 27.3% (15-for-55). Neither team shot 3-pointers very well (6-for-19 = 31.6% for UM, 5-for-22 = 22.7% for Binghamton), but UM had more assists (11-10), less turnovers (12-13), and more blocks (8-2) than Binghamton. Surprisingly, Binghamton out-rebounded Michigan, 37-36.

The stats for the Colorado game were very close. UM outshot Colorado, but just barely: 39.7% (25-for-63) to 39.0% (23-for-59). The 3-point shooting was also slightly in Michigan's favor (4-for-11 = 36.4% for Michigan, 6-for-18 = 33.3% for Colorado), as was the free-throw shooting: 15-for-18 (83.3%) for UM, 8-for-10 (80.0%) for Colorado. Michigan out-rebounded Colorado (41-37), had more assists (16-14), less turnovers (16-19), and more steals (14-11). The most impressive stat for Colorado was their 12 blocked shots. It seemed like even more in person.

Finally, the stats for the Sacramento State game were also pretty close, which is kind of surprising for a 21-point victory. Michigan had a much better night shooting than the rest of the week, hitting 45.7% (21-for-46). They held SSU to 33.3% (19-for-57), but that's only 2 more baskets for Michigan (21-19). Where did the other points come from? Not the 3-point shots. SSU actually outshot the Wolverines: 4-for-16 (25.0%) for Michigan, 5-for-19 (26.3%) for SSU. It was the free-throws that made the difference. While SSU did hit 100% of their free throws (6-for-6), Michigan shot a lot more, even if they only shot 70.6% (24-for-34). That was the difference in the game. As expected, the Wolverines out-rebounded SSU (37-33), had more assists (13-10), less turnovers (19-21), more blocked shots (12-0), and more steals (9-7).

Individually, the big gun this past week was Dion Harris. He was the only starter (or player) to hit double-figures in all three games, and he was the offensive star of the Colorado game, with a game-high 24 points. He was the 2nd leading scorer for Michigan in the Binghamton game, with 16 points, just behind Daniel Horton (17 points), and he was the 2nd leading scorer for UM in the Sacramento State game, with 14 points, just behind Courtney Sims (17 points). Harris occasionally has games where he gets his points, but only by taking a lot of shots, and he had a couple low-percentage outings this week: 4-for-12 (33.3%) vs. Binghamton, and 4-for-11 (36.4%) vs. SSU, but he shot very well vs. Colorado (7-for-12 = 58.3%).

Horton hit double-figures in two of the three games this past week, and he got close in the 3rd game. As I mentioned above, he was the leading scorer in the Binghamton game, with 17 points, and he had 13 points against SSU. He only had 8 points against Colorado, but that was OK, since Harris was on fire. His shooting was OK: 5-for-10 (50.0%) vs. Binghamton, 3-for-10 (30.0%) vs. Colorado, and 4-for-11 (36.4%) vs. SSU.

Sims was the other starter who hit double-figures in two of the three games this past week, and he also came close in the 3rd game. As previously mentioned, he was the high-scorer for Michigan in the SSU game, with 17 points, and he had 10 points (and 10 rebounds) against Colorado. He almost hit double-figures against Binghamton, with 8 points. As usual, he shot pretty well, except for the Colorado game: 3-for-5 (60.0%) vs. Binghamton, 5-for-16 (31.2%) vs. Colorado, and 5-for-7 (71.4%) vs. SSU.

The other two regular starters, Lester Abram and Graham Brown, only played in two of the three games this past week, due to injuries. In those two games, Abram hit double-figures

in one of them (Colorado) with 12 points, and almost hit double-figures in the other (Binghamton), with 8 points. He didn't shoot very well in either game: 2-for-12 (16.7%) vs. Binghamton, and 3-for-10 (30.0%) vs. Colorado. He's got to work on his shooting percentage. Brown isn't expected to shoot or score much in this offense, and he didn't. He had 0 points, on 0 shots, in the Binghamton game, but he did shoot 50.0% (3-for-6) for 6 points vs. Colorado.

The other two starters this week were Sherrod Harrell and Brent Petway, filling in for Abram and Brown in the Sacramento State game. Harrell wasn't expected to pick up the slack for Abram's scoring, just help out as another point guard, and run the offense. He did manage to score 3 points, on 1-for-2 shooting. He played in the other two games last week, but didn't take a shot in either. Petway had a good week, both as a starter and a bench player. As usual, his biggest contributions were intangible, as he fired up the team and the crowd when he came in. He had the big dunk that started the run that put Binghamton away in the 2nd half of that game, and he had a career-high 7 blocked shots vs. SSU. He also had 7 rebounds in that game, and 7 more in the Binghamton game. In fact, he was the leading rebounder for UM in the Binghamton game, coming off the bench. He only scored 2 points in that game, on 1-for-2 shooting, but he did much better against Colorado (4-for-8, for 9 points) and SSU (4-for-6 = 66.7%, for 11 points).

The rest of the bench players chipped in here and there. Chris Hunter played in all three games, and scored in two of them. He had 6 points (on 1-for-2 shooting from the floor, and 4-for-4 shooting from the free-throw line) against Binghamton, and 7 points against SSU, once again on 1-for-2 shooting from the floor, and 5-for-8 (62.5%) shooting from the free-throw line. He was 0-for-1, for 0 points, against Colorado. Ron Coleman was the only other bench player to see action in all three games. He didn't take a shot in either the Binghamton or Colorado games, but he did score 3 points, on 1-for-4 shooting, in the SSU game.

Since the SSU game turned into a blowout in the 2nd half, many of the bench players got in that game. Dani Wohl, Ashtyn Bell, and Amadou Ba didn't take a shot, so they didn't score. J.C. Mathis went 0-for-1, also for 0 points. Only John Andrews scored, on 1-for-2 shooting.

This week, Michigan has 2 games, in the Preseason NIT, out in New York City. Both games will be on ESPN or ESPN-2, so check your local listings.

Go Blue!