11/29/2004 – Week #04 – A Rotten Time In The Big Apple

The Week In Review

Sometimes, the difference between winning and losing a big basketball game can come down to one shot, one defensive stand, playing tough for 10 more seconds. If you can be tough for those 10 seconds, all your hard work up to that point is worth it. Falter, and it's all for nothing. That's what happened to the University of Michigan men's basketball team in the semifinal game of the Preseason National Invitation Tournament (NIT) on Wednesday (11/24/2004), when they lost to (#18) Arizona 61-60 in overtime. They had the game right there, ready to be won, and they faltered, twice. They played a great game up to that point, and had Arizona on the ropes, but they couldn't deliver the knockout blow either at the end of regulation, or at the end of overtime. At the end of regulation, they had the ball, with the game tied at 55, and 10.2 seconds left. They didn't even get off a shot. In overtime, they had the ball again for the last shot, with about 15 seconds left, down 61-60. This time, they got a couple shots, but they just couldn't put them in, and that was the game. It was a real shame, because they played well enough to win the game, but they just couldn't seal the deal.

After losing that heartbreaker, they had Thanksgiving in New York City, then they came back to Madison Square Garden on Friday (11/26/2004) for the consolation game against Providence, which they lost, 72-63. They had a 4-point lead with about 12 minutes left in the 2nd half, then they fell apart, and never really got back into the game. Providence went on a 14-0 run, and turned a 4-point UM lead into a 10-point Providence lead. It was the first bad game that they've played this year, and it looked like they were just out-of-sorts after the frustrating loss to Arizona.

The two losses in the Preseason NIT lowered Michigan's record to 3-2. As I've already mentioned, UM played a very good game against Arizona, which was encouraging, and it's something to build on. If they can play that kind of game against the rest of the "big boys" on their schedule, they'll be able to hang in there with them, and win their fair share. However, if they come up flat, the way they did in the 2nd half of the Providence game, they'll have a tough time winning even half of their Big Ten games. It remains to be seen which team shows up for each game. While a team seldom loses a season in November, it can lose a chance to make a season in November. A quality win against a ranked opponent is just such an opportunity.

Game Statistics

There is one glaring stat from the Arizona game: Arizona grabbed 54 rebounds over Michigan, including an amazing 23 offensive boards. UM had 41 rebounds, which is OK, but giving up 54 rebounds is a pretty sure way to lose a game. Other than that one stat, the rest were all as close as the game: each team had 12 assists and 16 turnovers, Michigan had 4 blocked shots, and Arizona had 2, Michigan had 8 steals, Arizona had 6. The shooting percentages were close (UM = 37.7% [23-for-61], Arizona = 31.4% [22-for-70]), the 3-point shooting percentages were close (UM = 23.8% [5-for-21], Arizona = 26.3% [5-for-19]), and the free-throw shooting percentages were close (UM = 52.9% [9-for-17], Arizona = 60% [12-for-20]). Actually, that last stat is telling. Michigan had been shooting in the high 80s, low 90s from the free-throw line, so 52.9% is terrible.

The stats from the Providence game aren't nearly as close. Providence shot better from the floor (41.8% [28-for-67] vs. 39.1% [25-for-64] for UM), shot better from 3-point range (26.3% [5-for-19] vs. 21.1% [4-for-19] for UM), and shot much better from the free-throw line (64.7% [11-for-17] vs. 47.4% [9-for-19] for UM). I thought that 52.9% against

Arizona was bad, but 47.4% is truly awful. The other stats were also almost all in favor of Providence: they had more assists (19-11), less turnovers (9-14), more blocked shots (5-4), and more steals (10-6). The only stat that UM won was rebounds (46-41).

Individual Statistics

Individually, the stars of both games were the "DH" boys: Dion Harris and Daniel Horton. Harris was the leading scorer for Michigan in both games, with 16 and 17 points respectively, but he didn't shoot very well to get all those points. He was 6-for-22 (2-for-10 from 3-point range) against Arizona, and 7-for-17 (1-for-5 shooting 3-pointers) against Providence. All those missed shots hurt. Horton was the only other starter (or UM player) to score in double-figures in both games, with 13 and 12 points, respectively. He didn't shoot much better than Harris: 4-for-9 (which is decent) and 4-for-15 (which isn't).

Once again, the Wolverines were playing short-handed. Lester Abram missed his 2nd and 3rd games, due to his sore shoulder. The other regular starter who missed the Sacramento State game, Graham Brown, was back in action, and he played pretty well, given his role on the team. He only scored 2 and 5 points, respectively, but he had 3 and 7 rebounds. In place of Abram, Sherrod Harrell started against Arizona, and Ron Coleman got his first career start against Providence. Harrell did OK against Arizona, with 4 points, including a 3-pointer to start the game. He was scoreless coming off the bench against Providence. Coleman had a much rougher time. In the Providence game, when he was a starter, he shot a woeful 1-for-11, including 0-for-5 from 3-point range. Combined with his 0-for-4 shooting (0-for-2 from 3-point range) against Arizona, he shot 1-for-15 for the week. It will be welcome relief when he finally finds his shot, hopefully soon.

The other regular starter was Courtney Sims, and he had a pretty good week. He only had 6 points against Arizona, but he had 10 against Providence, and he shot well in both games: 3-for-5 and 4-for-6. He only had 4 rebounds against Arizona, but he had 10 in the Providence game, giving him a double-double. He did hurt the team a little in the Providence game, shooting 2-for-8 from the free-throw line.

Michigan actually got a lot of help from the bench in both games. Chris Hunter had a very good game against Arizona, scoring 11 points, most of them down the stretch. He followed that up with 8 points against Providence. However, the crowd- and media-favorite of the whole team was Brent Petway, who spent his Thanksgiving vacation above the rim. He had a team-high 8 rebounds against Arizona, and 5 more in the Providence game. He scored 8 points against Arizona, on 4-for-5 shooting (3 dunks and a tip-in), and 6 points against Providence, on 3-for-3 shooting. He played hard, and he brought a lot of energy to the rest of the team when he was on the floor.

The only other bench player to see action during the week as John Andrews, who played 21 minutes against Arizona, and 7 more against Providence. He didn't score against Arizona, although he did grab 3 rebounds, and he scored 3 points in the Providence game. He did a nice job filling in for Abram.

The Upcoming Week

This week, Michigan has 2 games, both against ranked teams. On Tuesday (11/30/2004), they play at (#3) Georgia Tech in Atlanta, as part of the Big Ten-ACC Challenge, then on Saturday (12/04/2004), they host (#21) Notre Dame in Crisler Arena. The Georgia Tech game will be televised on ESPN at 7:00 p.m. (EST). The Notre Dame game is at noon, and is also going to be broadcast on ESPN, so if you can't come on out and cheer on the

Wolverines in person, be sure to watch on TV. Winning either game would be a big accomplishment for this team, and some good crowd support on Saturday would really help.

Go Blue!