02/28/2007 – EXTRA – The Good Guys Win Again!

It's Great To Be A Michigan Wolverine!

Last night (Tuesday 02/27/2007), the University of Michigan men's basketball team beat the Evil Empire (a.k.a. Michigan State) in Crisler Arena, 67-56. This was a big win for the Wolverines, and it really helped their chances of making it to the NCAA Tournament for the first time in way too long. The win raises Michigan's record to 20-10 (8-7), and pulls Michigan into a tie for 6th place with MSU.

It was a very exciting game. Michigan fell behind early in the 1st half, tied it up a few times, then pulled ahead for good, 20-19, with about 5:30 left in the half. They led by 5 (33-28) at halftime, and stretched the lead to 10 points (41-31) with about 15:30 left in the game. MSU came storming back, and got within a point (43-42) with about 12:00 left to play, but Michigan answered to push it back up to 6 points (49-43) in the next 2 minutes. From that point, State never got closer than 3 points, and Michigan pulled away in the last 2 minutes to win by 11.

Don't tell Lloyd Carr, but beating the Evil Empire in basketball means even more to me than beating them in football. This is the game I want to win the most each year, followed by the away version of the UM-MSU game, then the football game. I just love watching Tom Izzo squirm on the sidelines when things don't go his way. I really enjoyed watching the obnoxious visiting crowd file out glumly after the game. They were having so much fun before the game started, with their boring cheers and their rude comments. They are poor losers, and even worse when they win. It was great to shut them up at the end of the game.

I'll dissect the game stats in my weekly column on Monday, but I've got to mention the great game that Dion Harris had: he was the leading score for both teams with 24 points, on 7-for-14 shooting from the floor and 8-for-8 shooting from the free-throw line. He didn't have a great night shooting from 3-point range (2-for-7), but he did have more assists than turnovers (2 to 1), and he played 35 minutes.

The other Michigan players who really helped the effort were Brent Petway, Jerret Smith, Courtney Sims, and Jevohn Shepherd:

- Petway only had 7 points (on 3-for-5 shooting), but a couple of his baskets were huge in terms of momentum, and he really got the crowd into it.
- Smith only had 8 points (on 2-for-5 shooting), but he had the most assists (4) and was the 2nd leading rebounder, with 6 boards. More importantly, he ran the point very efficiently, with only 1 turnover, so Harris could move to shooting guard.
- Sims didn't start, but he chipped in 13 points (on 4-for-8 shooting) off the bench as the only other Michigan player in double figures. He was the leading rebounder (10), and had 2 blocks.
- Finally, there was Shepherd. He only took 1 shot, and he missed it, for 0 points, but he might have been the most valuable player out there, because he helped shut down MSU's only real scoring threat, Drew Neitzel. Sure, Neitzel had a touch of the flu, and he certainly wasn't 100% out there, but the few times he got open, he showed that he could still shoot 3-pointers, sick or not. Neitzel didn't start, and only played 29 minutes, but Shepherd helped hold him to 11 points, on 3-for-7 shooting, and only 2-for-5 from 3-point range. That was huge. MSU is basically a one-man team this season, and when that one man is held in check, they are very beatable.

It was a great team win, but Michigan doesn't get much time to savor it: they play (#1) Ohio State in Crisler Arena on Saturday (03/03/2007), at 4:00 p.m. If they play as hard and as focused as they did last night, they might be able to spring the huge upset on Saturday. Come on down to Crisler and cheer on the Wolverines.

Go Blue!