

Griffin Shines Again, But Rockets Still Fall

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While watching the Bowling Green-Toledo game on SportsTime Ohio I was stunned by this statistic given by STO broadcaster Michael Reghi - Toledo is currently mired in a 41-game losing streak on the road.

This blew my mind because, despite their poor records last season and thus far this campaign, the Rockets are not a horrible basketball team.

The last time Toledo has won away from Savage Arena was when they topped West Georgia, 77-62, in Miami, Fla. during the O'Reilly Auto Parts College Basketball Tournament on Nov. 26, 2008. The last time the Rockets won an actual road game came on Jan. 16, 2008 when they traveled to DeKalb and claimed a 65-61 victory over Northern Illinois.

This streak of road losses is inexplicable. During the streak they have suffered losses in Baltimore against UM-Baltimore County, Dayton against Wright State, Chicago against the UIC Flames twice, Youngstown against Youngstown State and Fort Wayne, Ind. against IPFW. You would think they could have stolen at least one of these games because there are some real bottom-feeders in there.

With their 70-64 home loss to Bowling Green yesterday the Rockets have now lost seven of eight games, but there is a glimmer of home emerging. Malcolm Griffin, a 6-foot-4 sophomore

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guard, has emerged as the kind of player that can take over a game and almost single-handedly lead a team to victory. His last four games have turned plenty of heads.

It started with a 31-point, 4 rebound, 4 assist and 1 steal effort against Northern Illinois. He then dropped 22 points with 5 rebounds, 6 assists and 2 steals on Western Michigan in UT's lone conference win this season. That was followed up by a 25-point, 5 rebound, 3 assist game against Ball State before, last night against BG, Griffin scored 25 points with 3 rebounds, 5 assists and a steal. During this explosive four-game stretch Griffin has shot 39-of-74 from the floor (52.7%) and 10-of-20 (50%) from beyond the 3-point line.

It is almost as if a light has clicked on in Griffin's head. When you look on the Toledo Rockets basketball website and find Griffin's bio page you can see what could have been holding Griffin back during his UT career. At the top of the individual players' pages there is a quote from Toledo coach Tod Kowalczyk. Most of them are quite flattering and flowery, but Griffin's was a message to the player:

"Malcolm is figuring out how hard you need to work to be successful at this level. He has a great feel for the game and talent, but he needs to have his work ethic match his talent level for him to be productive."

In other words, Kowalczyk was not happy with his young guard's work ethic. Last year he averaged just 7.3 points per game and his career high heading into this season was 17 points. Apparently Griffin took his coach's words to heart because this year he leads the Rockets in scoring at 13.3 points per game, has a team-high 22 steals and is shooting 40.8% from 3-point range.

Unfortunately, for Toledo fans, none of this has added up to much success. Following the loss to heated rival Bowling Green, UT now stands at 4-16 this season. And the Rockets do not have a cakewalk coming up; first they hit the road for a pair of games, first at Kent and then at Buffalo, then comes home to host Akron. This is followed by a road game at Ohio University before heading home to take on Miami. These five teams have a combined record of 51-43 this season, a 54.2 winning percentage.