12/09/1999 – Last Night's Last Minute Victory Over Kent

Michigan overcame a double-digit deficit, and rallied to beat a scrappy Kent team, 75-73, in the final minute at Crisler Arena Wednesday night. The Wolverines were sluggish for the first 30 minutes, then they started clicking. Kent lead most of the game, and fought off almost every attempt Michigan made to grab the lead, but the final push was successful. The officiating in the first half was terrible, with 26 fouls called, but the refs settled down in the second half and let the two teams play ball.

Once again, a freshman lead the way, in this case Jamal Crawford. He had a career-high 27 points, including the game-winning leaner in the lane. He also did a good job of bringing the ball upcourt against Kent's tough full-court press. He had to do this more often than usual, since Kevin Gaines spent a lot of the game on the bench in foul trouble.

During the 18 minutes he was in, Gaines did a good job of breaking the press, and running the offense, but he got hit with a couple cheap "touch" fouls, and fouled out with about 4 minutes left to go. Gavin Groninger did a good job filling in for him, but he's not the ball-handler that Gaines is, and no one on the team is as fast or as agile as Gaines. Gavin did hit a couple of crucial three-pointers, including the one that finally pulled Michigan into a tie, after trailing for so long.

Leon Jones finally broke out of his mini-slump, delivering 16 important points, including a couple big three-pointers. Josh Asselin had 8 points, and the game-saving blocked shot with 6.1 seconds left. On the other hand, Josh also committed a potentially disastrous turnover on an inbounds play, and he missed the front end of a one-and-one with the game in the balance. LaVell Blanchard had an "off" night, with only 4 points (on 2-7 shooting), but he did lead the team with 7 rebounds. Peter Vignier did a much better job of holding on the basketball, and his passing was a lot better. Chris Young and Leland Anderson contributed some important "quality minutes" at center/forward.

The good news is that the Wolverines found a way to win another game that looked lost, as they did against Detroit-Mercy. Their record is now 6-0, which is better than a lot of people expected. The bad news is that Duke is coming to town on Saturday. Few people expect them to beat Duke, but it's important to play a good game against them, regardless of the final outcome. UM can't "disappear" for 4 or 5 minutes at a time, or they'll be down by 30 before they know it. They'll have to cut down on their careless turnovers, and take good shots. If they can do all those things, they can hang around with Duke, and have a shot at pulling out a miracle at the end.

Overall, the tone of the season is very positive. The team is undefeated, all of the freshmen seem to be getting better, and the team is slowly learning how to play well together. There haven't been any injuries, and there doesn't seem to be any dissension or dissatisfaction on the team. With 9 players jockeying for playing time, this could have easily been a problem, but so far, everyone seems comfortable with their role on the team. That could take them a long way as the season goes on.