12/13/1999 – Wolverines Impressive In Close Loss To Duke

Raw talent met experienced talent on Saturday afternoon, and experience won. Duke's more battle-tested team remained calm in the face of a furious Michigan rally in the last two minutes of the game, and hung on for a thrilling 104-97 win. The young Wolverines were very impressive in the loss, especially Jamal Crawford and Kevin Gaines. If it hadn't been for a few small errors in judgment and execution, Michigan might have pulled off the big upset. Instead, it was their first loss of the season. But, it was a "good loss", if there is ever such a thing. The Blue Devils might have run away from the Wolverines, which can be a tough lesson for a young team to swallow. As it is, UM can be proud of their effort, and the team can learn a lot from this tape.

The difference in the game was the big men. Duke had Carlos Boozer and Shane Battier, and UM didn't have anyone to match them. Peter Vignier turned in a solid performance off the bench, and Josh Asselin had a few bright moments, but the 47 points scored inside by Boozer (25) and Battier (22) more than offset the scoring advantage UM enjoyed at the guard position. Vignier had 9 points, and Asselin had 4 points, for a difference of 34 points inside. At the guard position, Crawford had 27 points, and Gaines had 23, for a total of 50 points, which was 15 more than Duke's starting guard tandem of Nate James (18 points) and Jason Williams (17 points).

Crawford and Gaines were fearless against Duke's pressure defense. They both committed just one turnover each, in 38 and 40 minutes, respectively. They did force up some bad shots, and Crawford did hoist up 24 shots to get his 27 points, but they played hard and gave it all they had. Crawford was only 2 for 9 on his 3-pointers, which hurt. If he could have just coaxed another one or two of them in, it would have been a completely different ball game. Ditto for Gavin Groninger, who was 0 for 4 on his 3-pointers. He had a few good open looks, and just missed. It was frustrating, but he'll hit them again in the future.

Once again, LaVell Blanchard played a good all around game, with 17 points and 9 rebounds. He's played better games this year, and it would have really helped if he'd had a monster game against Duke, but he certainly helped the cause. Chris Young also had a good game, in limited action. Leland Anderson was not a factor at all, but he's still learning.

The sellout crowd at Crisler Arena deserves special mention. The fans did a nice job of supporting the team in a positive manner, and no one gave up until the final 5 seconds. Fan support like that can only help, so keep up the good work!

Now that the Duke game is out of the way, the rest of the non-conference schedule looks very winnable. The next game is on Sunday (12/19/1999) at Boston College, and then there are 3 more home games before the Big Ten season starts: Duquesne (12/23/1999), Towson (12/28/1999), and Colorado State (01/02/2000). Hopefully, we can win these last 4 non-conference games, and start the Big Ten schedule with a 10-1 record.