12/26/1999 – Wolverines End 2-Game Skid, Beat Duquesne 79-67

The Michigan Wolverines ended their 2-game losing streak Thursday night (12/23/1999) when they defeated Duquesne 79-67 in Crisler Arena. It wasn't exactly a masterpiece, but it was a "W", which is an improvement on the two recent "L"s. Michigan looked sluggish for much of the game, but turned up the intensity at the right moments to insure the victory.

As has been the case almost every game this season, the freshmen lead the way again. LaVell Blanchard and Kevin Gaines each had 16 points, and Jamal Crawford was right behind them with 14 points. Blanchard was the leading rebounder for Michigan, with 10. The other two freshmen weren't a factor, especially Leland Anderson, who was on the bench in street clothes with an injury. Gavin Groninger did have 5 points, but he continues to struggle with his 3-point shooting (1 for 4). The big men contributed a little more than usual, with 9 points from Josh Asselin, and 6 each from Peter Vignier and Chris Young.

It was a see-saw game for much of the first half, but the Wolverines settled down in the second half to take a decent lead. That lead slipped to 4 points with about 2:00 to go, but Michigan pushed it back up to a more comfortable 8 points, which proved to be enough. As usual, Gaines and Crawford were fearless out there, and Blanchard was quietly efficient at rebounding and scoring. Blanchard doesn't make as many flashy plays as Gaines and Crawford, but he gets results.

Duquesne was a worthy opponent, and a reasonable test for this young team. The game could have gone either way. It went Michigan's way, and that's good news. In years past, Michigan found a way to lose these kind of games. Last Sunday's loss at Boston College was a little discouraging, but it wasn't the end of the world. The freshmen are still learning, and it's hard to learn what it's like to play on the road, in a hostile arena, until you actually experience it. That experience will come in handy once the Big Ten season starts, in two weeks. In the meantime, there are still two more non-conference games left, both at home: Towson this Tuesday (12/28/1999), and Colorado State next Sunday (01/02/2000). They are both winnable games, and they are very important to Michigan's chances for making it to the NCAA Tournament in March. A loss in either game makes it that much harder to earn a berth in the Big Dance.