01/10/2000 – Wolverines Salvage Road Split

The Michigan Wolverines Men's Basketball team hit the road last week, and found out just how tough it can be to win in the Big Ten. Unfortunately, I couldn't hit the road with them, so I followed them via the radio, the Web, and the newspapers.

The young team got a rude awakening on Wednesday (01/05/2000) at Minnesota, when they got thumped 85-68. They fell behind early, got close for a brief moment, then let the game get away from them completely. About the only good thing about the game was that no one got injured. LaVell Blanchard, who had been averaging about 15 points a game, fouled out with 1 point. UM isn't going to win many games when that happens. The rest of the stats were equally gloomy.

Apparently, the Minnesota game taught the team a few things, and they showed what they learned Saturday (01/08/2000) at Purdue. UM took the lead early, and lead throughout the first half. Purdue charged back and took the lead in the early part of the second half, but the Wolverines regained the momentum and the lead later in the half, and should have won the game in regulation. Instead, they had to sweat it out through 2 overtimes, but they finally won, 88-86. It's a big win for the team, for several reasons: First of all, every win is important in their drive for the NCAA Tournament. Secondly, it was their first Big Ten win of the year. Finally, it was their first true "away" win. Their only other win on the road came at a neutral site (vs. Georgia Tech). They got beaten badly at Boston College, and at Minnesota. It would have been disastrous to start out the Big Ten season at 0-2. A sweep would have taken a miracle, but a split was reasonable to hope for. I just figured they would beat Minnesota, not Purdue. Go figure.

The stats for the Purdue game were much more impressive than the Minnesota game. LaVell Blanchard returned to form, with 21 points and 10 rebounds, including an offensive rebound/basket to win the game. Jamal Crawford had a decent game, with some real "highs" (19 points, and blocking the last two Purdue shots to preserve the victory), and a few "lows" (5-for-17 shooting, missed two crucial free throws at the end of the 1st overtime, and committed a key foul to send the game into the 2nd overtime). Kevin Gaines was steady again, and chipped in 8 points and 6 rebounds. Chris Young had a surprisingly good game, with 8 points and 6 rebounds in 27 quality minutes. Josh Asselin had 13 points and 5 rebounds.

The Wolverines now sit at 10-3 overall, 1-1 in the Big Ten. Their next game is at home this Sunday (01/16/2000) vs. nationally-ranked Illinois. It would be a big win for the team, and crowd support will be crucial. Show up, make some noise, and support the Wolverines!