01/16/2000 – Wolverines Win Second Straight Overtime Game

Michigan won it's second consecutive Big Ten basketball game, and it's second consecutive overtime game Sunday (01/16/2000) afternoon vs. Illinois at Crisler Arena, 95-91. It was an exciting game, with a thrilling ending. The Wolverines played hard, and played well for most of the game. Neither team was ever able to get a double-digit lead, with Illinois leading most of the way. The Wolverines played a little bit better than the Illini in the clutch, and that was the deciding factor. A large and vocal crowd helped as well. It was great to have the students back, in large numbers.

As usual, the freshmen lead the way. LaVell Blanchard was the leading scorer, with 22 points (including 11-for-11 on free throws), and Kevin Gaines was steady running the offense. Jamal Crawford was benched for the first 15 minutes of the game, for violating an unspecified team rule, but he made up for lost time in the second half, scoring 14 points and providing a spark on both ends of the court. Josh Asselin had a big game, with 13 points, and 10 big rebounds (all in the second half). Brandon Smith had another good game, as he continues his incredible recovery from knee surgery. Leon Jones, Chris Young, and Gavin Groninger all contributed, but Peter Vignier had another disappointing outing.

This was an important win for the Wolverines, since it keeps them in the thick of the Big Ten race. No one expects them to win the Big Ten, not with Michigan State, Ohio State, and Indiana having such good seasons, but it's not unreasonable to hope for a 3rd or 4th place finish. To do this, Michigan has to win most, if not all, of their home games, and try to win half of the road games. If they do that, they'll be a lock for the NCAA Tournament.

The Wolverines don't get much rest. They play again at home on Wednesday evening (01/19/2000) vs. Northwestern at 8:00 p.m. All the Big Ten games are big games, and this is one that looks pretty winnable. Another big crowd would sure help...