02/07/2000 – Buckeyes Batter Wolverines, 88-67

The University of Michigan Wolverines were soundly beaten by the Ohio State Buckeyes Sunday afternoon (02/06/2000) in Crisler Arena, 88-67. The loss extends UM's losing streak to 4 games, 3 of them blowouts. OSU was clearly the better team, and the Buckeyes won easily and convincingly. UM fell behind early, struggled to stay close, then lost control of the game early in the second half.

Once again, poor defense was the main problem, but turnovers played a big part as well. OSU got many easy fast-break baskets off steals and poor passes. UM had to work much harder for their baskets, and 36% shooting didn't help.

The team obviously missed Jamal Crawford, not just for his points, but also for his enthusiasm. They may not have been able to beat MSU or OSU even if he had been in the lineup, but I'm sure they would have given both of them a much better fight. LaVell Blanchard and Kevin Gaines both played hard and played well, but they weren't enough. OSU was too deep and talented. Josh Asselin had a decent game, and Chris Young tried hard. Brandon Smith and Leon Jones had mediocre games, and that hurt a lot. The team needs one or both of them to step up and pick up some of the load that Jamal used to carry. They both have the ability, but not the consistency.

I'm afraid UM is looking at the NIT for this year. There are 3 more games left in this brutal streak, and UM could easily lose them all: at Illinois, home vs. Indiana, and at Wisconsin. UM might be able to sneak out a win at Wisconsin, but I don't expect it. The team's current record is 12-7 (3-5 in the Big Ten), and if they lose the next 3 games (as expected), they'll be at 12-10 (3-8 in the Big Ten). The last 5 games aren't a lot easier, but I can see a few wins: home vs. Penn State, home vs. Purdue, at Northwestern, home vs. Iowa, and at MSU. They could win all 3 of the home games, and the away game at Northwestern. They don't stand much of a chance at MSU, so that would make their final regular season record 16-11 (7-9 in the Big Ten). If they can win 2 games in the Big Ten Tournament, they might get an at-large bid to the NCAA Tournament, but even that's iffy.

Just a few words about the whole Jamal Crawford controversy: personally, I think that Jamal got a raw deal from the NCAA. I can understand the need for the NCAA bylaw that he violated, and I can see the circumstances where it should be applied, and this isn't one of them. There was no abuse of the system. All Jamal got out of it was a safer place to live, so he didn't end up dead at a bus stop, like his best friend. When he was 15 years old, was he supposed to say to his mother "Mom, I'm going to be an athlete at an NCAA institution in 3 years, and there's an obscure bylaw in their giant rule book that requires you to make my living arrangements legal"? How was he, or his mother, supposed to know about this bylaw? Even when they learned about it, just recently, it didn't look like it applied to them. It's a sad thing, because Jamal didn't do anything wrong, but he's still being punished for it. The NCAA has taken away 6 games from his career, and even if they eventually realize that they misapplied the rules, they can't give those games back to him.

I'd also like to say a few words about visiting fans: this year, there have been more rowdy visiting fans in Crisler Arena than any other year I can remember, and I've been going to almost all the home games since 1974. The UD-Mercy fans were loud and obnoxious, right up until we stole the game away from them in the last seconds. The MSU fans were even louder and more obnoxious, not to mention cocky and arrogant. Ohio State brought almost as many visiting fans to the game Sunday, but

they were much better behaved. Sure, they cheered hard for their team, and occasionally they cheered against Michigan, but in general they showed a lot of class. It was a marked contrast to the Izzone Thugs. I'm sure some of them will be proud of that characterization, and it doesn't surprise me at all. I've always said that at MSU, they spell "class" with a capital "K".