02/25/2000 – Wolverines Come Up Just Short Against Purdue

The University of Michigan Wolverines came close, but couldn't quite beat Purdue on Thursday (02/24/2000) in Crisler Arena. Despite the continued suspension of Jamal Crawford, and an early injury to LaVell Blanchard, the undermanned Wolverines played with a lot of heart, and took Purdue to the wire before losing 78-75. UM was just one missed rebound away from having a chance to tie or win the game.

Gavin Groninger had easily his best game at UM, scoring 19 points before he fouled out with 2:06 left in the game. Besides shooting 5 for 7 from 3-point range, he also had a wonderful reverse lay-up near the end of the game. He looked much more confident out there than he has all season. Kevin Gaines had another great game, scoring 18 points, dishing out 5 assists, and only committing 1 turnover in 38 minutes of action. Brandon Smith, Chris Young, and Josh Asselin all played hard, but they were all plagued by foul trouble most of the night.

The game sure didn't start out well. The first blow was learning that Jamal Crawford's NCAA suspension had been lengthened from 6 games to 14. Then LaVell Blanchard went down with a twisted knee in the first minute of the game. That left UM seriously undermanned, and Purdue took full advantage of it by driving to the basket and picking up fouls. It was also obvious at the end of the game that the Purdue starters were much better rested than the UM starters, and it showed in the last 4:00 of the game. Some questionable officiating didn't help matters, either.

At this point, I don't know the extent of Blanchard's injury to his knee. If he's out for more than a couple of games, UM is in big trouble. They're already shorthanded, and LaVell is one of the best players in the league.

The loss drops UM record to 13-11 (4-9 in Big Ten), with 3 regular season games left before the Big Ten tournament. UM should be able to win 2 of them (at Northwestern and home vs. Iowa), but the game at MSU will be a tough one. Realistically speaking, UM should enter the Big Ten tournament with a 15-12 (6-10 Big Ten) record. That means that UM would have to win at least 3 games in the tournament to stand a chance of an NCAA Tournament invitation. Not too likely, but not impossible.