03/16/2000 – Season Over: Notre Dame Eliminates Michigan From NIT In First Round

The University of Michigan men's basketball team lost at Notre Dame on Wednesday (03/15/2000) in the first round of the NIT, 75-65. It was a very disappointing way to end a season that had started with so much promise.

UM played hard against Notre Dame, but they didn't play with much spirit or intensity. That's been a problem in several games in the second half of the season. The effort was there, but not the desire. This was a team that was pretty easily rattled and demoralized, and it cost them a few games. The game against Notre Dame was just another example. UM hung around with Notre Dame, but once ND got a small lead with time running out, panic set in, and UM fell apart.

Check out some of the stats from the box score:

Brandon Smith: 18 minutes, 0 points (0 for 0 shooting), 0 rebounds.
Peter Vignier: 17 minutes, 2 rebounds.
Chris Young: 17 minutes, 4 points, 3 rebounds.
LaVell Blanchard: 26 minutes, 4 rebounds.

Michigan's not going to win many games with stats like that.

Michigan also needs to improve their team defense significantly. Troy Murphy for Notre Dame gave a clinic on how to beat the UM defense, and he got 32 points to show for it.

The good news for Michigan is that the team next year should be better than this year's, and the rest of the Big Ten should be a little worse, so they should finish with a better record, and challenge for the title. The only (part-time) starter who will be lost from this year's team is Peter Vignier, who was inconsistent throughout his career. It's been said that the best thing that can happen to a freshman is that he becomes a sophomore, and this year's freshman class should be fabulous next year as sophomores.

I just wish UM could have won a couple more games in the Big Ten Tournament and the NIT, and knocked off the last 2 games of Jamal Crawford's suspension. As it is, he'll have to sit out the first 2 games next season.

Check back in the next few days for my end-of-the-season wrap-up, and my final grades for the players and head coach. Hint: they're not nearly as generous as my mid-term grades.