07/11/2000 – Recent Defections Hurt Basketball Team

The recent defections of three key members of the University of Michigan Men's Basketball team will definitely hurt the team next year.

Jamal Crawford
We've been waiting for the other shoe to drop with Jamal Crawford since he was first suspended, way back on 02/01/2000, 45 minutes before the home game vs. MSU. On 05/09/2000, when he entered the NBA Draft, there was still a faint hope that he would withdraw his name by 06/21/2000, and return to UM for his sophomore season. When he signed with an agent on 06/21/2000, that officially ended any hopes. The fact that he was the 8th player selected in the draft is an indication of how much he will be missed.

On the one hand, I'm not sure that Jamal is really ready to play in the NBA, but on the other hand, I can't blame him for making the move. I still feel that the NCAA was very unfair with him, both in the number of games he was suspended for, and the decision that he had to repay $15,000.

Leland Anderson
Leland didn't play that much last season, for various reasons, and when he did, he wasn't very consistent. He had a few good games, and a bunch of mediocre ones. He will be missed for a couple of reasons: he's one of the few "big guys" on the team, and he had a lot of potential. He was the least successful of last year's freshman class, but he was still a quality player.

With his transfer, and Jamal Crawford's jump to the NBA, the super class of 2003 is suddenly down from 5 to 3, with LaVell Blanchard, Kevin Gaines, and Gavin Groninger returning.

Brandon Smith
Brandon was a key member of the team last year, once he returned from his knee surgery. He was being counted on to provide some senior leadership next year, and he will be missed. He was an exciting, slashing player, with a good shot and good rebounding abilities. He could bring the ball up the court in a pinch, and played decent defense.

Once again, I can understand his reasons for leaving, but his departure will leave another big hole to fill.

The only good news about these departures is the timing. It's still several months until practice starts, so the team has plenty of time to try to adjust to the changes. If these changes had happened in October, it would have been a lot worse.

Hopefully, this will be the end of the turmoil surrounding the team. If they can just stay the course, and get down to playing basketball, I feel that they'll be OK. All the distractions last season, continuing through this spring and summer, can only hurt them. They need to get some stability and continuity in the program, so they can start rebuilding. They have a good nucleus of quality players returning, even after the defections, and with a lot of hard work, they can be as good as any team in the Big Ten. They just need some stability and continuity.