

Men's Hockey Faces St. Norbert In Search Of The Peters Cup

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EAU CLAIRE - The Northern Collegiate Hockey Association (NCHA) Peters Cup Playoffs will be an uphill climb for the eighth-seeded UW-Eau Claire men's hockey team, as it faces top-ranked and defending Peters Cup Champion St. Norbert in quarterfinal play in De Pere this Friday and Saturday.

The Blugolds have a 2-19-4 record overall and 0-12-2 NCHA record. The Green Knights, who are ranked first in the USCHO.com Division III poll, went 20-3-2 this year overall and 10-2-2 in NCHA games.

St. Norbert comes off a season in which it had enormous success, including a 13-game winning streak at one point. The Green Knight power-play is running at 24 percent, while their penalty kill is 90 percent. The team went 13-1-0 this year at home, with the one loss coming after the team clinched the NCHA title. That result is the only NCHA loss the team has had at its Cornerstone Community Center in the past 35 NCHA contests. In the past four-plus seasons, the team went 73-5-4 at this facility. It has found success in the NCHA Peters Cup playoffs also, going 33-10-1 in them all-time. In fact, the team has won the past three Peters Cups.

Eau Claire will have to avoid coming from behind, as the Green Knights are 224-0-6 when leading after two periods in the past 230 matchups. Meanwhile, St. Norbert has many players that can help create a Green Knight lead. Senior Connor Hughes and junior Andrew Derton both have 30 points on the year. Hughes split his 15-15 between assists and goals. Derton had nine goals and 21 assists. That ties them for third in the NCHA for points. Derton's 21 assists are the team's most and are tied for the most in the NCHA for all games. Andy Cote poses another threat, with his 10 goals in NCHA play tying for the lead this year.

The Blugolds will face a solid goalie in Kyle Jones, a sophomore. He went 19-2-2 this year with a .926 save percentage and an average of 1.66 goals against him per game. In NCHA play he went .947 and 1.14 in the respective categories. The narrowly-missed league record is .949, set in 1983-84 by Bemidji State's Galen Nagle.

However, Eau Claire is not without its firepower. **Chip Dunleavy** (*Sr.-Littleton, CO/Columbine*) has 17 points on 13 goals and four assists. He is tied for sixth in the NCHA in goals. Dunleavy's nine power-play goals are good for a third-place tie in the NCHA. **Brooks Lockwood** (*Jr.-Hudson*) totaled eight goals and six assists this season, making for 14 points.

Goalie **Steffan Braunlich** (*Sr.-Los Angeles, CA/Loyola*) has stopped an NCHA leading 615 shots this year. He holds a .895 save percentage and allows an average of 3.49 goals against him per contest.

The Blugold power-play runs at 12.2 percent. The team's penalty kill went 75.5 percent this year.

Despite the Green Knight success, Eau Claire knows how to play St. Norbert tough. In the first meeting between these two teams this year, Eau Claire came from behind in the last period to score two goals, force overtime and an eventual 2-2 tie, which St. Norbert only had two of this season. Then in the last meeting the Green Knights won 6-0, though it was closer than the score indicates for much of the game. The team was 2-0 in the third, but allowed four Green Knight power-play goals in the final period. Eau Claire is 3-24-2 all-time versus St. Norbert, with the last away victory coming in 1994.

The Blugolds look to change that this weekend when they face St. Norbert at 7:00 p.m. on both Friday and Saturday. If the teams split or tie both games, a 20-minute "mini-game" will ensue and 20 minute overtime periods will follow if necessary to determine who moves on in the search for the Peters Cup.