

St. John's Takes Football Opener

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COLLEGEVILLE, MN - The UW-Eau Claire football team kept fourth-ranked St. John's within reach due to some empty Johnnie drives but Eau Claire could not muster up enough offense as the team fell 15-11 to begin the season.

The win gives Johnnies coach John Gagliardi 409 wins, the most by one coach at a single school. Gagliardi is also making history by coaching in his 58th season, passing Amos Alonzo Stagg's mark of 57. The game also drops Eau Claire to 4-6 all-time versus the Johnnies with this being the second consecutive opener lost to them.

Eau Claire started the scoring on its first drive after the home team went three-and-out. **Kyle Paulson** (So.-Amery) looked to fill Jesse Krzyzanowski's shoes as he began his first drive as the go-to Blugold quarterback. Big passes went to **Tony Hull** (Jr.-Blaine, MN/Spring Lake Park) and **Chris Hull** (Jr.-Blaine, MN/Spring Lake Park) as the team marched down the field. Paulson's run of 13 yards got Eau Claire to the Johnnie 20, where they settled on a field goal.

The Johnnies got good field position on the ensuing kickoff with a return of 37 yards. A big 24-yard pass on fourth down from Alex Kofoed to Brian Weber set up an immediate five yard touchdown run from Craig Luberts for a 6-3 lead. The extra kick was no good.

In the second quarter St. John's came up empty for the first time. The Johnnies got to the Eau Claire six-yard line, but Eau Claire held up against a rush and two incompletions to force a field goal, which went wide right and kept it a three-point game.

The next Johnnie drive also came within reach of the end zone, but again the Johnnies did not score. St. John's got to the 28 before Weber made another clutch reception. As he neared the goal, **Dave Wicklund** (So.-Kewaskum) forced a fumble at the two-yard line where **Nate Rucker** (Jr.-Green Bay/Southwest) recovered the ball to kill another Johnnie scoring chance.

Backed up near the goal line, Eau Claire went three-and-out before punting, which gave St. John's excellent field position. After three plays, Luberts found the end zone again and the extra point was made to make the score 13-3.

In a game where St. John's gained 365 yards in total offense compared to Eau Claire's 267, the Johnnies got another chance before halftime. Consecutive passes of 14, 23, and 21 yards brought Saint John's to the three-yard line. The Johnnies tried a pass and a run before running out of time.

Eau Claire had a chance to get within a score of St. John's in the third quarter. Paulson led an air attack to the Johnnie two-yard line. Three plays later they were at the one and could not get in on third-and-goal. The team originally went out to kick the field goal before calling a timeout. The Blugolds came back after the timeout ready to run, however. St. John's held and Eau Claire came up empty.

In the fourth the home team made its way into the red zone again, but the Eau Claire secondary stepped up against four straight pass attempts to force a turnover on downs. On the ensuing play, Paulson was sacked for a loss of 10 yards and a safety to make it 15-3 Johnnies.

The Blugolds did rally with less than four minutes to play with a 44-yard drive that resulted in an 11-yard Paulson touchdown to **Matthew Evensen** (Sr.-Junction City/Auburndale). The two-point conversion was caught by **Scotty Osborn** (Jr.-Fall Creek) to make for an 11-15 score. The Johnnies then recovered the onside kick to seal the game.

Eau Claire only managed 53 yards in the running game, but it held St. John's to 65. Paulson threw for 214 yards on 33 completions with one touchdown and one interception. Evensen (8 receptions, 84 yards) and Chris Hull (6 receptions, 65 yards) had big days. **Ryan Schulz** (Sr.-Maple Grove, MN) led the team in tackles by getting in on nine takedowns.

The Blugolds look to even up their record next Saturday at home against Black Hills State in the Clear Water Bowl. The game begin