

Blugolds stun Defending Champion St. John's

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COLLEGEVILLE, Minn. - The UW-Eau Claire football team completely dominated defending national champion St. John's for three quarters, carrying a 30-7 lead into the fourth quarter, and held off a late Johnnie charge as the Blugolds topped St. John's 30-28 here today at Clemens Stadium.

The Johnnies came into the weekend ranked in the top four in all five major polls, including carrying the No. 1 ranking in the county in Don Hansen's National Weekly Football Gazette and the No. 2 ranking according to D3Football.com's Preseason poll. The regular season loss is the first for St. John's since 2002, when Eau Claire again scored a victory, handing the Johnnies a 29-21 overtime loss. The loss snaps St. John's 19-game regular season winning streak and its 22-game home winning streak. The Blugolds have now defeated St. John's in three of the last four seasons.

The game got off to an inauspicious start for Eau Claire, as **Nels Fredrickson** (Sr.-Burnsville, MN) threw an interception on the first play from scrimmage which was returned for a St. John's touchdown and a 7-0 lead. The Blugolds moved the ball well on their second possession but again lost the ball when **Joe Gast** (Jr.-Waconia, MN) fumbled in Johnnie territory. The Eau Claire defense forced a turnover on downs and the Blugolds followed with a 14-play, 62-yard drive which set up an **Andy Schneider** (Jr.-Green Bay/Ashwaubenon) 24-yard field goal to make the score 7-3.

Eau Claire took the lead for good with 11:37 remaining in the second quarter, when Gast rushed for a two-yard touchdown to put Eau Claire ahead 10-7. The touchdown was set up by a forced fumble from **Derek Sikora** (Jr.-Neilsville) deep in St. John's territory. **Zach Paul** (So.-Edgar) fell on the loose ball to give the Blugolds the excellent field position. After a quick three-and-out by the Johnnies and a poor punt which again gave Eau Claire great field position, Fredrickson hooked up with **Darin Kryzanowski** (Jr.-Thorp) for a 30-yard touchdown pass. The point after missed wide but the Blugolds still held a 16-7 lead over the defending champions.

With less than five minutes remaining in the first half and the Johnnies once again caught deep in their own territory, **Marc Moonen** (Fr.-Caledonia/Martin Luther) picked off a Zach Vertin pass to give the Blugolds the ball at the St. John's 44-yard line. Eau Claire drove to the 17-yard line before the Johnnie defense held and the Blugolds set up to try a 34-yard field goal. The field goal attempt proved to be a broken play, causing **Jesse Kryzanowski** (Jr.-Thorp) to scramble with the ball before unloading and finding tight end **Don Kahl** (Sr.-Brookfield/East) in the end zone for a 17-yard touchdown reception to give Eau Claire a 23-7 lead at halftime.

On St. John's opening drive of the second half, it was Paul again who gave the Blugolds possession, this time intercepting a Brandon Royce-Diop pass to give Eau Claire more solid field position. The Blugolds marched to the Johnnie's three-yard line behind a 12-yard run by Gast and an 11-yard run by fullback **Mike Hennessey** (Jr.-Somerset) before Fredrickson hooked up with Kahl for a three-yard touchdown pass to put Eau Claire up 30-7.

The Blugold defense held firm until the 7:56 mark of the quarter. Then the Johnnie's furious comeback began. On the third play of the ensuing St. John's drive, Kofoed found Kyle Gearman for a 79-yard touchdown strike and the two-point conversion was good to make the score 30-15. The drive took just 43 seconds and spanned 83 yards. Following a Johnnie interception, Kofoed hit Justin Winkels for an 11-yard gain and then found Gearman for 18 more. On the next play, he hit tailback Corey Weber for a 15-yard touchdown pass to make the score 30-22.

Johnnie head coach John Gagliardi opted to kick it deep and the Blugolds took control of the ball with 2:36 remaining in the game. Gast posted runs of four and three yards but was stuffed for no gain on third and three, forcing an Eau Claire punt and giving St. John's one final possession with no timeouts to tie the game. The offense did the job, marching 62 yards on