

Men's Hockey Ready To Open Season At River Falls

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RIVER FALLS - The UW-Eau Claire men's hockey team looks to start off its 2006-07 campaign with a non-conference win when it visits UW-River Falls this Friday.

A year after the team went 2-21-4 overall and 0-12-2 in the NCHA, second-year head coach **Luke Strand** comes into this season with many new faces but with some experienced veterans.

The team went through quite an overhaul with 13 newcomers, of which six are freshmen. However, there are 14 letterwinners returning to the squad. All-Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC) Honorable Mention honorees **Brooks Lockwood** (*Sr.-Hudson*) and **Kyle Garner** (*Sr.-Sun Prairie*) are key returnees for the team. Lockwood was second in points (15) while Garner was third (10) last season. Garner led the team in assists (9) while Lockwood was tied for second (7).

Key losses include the player who led in points, Chip Dunleavy. His team-leading 17 points and 13 goals helped earn him an NCHA Honorable Mention. He also grabbed a WIAC Honorable Mention, as did Steffan Braunlich, who led the conference in saves last season. **Mike Gatzke** (*Jr.-White Bear Lake, MN/Hill-Murray*), who got in two games last year, is the only veteran to replace in him in goal. Other possibilities include newcomers **Ryan Mensing** (*So.-Langley, BC/Walnut Grove SS*) and **Tyler Brigl** (*Fr.-Eagan, MN*).

The Falcons went 17-7-3 last season overall and 9-4-1 in the NCHA, good for second place. River Falls is picked to finish runner-up again this year while the Blugolds are picked to finish last again. The Falcons return with the same corps as last year, with 14 of the top 15 scorers back for this season. Returning First-Team All-NCHA members include AJ Bucchino, TJ Dahl, and Derek Hansberry. Returnee Pat Borgestad was named All-NCHA Honorable Mention. A key loss for the team is First-Team All-NCHA selection defenseman Mike Salmela.

All-time the Blugolds are 25-75-3 against River Falls. The teams faced each other three times last season, with Eau Claire losing 5-1, 7-3, and finally 5-1 again. The last time the Blugolds have beaten the Falcons was in 2004. River Falls has won 13 of the past 14 meetings and has beaten Eau Claire the past eight times.

The season will officially get underway 7:05 p.m. Friday at the W.H. Hunt Arena.