

# Men's Hockey Returns Home After Big Victory

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EAU CLAIRE - The UW-Eau Claire men's hockey team will have its first home games of the season this weekend after taking the season opener 3-2 at 11th ranked UW-River Falls last Friday.

After only taking two victories last season, the Blugolds are predicted to take last in the Northern Collegiate Hockey Association (NCHA) again this year. The Falcons are predicted to finish runner-up after going 17-7-3 last year and taking second in the NCHA. Friday's upset did not count towards NCHA standings, however. The last time Eau Claire won its season opener was in 2003 when it defeated UW-Stevens Point 5-3.

On a team where half of the players are freshmen or transfers, Western Michigan University transfer **Ryan Mensing** (So.-Langley, BC/Walnut Grove SS) came through between the pipes against the Falcons. He stopped 42 of 44 shots. Mensing was honored by the NCHA and the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC) by being named the Player of the Week for each. **Tyler Trudell** (Fr.-Waukesha/South), **Sean Garrity** (Jr.-North St. Paul, MN), and **Evan Byers** (So.-Eagan, MN) notched goals in the victory.

The team came into the season losing last year's points leader Chip Dunleavy and conference leader in saves Steffan Braunlich. The squad then went through an overhaul for this season, where 13 of the 27 players are new faces.

The home opener opponents will be St. Thomas and St. Mary's this weekend. The last time the Blugolds won a home opener was 2004 in an 8-2 victory over Bethel University.

St. Thomas is ranked eighth in the Division III preseason polls. The game Friday will be its first of the year. Last year's team went 17-9-1 and won the conference title. The team lost the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) Championship game, however. The team also lost three All-Americans - John Bottoms, Dan Krmpotich, and Brandon Wilcox. A key returnee is Nick Harris, who tied for the team lead in points with 38 off 13 goals and 25 assists.

Saturday's opponent, St. Mary's, has yet to play a game this season as well. Last year the team went 9-14-1 and took sixth in the MIAC. A key returnee for this year's squad is Adam Gill, who led in points (27) and goals (15).

Eau Claire is 5-9-2 all-time versus St. Thomas with the last two meetings ending as ties. The last Blugold victory came in 2000. St. Mary's holds the lifetime record between these two schools by a 3-11-2 margin. Last year's game also ended in a tie.

Both Friday's and Saturday's game start at 7:00 p.m. at Hobbs Ice Center.