

Men's Hockey To Face Seventh-Ranked Falcons

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EAU CLAIRE - The UW-Eau Claire men's hockey team will start off its Northern Collegiate Hockey Association (NCHA) stretch of the season against seventh-ranked UW-River Falls this Friday in Hobbs Ice Center.

The Blugolds are 4-1-0 this year and will face its first NCHA test against the Falcons. River Falls is 5-1-0 this year with its one loss coming to Eau Claire on the opening game of the season. The Blugolds won 3-2 as goalie **Ryan Mensing** (So.-Langley, BC/Walnut Grove SS) made 42 saves. The game did not count in the NCHA standings, however.

Mensing has been a standout in goal while being pushed along by **Tyler Brigl** (Fr.-Eagan, MN) and **Mike Gatzke** (Jr.-White Bear Lake, MN/Hill-Murray). Mensing was honored as both the NCHA and Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC) Player of the Week after the River Falls performance. He has 134 saves, a .931 save percentage, and a 2.28 goals against average.

Newcomers **Sean Garrity** (Jr.-North St. Paul, MN) and **Jesse Vesel** (So.-Hibbing, MN) have led the offense. Garrity leads Eau Claire in points at nine off of six goals and three assists. The six goals are also a team-high. Garrity was named the WIAC Player of the Week for his recent offensive performance which included a hat trick. Vesel's seven assists are tops for the team and combined with one goal, Vesel has eight points. **Greg Petersen** (So.-Maple Grove, MN/Totino-Grace) has contributed strong play and production on the blue line and he has added two goals with five assists for seven points.

The Falcons, riding a five-game winning streak, start the NCHA schedule that features five teams ranked in the top 15 for the country. The NCHA contests are expected to create an increase in intensity and physical play for the teams as well as a quicker pace.

River Falls returns a strong 1st team All-NCHA goalie selection from last year in AJ Bucchino, who has 144 saves and a .929 save percentage along with a 2.15 goals against average. The team's top scoring line also returns from a successful 17-7-3 season. TJ Dahl has been a force as he leads the team in points (12), goals (5), and assists (7). The key to the weekend against the powerful River Falls team will be special teams taking care of their respective sides of the puck as well as trying to play 5-on-5 hockey.

Eau Claire is 26-73-3 all-time versus the Falcons. Before this season's victory, the Blugolds had lost eight straight. The last home win against River Falls was in 2004.

Friday's game starts at 7:00 p.m. in Hobbs Ice Center and ends a five-game homestand.