

Eau Claire, Wartburg Move Into Classic Finals

Posted: Friday, December 29, 2006

EAU CLAIRE, Wis. - UW-Eau Claire and Wartburg College will square off in the championship game of the Eau Claire Holiday Classic Saturday after claiming relatively easy first round victories at the W. L. Zorn Arena here Friday.

Wartburg jumped to a 16-2 lead in the first five minutes of its game and was never threatened in notching an 88-63 decision over Finlandia University.

Eau Claire used an 11-2 spurt in the first six minutes of the second half to break from a 29-27 halftime lead to a 73-54 verdict over Marian College.

Eau Claire, now 7-3 on the season, will be seeking its eighth consecutive title and 27th overall in the 38-year history of the Holiday Classic. Wartburg, a member of the Iowa Intercollegiate Athletic Conference from Waverly, has only faced an Eau Claire team on the hardwood once before and that was during the 1949-50 season when the Blugolds claimed a 66-59 decision.

The tournament continues at 6 p.m. Saturday when Finlandia, a 2-9 team from Hancock, Michigan, will face Marian, a 4-5 team from Fond du Lac, Wisconsin in the third place game. The title game is slated to begin at 8 p.m.

Wartburg, now 5-4 overall, outscored Finlandia, 35-8, off turnovers as Finlandia committed 27 miscues to just 10 for Wartburg. Six-foot-five junior guard Lee Nelson led Wartburg with 20 points including six three-pointers. The Knights connected on 10 of 31 shots from beyond the arc. Nelson was one of four Wartburg players in double figures. James Menke scored 14, Allen Weaver 13 and Danny Stark 10. Twelve different players got into the Knights' scoring column. Victor Harrington had the team-high for Finlandia with 15.

The Eau Claire-Marian contest was close for the first half with two ties and six lead changes. The Blugolds built their biggest lead at 29-22 with 2:03 to go but Marian closed out the half with the final five points.

After Eau Claire streaked to a 42-31 lead in the first six minutes of the second half, only once did Marian get the deficit to single digits thereafter. The Blugold lead peaked at 21 on two occasions: 67-46 with 4:24 to go and 71-50 with 2:33 remaining.

In remaining unbeaten at 6-0 in the all-time series with Marian, Eau Claire had four players in double digits led by Dan Beyer with 17 points. Geoff Probst added 14, Jared Bardon 13 and Luke Meier 11. Jerid Holewinski was the leading scorer for Marian with 11 while Titus Redmond contributed 10.

The Blugolds had a commanding 42-22 advantage on the boards to offset their 20-13 edge in turnovers. The Blugolds also hit 54 percent from the field compared to 37 percent for Marian.

The Blugolds are working on a five-game win streak after dropping three of their first five contests this year. Wartburg has some Wisconsin ties. Head coach Dick Peth was an all-state player at Tomah while assistant coach Oliver Drake was an assistant for Blugold coach Terry Gibbons one year and was also a head coach at nearby Cadott High School.

Eau Claire-Marian Box Score

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