

Men's Hockey To Face Familiar Foe In Peters Cup Quarterfinals

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EAU CLAIRE - For the third straight year, the UW-Eau Claire men's hockey team will travel to face No. 2-ranked St. Norbert College in the quarterfinal round of the Northern Collegiate Hockey Association (NCHA) Peters Cup Playoffs this Friday and Saturday night in De Pere.

The Blugolds have been swept in each of the last two seasons by the Green Knights. However, this will be the first time since the 2000-01 season that the Green Knights won't be the No.1 seed going into the playoffs as they will be the No.2 seed.

Eau Claire, who will be the No. 7 seed, finished with a 9-12-4 overall record, which is a seven-game improvement from last season. The Blugolds finished with a 2-9-3 NCHA record, including a 3-2 win over UW-Stevens Point in the regular season finale on Saturday. The Blugolds tied Stevens Point in points, but the Pointers received the No. 6 seed due to having more NCHA wins.

Even though St. Norbert will not be the No.1 seed in this year's playoffs, it still claimed its sixth-straight NCHA regular season championship after sharing the title with UW-River Falls and UW-Stout. This was the first shared NCHA championship since the 1990-91 season. The Green Knights won the Peters Cup for three straight seasons from 2003-05. Last year, St. Norbert lost to UW-Superior 3-2 in overtime in the championship game. The Green Knights are 36-11-1 all-time in the NCHA playoffs.

In the two meetings earlier this season, St. Norbert defeated Eau Claire 5-1 in De Pere in the first meeting and then the Green Knights rallied to defeat the Blugolds 3-2 in overtime in the second meeting at Eau Claire. The Blugolds scored first in the first meeting and were tied 1-1 at the end of the second period. However, the Green Knights scored four goals, three coming on the power play, in the third period to defeat Eau Claire. In the second meeting, the Blugolds had a 3-1 lead with a little over five minutes to play only to let the lead slip away as the Green Knights forced overtime. St. Norbert then scored a power play goal in overtime to extend its unbeaten streak to 32 games over Eau Claire.

The key for the Blugolds will be defense. St. Norbert is unbeaten in its last 196 games when it scores five goals or more. This season, the Green Knights lead the NCHA with 115 goals and average 4.6 goals per contest. They also have given up the least goals in the conference (1.84/g).

Sean Garrity (*Jr.-North St. Paul, MN*) is Eau Claire's leading goal-scorer with 13 this season. **Andrew Johnson** (*So.-Andover, MN/Anoka*) is the only other Blugold in double-figures with 10 goals. Garrity also leads the team with 27 points. **Jesse Vesel** (*So.-Hibbing, MN*) led the Blugolds with 18 assists.

In net, **Ryan Mensing** (*So.-Langley, BC/Walnut Grove SS*) had a record of 6-12-3 this season. Mensing stopped 563 shots and had a 2.99 goals against average.

For the Green Knights, Marc Belanger leads the team with 17 goals scored, which is tied for second-most in the conference. Compared to the Blugolds, St. Norbert had six players with double-digit goals scored. Matt Boyd had 19 assists to lead the team.

Goaltender Kyle Jones had a 20-3-2 record this season with two shutouts. Jones is currently tied with former St. John's goaltender Adam Hanna for the all-time NCAA Division III record for shutouts with 14.

The Peters Cup Playoffs consist of a two-game series on Friday and Saturday. If the teams happen to split the two games, a 20-minute mini-game will follow the second game. If they are still tied after the mini-game overtimes will follow until a winner is determined.

The Blugolds and the Green Knights will play at 7 p.m. on Friday and Saturday night at the Cornerstone Community Center.

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