

Softball Loses Pool Play Game, Wins Bronze Bracket Matchup

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PANAMA CITY BEACH, FL - The UW-Eau Claire softball team slipped to the bronze bracket at the National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) Division III Leadoff Classic today after losing 7-3 to William Paterson University (NJ), but advanced in the bracket with an 8-5 win over Maryville University (MO).

The Blugolds had previously lost 8-4 to Willamette University (OR) and 5-3 to Central College (IA) on Friday in the Leadoff Classic. Today's loss to William Paterson pushed the team to the No. 6 seed in bronze bracket play, where it faced third-seeded Maryville. While William Paterson and Central had both received votes, Eau Claire was the only ranked team at No. 7. William Paterson is now 2-2 after today while Maryville is 4-4. Eau Claire is 1-3.

In the first game the Pioneers claimed a 1-0 lead in the bottom of the first off a two-out unearned run. The Blugolds would commit six costly errors while giving up four unearned runs over the course of the 7-3 decision.

While adding a run in the third, the floodgates opened in the Pioneer half of the fifth. A one-out round-tripper with one on made it 4-0 William Paterson. Eau Claire then committed three straight errors after the homer and ended up allowing two unearned runs before escaping the fifth down 6-0.

Another unearned Pioneer run in the sixth put the Blugolds down 7-0 for their last at-bats, but the Blugolds went down fighting. **Kristi Doucette** (So.-Green Bay/Ashwaubenon) led off the top of the seventh with a four-bagger before the Blugolds started filling the bases. Sandwiched between a flyout and strikeout, a pair of walks and a single loaded the bases for **Jen Peterson** (Fr.-Arden Hills, MN/Mounds View), who knocked in **Amanda Wruck** (Fr.-Wrightstown) with a single up the middle. **Casey Leisgang** (Jr.-Seymour) then drew a bases-loaded walk to send home **Tessa Pecha** (Jr.-Eau Claire/North) before the rally ended with a bases-loaded strikeout.

Bri Sturm (So.-Zumbrota, MN/Zumbrota-Mazeppa) allowed six hits and three earned runs over six innings while walking one and striking out two.

The Blugolds left 10 on base while William Paterson stranded six. Two Blugold runners were gunned down at the plate in the second. The home runs were the only extra-base hits.

The loss put Eau Claire as the sixth-seeded team in the bronze bracket, where it went up against third-seeded Maryville.

The first two innings saw no runs and a lone hit before Maryville plated a two-out unearned run in the third. The Saints also left the bases loaded that inning.

After a three-run Saints half of the fourth, the Blugolds tallied their first run of the game in the bottom of the inning. **Mandy Tschernach** (Sr.-Rice Lake) plated pinch-runner Pecha with a bases-loaded groundout to second after **Bekki Kidnie** (Fr.-St. Paul, MN/Johnson), **Mallory McKinney** (Sr.-Brooklyn Park, MN/Champlin Park) and **Jill Janke** (Jr.-Black River Falls) all singled with one out.

Maryville answered with a run in the top of the fifth off a wild pitch, but the Eau Claire bats came alive in the top of the sixth.

Amber Haack (Sr.-Madison/LaFollette) led off the inning with a single and hustled to second on an error by the centerfielder. **Katie Stalker** (Fr.-Madison/LaFollette) came in to pinch-run and moved up to third on a wild pitch. After Kidnie lined out to third, McKinney reached first the next at-bat on an error by the third basemen. Stalker came in unearned to make it 5-2. After a Janke walk and a **Michelle Butkus** (Jr.-Medford) pinch-hit single filled the bases, Doucette notched a single to left center to score Janke and McKinney. With two outs, Leisgang walked to once again load the bases for the Blugolds. **Rachel Paulus** (Sr.-Wisconsin Rapids/Lincoln) then provided the game-winning blow with a two-out grand slam to make it 8-5 Blugolds. Seven of those runs came in the sixth.

Sturm gave up 11 hits and four earned runs while walking six and striking out four. Maryville left 14 runners on

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