

Softball Wins Bronze Bracket At NFCA Leadoff Classic

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PANAMA CITY BEACH, FL - The UW-Eau Claire softball won the Bronze Bracket of the National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) Leadoff Classic defeating La Verne (CA) 8-1 in a semifinal game and Plattsburgh State (NY) in the championship game 6-0 here today at the Frank Brown Complex.

After starting 0-3 in pool play the Blugolds went 3-0 in the Bronze Bracket outscoring their opponents 22-6 in the process.

The Blugolds came out firing on all cylinders scoring six runs in the first three innings against the Leopards. Eau Claire scored two runs in the first inning when **Michelle Butkus** (*Jr.-Medford*) hit a two-run triple scoring **Rachel Paulus** (*Sr.-Wisconsin Rapids/Lincoln*) and **Bekki Kidnie** (*Fr.-St. Paul, MN/Johnson*). Both Paulus and Kidnie reached base on walks before Butkus drove them both home.

Mandy Tschernach (*Sr.-Rice Lake*) got things going in the second inning by hitting a single, stealing second base and advancing to third on a ground out before scoring on a **Casey Leisgang** (*Jr.-Seymour*) single to right field to make the score 3-0.

In the third inning with one out and runners on first and third **Jill Janke** (*Jr.-Black River Falls*) hit an RBI single to score **Amber Haack** (*Sr.-Madison/La Follette*) for a 4-0 Blugold lead. Janke and Butkus advanced to second and third, respectively, on the throw to home plate. After Tschernach loaded the bases with a single **Kristi Doucette** (*So.-Green Bay/Ashwaubenon*) hit a RBI single up the middle to score Butkus from third. With two outs and the bases still loaded Leisgang hit another RBI single, this time to center field, to score Tschernach and extend the Blugold lead to 6-0.

After La Verne scored its first run in the bottom of the fifth inning to make the score 6-1 the Blugolds stormed back with two more runs in the sixth inning. Leisgang started the inning off reaching base on an error, stole second base, reached third on a passed ball and then scored on a wild pitch making the score 7-1. Haack and **Lauren Miller** (*Fr.-Mankato, MN/West*) both reached base on errors and Butkus was hit by a pitch to load the bases for Janke who drove the ball to left centerfield scoring Haack for the final run of the day.

Bri Sturm (*So.-Zumbrota, MN/Zumbrota-Mazepa*) pitched all seven innings allowing six hits and one unearned run striking out two and walking two batters. Butkus went 2-for-3 on the day with two runs batted in and one run. Janke also went 2-for-3 with two runs batted in and Leisgang went 2-for-4 with two runs batted in, two stolen bases and one run.

In the championship game against Plattsburgh State both teams went hitless for the first 3.5 innings before Eau Claire broke a scoreless tie in the bottom of the fourth. With runners on first and second and one out Tschernach cleared the bases with a two-run triple to right field scoring Kidnie and **Tessa Pecha** (*Jr.-Eau Claire/North*) to give the Blugolds a 2-0 lead. **Ainsley Klar** (*So.-La Crosse/Aquinas*) drove Tschernach home in the next at bat with an RBI single to third base to extend the lead to 3-0.

Mallory McKinney (*Sr.-Brooklyn Park, MN/Champlin Park*) led off the fifth inning with a double and was replaced on the base pads by **Katie Stalker** (*Fr.-Madison/La Follette*). Kidnie followed McKinney's double with a two-run home run giving Eau Claire a 5-0 lead.

McKinney once again hurt Plattsburgh State with her bat driving the ball into right field for a triple and then scoring on a wild pitch to extend the lead to 6-0.

McKinney allowed no runs on just two hits in six innings striking out five and walking one. Sturm pitched a scoreless seventh inning all one hit to preserve the win. Kidnie and McKinney both went 2-for-4 from the plate combining for three runs scored and two runs batted in. Janke collected two hits on three at-bats and Tschernach went 1-for-2 from the plate knocking in two runs and scoring one.

The Blugolds will return from Florida than prepare to fly to Orange, California where they will compete