

Softball Geared Up For Sun West Games

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EAU CLAIRE - The UW-Eau Claire softball team heads to its second tournament of the season this spring break as it plays 10 games between March 18 and March 23 at the Sun West Games, hosted by Chapman University (CA).

Each playing day will feature two games for the 3-3 Blugolds. The opponents include Wesleyan University (CT), St. Thomas (MN), Elmhurst College (IL), Amherst College (MA), Chapman, Williams College (MA), Augsburg College (MN), and Cal State East Bay. Eau Claire plays St. Thomas and Elmhurst twice. Of those teams, St. Thomas (1st), Chapman (6th), and Williams (15th) are ranked. Eau Claire is ranked 13th.

The Blugolds started off the season by losing three straight at the National Fastpitch Coaches Association (NFCA) Leadoff Classic, but they stormed back to even their record and claim the bronze prize at the Leadoff Classic. The last victory was over Plattsburgh State (NY), ranked 16th.

As a team, Eau Claire has a 2.28 ERA while opponents hold a 4.20 mark. Of Eau Claire's 26 runs given up, 20 occurred in the three losses.

Mallory McKinney (Sr.-Brooklyn Park, MN/Champlin Park) is 1-1 with a 2.03 ERA. She has given up 22 hits and 11 walks, but has struck out 21 batters. Opponents hold a .268 batting average against her. **Bri Sturm** (So.-Zumbrota, MN/Zumbrota-Mazeppa) has the exact same batting average against and hits allowed, but holds a 2.53 ERA. The 2-2 hurler has walked seven batters and struck out nine.

Teams have hit .268 versus Eau Claire and slugged .360 while maintaining a .353 on-base percentage. They have 44 hits and 18 walks with 30 strikeouts.

The Blugolds have batted .313 as a team and slugged .460. Their on-base percentage is .376. They also have 55 hits and 16 free passes compared to 34 punchouts. Of the team's 32 runs, 22 came in the three victories.

Jill Janke (Jr.-Black River Falls) has batted .500 thus far this season with three RBI. **Michelle Butkus** (Jr.-Medford) has a .400 average with two RBI while **Mandy Tschernach** (Sr.-Rice Lake) (.357), **Bekki Kidnie** (Fr.-St. Paul, MN/Johnson) (.353), and **Casey Leisgang** (Jr.-Seymour) (.350) are all connecting as well.

Kidnie also holds the team's top slugging percentage at .765 and Leisgang's five runs are most for the Blugolds too. Tschernach and Kidnie each have four runs.

The RBI leader and hero of Eau Claire's first win is **Rachel Paulus** (Sr.-Wisconsin Rapids/Lincoln), who knocked in four of her five RBI with a two-out grand slam in the bottom of the sixth against Maryville University (MO). The team was down 5-4 until Paulus' slam, but she helped put Eau Claire in the win column as she also moved up in the RBI ranks. Kidnie and **Kristi Doucette** (So.-Green Bay/Ashwaubenon) each have four RBI. Doucette's .714 slugging percentage is second on the team.

The games begin for Eau Claire on Sunday at 3 p.m. in Orange, CA when it faces Wesleyan University. The matchup against St. Thomas, which took second at nationals last year, is then at 7:45 p.m. The team will also play on the 19th, the 21st, the 22nd, and the 23rd.

Sun West Games

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