

Softball Captures Second Consecutive WIAC Tournament Title

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EAU CLAIRE - A **Rachel Paulus** (Sr. -Wisconsin Rapids, WI/Lincoln) solo home run in the top of the ninth gave the UW-Eau Claire softball team a 3-2 victory over 11th-ranked UW-Oshkosh today in the deciding game of 2007 Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC) Softball Tournament to earn its second tournament title in as many years.

The win gives the Blugolds the automatic bid to the NCAA Division III Tournament which begins next Thursday. The last host team to win the conference tournament was Eau Claire in 1998. The Blugolds have won 11 of their last 14 games with their only losses coming to Oshkosh by a combined five runs.

Eau Claire started off day two of the WIAC Tournament facing UW-River Falls. The Blugolds would only manage two hits against the Falcons, but it would be enough. In the bottom of the fifth with two outs, Rachel Paulus reached on an infield single and on the play **Tessa Pecha** (Jr.-Eau Claire, WI/North) scored from third and **Casey Leisgang** (Jr.-Seymour, WI) scored from second to give the Blugolds a 2-0 lead.

The Falcons loaded the bases with one out in the top of the sixth but **Mallory McKinney** (Sr.-Brooklyn Park, MN/Champlin Park) got a strike out and got a groundout to get out of the jam. River Falls went down in order in the seventh as the Eau Claire advanced with 2-0 victory. McKinney (14-7) had a complete game four-hitter to pickup the win.

Now all the Blugolds had to do is defeat WIAC regular season champion UW-Oshkosh once, while the Titans had to beat Eau Claire twice in the championship series. The Titans scored first in the top of the fourth when Amanda Baumann hit a RBI single up the middle. Whitney Tyriver scored later in the inning on a fielders choice to give Oshkosh a 2-0 lead.

Eau Claire cut the lead in half in the bottom of the fifth on a **Bekki Kidnie** (Fr.-St. Paul, MN/Johnson) RBI single to center that plated **Katie Stalker** (Fr.-Madison, WI/La Follette). The Blugolds then threatened in the bottom of the seventh. **Michelle Butkus** (Jr.-Medford, WI) led off the inning with a single. Two Batters later **Mandy Tschernach** (Sr.-Rice Lake, WI) singled to left field. However, the Titans would get Eau Claire to pop-up a bunt and then get a strikeout to force a 16th and deciding game as the Titans hung on 2-1.

The deciding game lived up to expectations. The game featured clutch hitting, clutch pitching, and great defensive plays.

Eau Claire struck first in the top of the third. Casey Leisgang led off the inning with a double to left center. Two batters later, Mallory McKinney hit a double that hit the chalk on the right field line that scored Leisgang to make the score 1-0.

In the fifth inning, the Blugolds missed a great opportunity to extend its lead as they loaded the bases with nobody out. The Titans then got Eau Claire to pop out twice and got a force out at home to get out of the inning. In the six inning the Blugolds loaded the bases again after a Titan error. Casey Leisgang delivered this time for Eau Claire with a RBI single to left field that plated Bekki Kidnie to make the score 2-0 Blugolds. However, the Blugolds would strand the bases loaded again after a fantastic over the shoulder grab by Titans' shortstop Whitney Tyriver to end the inning.

Bri Sturm (So.-Zumbrota, MN/Zumbrota-Mazeppa) was cruising going into the seventh allowing just one hit and two base runners the first six innings. However, the Titans got back-to-back singles to begin the inning. Oshkosh loaded the bases two batters later. Tyriver then hit a single to left field that scored both Brianna Bilotti and Jennelle Schmidt to tie the game. With the winning run at third Sturm struck out Dani Olsen to send the game to extra innings. Then with the bases loaded in the bottom of the eighth the Titans loaded the bases again with two outs. Sturm then fell behind 3-1 to Ashley Steltenpohl, but rallied to strike