

Football Runs Over Alma

Posted: Saturday, September 15, 2007

EAU CLAIRE, Wis. - **Cory Sartorelli** (So. -Appleton/North) racked up 209 rushing yards and the defense had six takeaways as the UW-Eau Claire football team won 30-14 over Alma College (MI) today at Carson Park.

The Blugolds now have a 3-0 start to the season, the first time they've accomplished that since 1998. UW-Oshkosh also won today by a 62-7 score over Lakeland College, so both teams lead the conference at 3-0. The Scots drop to 0-2 in their first season without quarterback Josh Brehm, who won last year's Gagliardi Trophy.

Eau Claire got off to its early lead with a field goal on its first drive. After the Eau Claire defense held Alma deep in its own territory after the kickoff, the Blugolds started their drive at the Scots' 38 following the punt. In an indicator of what was to come, Sartorelli burst for 18 yards on the first Blugold play and followed it up with eight more yards on two carries. A penalty and an incompleteness stalled the drive at the 17. **Craig Kolb** (So. -Marshfield) then split the uprights with a 34-yard field goal to give Eau Claire a 3-0 advantage with 10:13 left in the quarter.

The Blugold defense held their own against the Alma "Scot-gun" spread offense, forcing another punt. The next Blugold drive started at Alma's 44 after **Craig Polifka** (Jr. -Kewaunee) had a 46-yard return and it got within the red zone. However, the drive halted due to two incompleteness and a fumble by quarterback **Joe Nikolay** (So. -Abbotsford/Colby), who was starting for injured **Kyle Paulson** (Jr. -Amery). On fourth down, the Alma special teams broke through to block Kolb's 37-yard attempt as Eau Claire came up empty.

The Scots took advantage of the blocked field goal, going on a 12-play, 80-yard drive that resulted in a Scots touchdown. Mackenzie McGrady had rushes of 13 and 16 during the series. He also connected with Jeremy Stephens for a 17-yard gain that brought them to the Blugold 40. On the only third down of the drive, McGrady plunged in from the 3 to go up 7-3. He rushed for 41 yards of the drive.

In a game of field position during the second quarter, Eau Claire pinned the Scots within the 10 on their next two drives. They started at the 1 and then at the 9. In the second drive, the Blugold defense stepped up for a score. On third down, **Nate Rucker** (Sr. -Allouez/Green Bay Southwest) picked off McGrady at the 31 and returned it to make it a 10-7 Blugold lead at the 3:58 mark.

McGrady struck right back, however, going 77 yards in a scoring drive. A 27-yard pass to Bruno Gervasi brought the team to the Eau Claire 30. Gervasi also later caught a pass at the 10, but a roughing-the-passer call brought it to the 5. Kyle Ryan went in two plays later as Alma went ahead 14-10, which would be the score at half. Eau Claire had 78 rushing yards on 19 carries in the half while Nikolay went 5-for-10 with 62 yards. McGrady went 13-of-18 with 116 yards and the pick. The team rushed for 88 yards on 20 attempts.

The Blugolds turned it around in the second half, holding the Scots scoreless while putting up 20 unanswered points. Polifka started it with a 45-yard return on the kickoff. The next 35 yards all came via Sartorelli, who capped it off with an elusive 18-yard run for the score. The extra point went wide, making it 16-14.

An Alma punt followed before Sartorelli took over another series, with all 65 yards of the scoring drive coming from the running back. He had a 41-yard dash during the drive, but the touchdown came from 2 yards out to make it 23-14 at 9:13.

The rest of the quarter stayed mostly in Scots territory, but Eau Claire could only manage punts.

In the fourth, another Alma turnover led to Blugold points. On the first play of a drive following an Eau Claire punt, Alma tried a trick play that backfired. McGrady swung a backwards pass to wideout Joe Cline on the right side. Cline was under pressure, but tried to force a pass downfield. **Zach Paul** (Sr. -Edgar) came in to force a fumble, which he recovered and brought to the 2. This set up Sartorelli's third touchdown of the day with nine minutes left on the clock.

On Alma's ensuing drive, McGrady hit Stevens for receptions of 15 and 13 yards as the Scots made it to the

17. Paul came up with his second turnover in a row on an interception at the Eau Claire 6. It was his third turnover on the day, as he also had another fumble recovery in the third.

The Scots had two more deep drives in the game, but both ended on interceptions. **Dave Wicklund** (*Jr.-Kewaskum*) snagged the first one at the Blugolds' goal line and Paul Bielmeier (Jr.-Edgar) picked off the other one at the Eau Claire 1 as time expired in the 30-14 Blugold victory.

Sartorelli's 209 rushing yards and three touchdowns led the Blugolds, while Nikolay hit 8-of-15 for 80 yards. **Dan Varnes** (*So.-Ridgeland/Colfax*) had three catches for 24 yards, both tops in the receiving corps.

Alma actually outgained Eau Claire 431-to-302, with the Scots relying on passing (291 yards to Eau Claire's 80) and the Blugolds depending on the ground game (222 yards to Alma's 140).

What really cost the Scots were four picks and two fumbles, with three coming deep in Eau Claire territory.

The Blugolds look to carry the momentum into the upcoming conference games, including Saturday's 1 p.m. contest at second-ranked UW-Whitewater.

Eau Claire-Alma College Box Score

- PH-