

Third-Ranked Whitewater Blanks Football

Posted: Saturday, September 22, 2007

WHITEWATER, Wis. - For the second year in a row, the UW-Eau Claire football team experienced a shutout at the hands of powerhouse UW-Whitewater as it lost 27-0 today at Perkins Stadium.

This was the first loss of the year for the 3-1 Blugolds. It was also the first time the third-ranked Warhawks have had to rebound from a loss since 2004. They lost 26-16 to St. Cloud State (MN) last week, but bounced back to beat the Blugolds for the fifth straight time, including last year's 34-0 contest. Eau Claire hasn't scored above seven points since 2002, their last win. Also, the 2-1 Warhawks have held the Blugolds scoreless for the past nine quarters. It was the first Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC) game for both teams.

Today's game got off to a slow start, as neither team scored in the opening quarter. Part of the reason was the opportunistic Blugold defense. With 7:55 left in the first, starting quarterback **Joe Nikolay** (*So.-Abbotsford/Colby*) and the Blugolds started a drive at their own 11. Two plays in, Nikolay fumbled and Whitewater's Anthony White recovered at the 10. Whitewater's Justin Beaver, the conference's all-time leading rusher, made his way to the 1 over three rushes. On the third one, he fumbled just before the goal line as Eau Claire snagged its 16th takeaway of the season.

Eau Claire got to the Whitewater 36 in their next possession but had to punt it away. During the ensuing Warhawk drive, the home team made it to Eau Claire's 25 on a nine play, 57-yard drive that saw a clutch 21-yard pass on a third-and-long. On second down at the Blugold 25, Danny Jones connected with Matt Gifford on a short pass, but Eau Claire forced its eighth fumble of the season and **Tom Dohr** (*Jr.-Neenah*) recovered at the 23 with 11:31 remaining in the second quarter.

The Blugolds gave it right back, however, as Nikolay fumbled on the third play of the drive. The Warhawks had the ball at the 27 to start their drive following the fumble and were actually pushed back to the 40 on a sack by Dohr and **Nate Stemper** (*Sr.-St. Anthony Village, MN*). On third-and-13, Neil Mrkvicka hauled in a 30-yard touchdown pass as Whitewater went up 7-0 at 9:11.

Both teams made it to enemy territory in the next two possessions, but on Eau Claire's second drive following the score, the Blugolds suffered a costly special teams miscue. The **Mitch Schaeuble** (*Sr.-Wrightstown*) punt from Eau Claire's 28 was blocked and recovered at the 13. Three plays later, Jones found Gifford for a five-yard touchdown strike with just 48 seconds left in the half.

In the second half, the Warhawks took the kickoff and drove 76 yards over 13 plays and five minutes to put up a field goal. They did have a first-and-goal from the 5, but Beaver was stopped for a one-yard gain and Jones followed with two incompletions to force fourth down.

Eau Claire made a march in their possession, mostly aided by a 26-yard dash from **Chris Below** (*Sr.-Antigo*). The team made it to the Whitewater 37, but a couple sacks and a penalty brought Eau Claire back into their own territory.

After the punt, Whitewater started at its own 23. Beaver rushed for 41 yards during the drive as Whitewater made it to the Blugold 14. A Warhawk holding penalty and a sack brought them back to the 25 during the next four plays, but Jeff Schebler hit from 42 yards out to go up 20-0 with 1:44 left in the quarter.

On Eau Claire's following drive, another turnover led to Whitewater points. The Blugolds rushed for 12 yards in two plays, but Nikolay lost the football at the Eau Claire 24 on the third play. Whitewater recovered it at the 30 to set up the final score of the day.

Two plays into the short series, Jones had his third touchdown pass of the day -- this one on a 29-yard throw to Nick Slupski.

Eau Claire got in Whitewater territory a couple times in the fourth quarter and Whitewater got in Eau Claire's once, but neither team got on the scoreboard as time ran down in the 27-0 game.

Whitewater outgained Eau Claire 332-to-116, which is the ninth-lowest yardage Eau Claire has ever had in a game. The Warhawks had 134 yards on the ground to 67 for the Blugolds. In the air, Whitewater compiled 198 while Eau Claire managed 49. There were 22 Whitewater first downs compared to eight for Eau Claire.

With the turnovers keeping Eau Claire in the game at times and keeping them out of it at others, the Blugolds lost three of their five fumbles while throwing a pick. The Warhawks lost both of their fumbles, but threw no interceptions.

Cory Sartorelli (So.-Appleton/North) had 17 rush attempts for 33 yards. Nikolay went 4-for-8 during the game and had 49 yards with the pick. **Sam Cummings** (Sr.-Rochester, MN/John Marshall) and **Zach Paul** (Sr.-Edgar) both made nine tackles to lead the defense,

For Whitewater, Jones hit on 20-of-27 while accumulating 208 yards and three TDs. Beaver rushed for 134 yards on 31 attempts. His WIAC career rushing record stands at 4,578 now. Mrkvicka also set a WIAC record today with his three punt returns. He now has 110 career returns, breaking UW-La Crosse alum Dan Bridges' mark of 108.

The Blugolds will stay on the road for their next game, a WIAC contest against UW-Oshkosh on Saturday. Kickoff is set for 1 p.m.

Eau Claire-Whitewater Box Score

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