Volleyball Hosts Yellowjackets In First Round Of Playoffs

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EAU CLAIRE, Wis. - The Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC) volleyball playoffs begin on Tuesday for 25th-ranked UW-Eau Claire with a 7 p.m. match versus UW-Superior at the McPhee Physical Education Building.

Third-seeded Eau Claire has lost in the WIAC championship match each of the past two years. The Blugolds have never won a WIAC tournament. Meanwhile, sixth-seeded Superior did not qualify for the WIAC tournament last year and it has never gotten to the second round of the tourney.

Eau Claire went on an 8-1 streak to finish the season and run their record to 21-8. In their conference matches, Eau Claire is 6-2 with the losses coming to UW-Oshkosh and UW-Whitewater. Eau Claire finished the year at third in the WIAC.

Heading into this year's tourney, **Abby Freiborg** *(Jr.-Sacred Heart, MN/Renville County West)* is Eau Claire's offensive leader with 3.45 kills per game and 74 total aces. Her 0.78 aces per game are most in the conference while **Jenna Weber** *(Jr.-Antigo)* is tied for second at 0.51 per game. **Lissa Martinez** *(Sr.-Vadnais Heights, MN/White Bear Lake)* and **Nikki Peterson** *(Sr.-North St. Paul, MN/North)* are next behind Freiborg with 2.89 and 2.87 kills per game. **Emily Haese** *(Jr.-Mishicot)* sets them up with 12.29 assists per game.

As a team, Eau Claire hits .197, good for sixth in the conference. They have 2.54 aces per game, second-best amongst WIAC competitors.

Defensively, **Heather Harnell** *(Sr.-Minnetonka, MN)* leads with 4.53 digs per game, which is also fifth in the conference. Freiborg has come through on defense as well, with 4.01 digs per game. **Katie Fox** *(Jr.-Chippewa Falls/Chi-Hi)* has tallied 85.0 blocks this season, most for Eau Claire. The Blugolds are last in the WIAC for blocks with 1.75 per game.

Tuesday's opponent has gone 21-12 this year with a 3-5 conference mark, which puts them at seventh in the WIAC. The Yellowjackets lost the one time they faced Eau Claire this year. The Blugolds swept with games of 30-22, 30-23 and 30-16.

The Yellowjackets are led by Courtney Stach's 3.44 kills per game and Alicia Fairchild's 10.13 assists per game. Superior has a collective hitting percentage of .198, edging out Eau Claire for fifth in the WIAC.

Samantha Blake has the most digs per game at 3.89. Superior is last in the WIAC for digs with 17.41 per game. The pair of Kelsey Lesny and Brittany Jarvis has been strong for Superior, collecting 124.0 and 117.0 blocks, respectively.

Eau Claire has found success recently at the conference tournament, taking second and getting selected to the NCAA Division III Championships the past two years. Both years, they met Whitewater in the national tournament and ended their season against the Warhawks. The last time Eau Claire didn't make it past the first round of the WIAC tourney was a 3-0 loss to UW-Platteville in 2004.

The Blugolds are 58-18 all-time versus Superior. Eau Claire has won 24 straight matches over Superior and 26 straight games. The last match Eau Claire lost was in 1994 and the last game Eau Claire lost was in 2002.

Eau Claire looks to continue that dominance on Tuesday when it hosts Superior in round one of the WIAC tournament. The match will begin at 7 p.m. in the McPhee Physical Education Building.