

Last Minute Heroics Advance Football In NCAA Playoffs

Posted: Saturday, November 17, 2007

DE PERE, Wis. - The UW-Eau Claire football team found itself in enemy territory often today with some empty drives, but a 28-yard touchdown from **Mitch Schaeuble** (Sr. -Wrightstown) to **Chris Hull** (Sr. -Blaine, MN/Spring Lake Park) with 46 seconds left made it 24-20 as Eau Claire won the first round of the NCAA Championships over St. Norbert College.

The 17th-ranked Blugolds will now play on Saturday and face ninth-ranked Bethel University (MN). The Blugolds also improved to 9-2, their best record since a 10-3 season in 1998. That year was the lone other appearance Eau Claire has had in the national playoffs. The 24th-ranked Green Knights lose their perfect season and have a 10-1 record. This is the eighth time St. Norbert has competed in the NCAA championships and it is the seventh time it has lost in the first round. Four of those losses have come in the final minutes.

Eau Claire took the football to begin today's game and gave itself an early lead on a long drive. It started on the Blugolds' 27 and nearly ran out of steam on a couple third-and-7 downs. However, Schaeuble found Tony Hull (Sr.-Blaine, MN/Spring Lake Park) and Chris Hull for gains of 15 and 19 yards on the clutch conversions. On a fourth-and-3 from St. Norbert's 26, **Cory Sartorelli** (So.-Appleton/North) found the necessary yardage on a 5-yard gain. He also capped off the 13-play, 73-yard drive with a 6-yard touchdown run. The entire series took 5:58 off the clock.

On St. Norbert's first possession, the Green Knights turned the ball over. They made it to their 46 before **Craig Polifka** (Jr.-Kewaunee) reeled in a pick at Eau Claire's 38. Aided by a St. Norbert personal foul and a Sartorelli 5-yard conversion on third-and-2, the Blugolds got to the Green Knights' 9. **Craig Kolb** (So.-Marshfield) then made the 27-yard attempt as Eau Claire went up 10-0 with 2:43 to go in the first.

The next time either side drove deep into enemy territory was at 13:21 in the second. Eau Claire had excellent field position after forcing the Green Knights to punt from deep in their territory. The team got to St. Norbert's 35 before a holding penalty brought them back. Schaeuble then launched one to the 5, where John Rappel intercepted it.

Eau Claire had excellent field position on its next drive as well, staring at the Green Knights' 49 after a punt. Schaeuble passed the Blugolds down to the 32, where another drive ended on an interception. Scott Wuensch wrestled the ball from the receiver at the 20 to set up St. Norbert's first scoring drive.

The Green Knights mixed the run and the pass before making it to Eau Claire's 46, where the team met a fourth-and-1. Running back A.J. Phillips picked up 2 yards to keep it alive. The next play was a completion to Phillips for 25 yards, which brought the ball to the 19. Three plays later, quarterback Cody Craig hooked up with Ben Petry on a 5-yard score. The score would remain 10-7 going into half.

After half, the Green Knights took the kickoff and began their drive at St. Norbert's 33. This march had plenty of big plays, with the Green Knights covering 19, 23 and 11 yards on single plays during this six-play series. Gerald Danforth rushed in from the 8 to score the touchdown and give St. Norbert its first lead. **Craig Danielson** (So.-Superior) blocked the extra point, the ninth blocked kick by Eau Claire this year.

On Eau Claire's ensuing possession, the Blugolds dug themselves a hole after starting the drive in St. Norbert's territory. Following a bad snap, Schaeuble picked up the ball as Eau Claire lost 32 yards on the play. On second-and-42, however, Sartorelli ran for 37. On fourth down at the Green Knights' 29, Schaeuble completed the pass to Tony Hull for a first down while also picking up a roughing the passer penalty. Now at the 11, two rushes and an incompletion followed before Kolb trotted out. However, the St. Norbert special teams knocked it down to stay ahead.

The momentum was now in St. Norbert's favor, but not for long. Danforth put the ball on the ground during the first play, which **Tom Dohr** (Jr.-Neenah) recovered. The Blugolds were given