

Men's Hockey Faces Ranked Competition this Weekend

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EAU CLAIRE, Wis. - The UW-Eau Claire men's hockey team has a chance to gain some ground in the Northern Collegiate Hockey Association (NCHA) this weekend, but will have to win a couple tough games against No. 6 UW-River Falls and No. 12 UW-Stout.

Friday's game at Stout starts at 7:30 p.m. On Saturday, the Falcons travel to Hobbs Ice Center for a 7 p.m. showdown.

The Blugolds are 4-5-0 in the NCHA and 8-12-0 overall, which puts them in sixth for NCHA standings. Before Saturday's win, the team had lost five straight. Stout is third in the NCHA at 5-4-0 in the conference and 13-6-1 in all games. River Falls is one spot above the Blue Devils on a 6-2-1 NCHA mark. They've gone 14-3-3 over the season.

Eau Claire averages 2.5 goals per game, half a goal below the opponents' average. They have been keeping pace on the advantage, however. The Blugolds have gone 18-for-104 (17.3 percent) while opponents have managed 19-for-105 (18.1 percent).

Sean Garrity (*Sr.-North St. Paul, MN/North*) has put up the points for the team. His team-leading 13 assists along with nine goals give him 22 points. The goals tie **Andrew Johnson** (*Jr.-Andover, MN/Anoka*) for first on the team. Johnson shares his 13-point total with **Greg Petersen** (*Jr.-Maple Grove, MN/Totino-Grace*) while **Jesse Vesel** (*Jr.-Hibbing, MN*) also hits double-figures at 10.

Tyler Brigl (*So.-Eagan, MN*) has sat in goal for the Blugolds, posting a 2.64 goals-against average. His 408 saves have led to a .893 save percentage.

Stout comes into Friday's matchup having lost four of the past six. Earlier this season, the Blue Devils edged Eau Claire 2-1 after Andy Sternberg scored with 29 seconds left in the game. It made the all-time record 24-23-2, with Eau Claire leading.

The Blue Devils allow 2.6 goals per game, but score 4.2. Stout knows how to take advantage in the power-play, putting in 27.1 percent of their 118 chances. Opponents succeed just 17.9 percent of the time.

There are four players at 20 or more points on the Stout roster. Joel Gaulrapp leads them all with 25 points and 15 goals. Derek Hanson is one point behind him with 14 goals and 10 assists, as well. Jeff Wheeler's 10 goals and 12 assists make for 22 points while Jack Wolgemuth has 20. His 17 assists lead the team by a large margin. Matt Koenig has been the main man in net. He holds a 2.74 goals-against average and a .908 save percentage.

While Stout may be treading water, River Falls has won six of the past seven. The one loss came Saturday and was in triple overtime. The Falcons previously Eau Claire 5-3 on Nov. 30. The Blugolds are down in the all-time series 26-78-3.

River Falls outscores opponents by two goals a game (4.8-to-2.8). They perform even better than Stout in the power-play, converting 32.4 percent of 111 opportunities. Opponents have scored on 20.6 percent of their 107 power-plays.

The big three from River Falls are TJ Dahl, Derek Hansberry and Pat Borgestad. Dahl has an incredible 29 assists and 34 points. Hansberry spreads his 33 points between 18 goals and 15 assists. Borgestad has 21 goals and 11 assists for 32 points. Dustin Norman (24 points), Jim Henkemeyer (23 points) and Tyler Czuba (20 points) also contribute to the offensive attack. On defense, Tyler Owens and Stephen Ritter have split time at goalie. Ritter has played in seven games and has a 2.05 goals-against average with a .939 save percentage. Owens played in 11 contests while allowing 3.05 goals per game. His save percentage stands at .896.

Friday's away game is at 7:30 p.m. while the Saturday contest begins at 7 p.m.