

Men's Hockey Prepares For Playoffs In Superior

Posted: Wednesday, February 20, 2008

EAU CLAIRE, Wis. - The UW-Eau Claire men's hockey team looks to make some noise in this year's Northern Collegiate Hockey Association (NCHA) playoffs, which start this weekend at UW-Superior for the Blugolds.

The Blugolds are the fifth seed after beating UW-Stevens Point 2-0 on the last game of the season to move their NCHA record to 6-7-1. Both Eau Claire and the Pointers have 13 points, but the Blugolds have one more NCHA win, giving them the higher seed. The Yellowjackets, who received 10 votes in the latest USCHO.com/CSTV Division III poll, are the fourth seed at 6-4-4 in the conference. Superior went 12-5-8 over the whole season while Eau Claire went 10-14-1. It is the first time since 2003-04 that the team notched 10 or more wins, with the 2003-04 squad going 14-12-1. It is also the first time Eau Claire has had the fifth seed since 2001-02. That year the Blugolds were swept by UW-River Falls in the Peters Cup Playoffs.

The Blugolds and Yellowjackets have split the season series, with Eau Claire winning 3-1 on Dec. 8 and Superior winning 2-1 in overtime on Feb. 8. The first game saw three Eau Claire goals in the first period while the second saw late Yellowjacket goals as they caught up. The winner came just a minute into the extra session.

The Eau Claire offense generates 2.5 goals per game while the defense allows 2.7. That puts Eau Claire's offense at seventh and the defense at fifth. On the advantage, Eau Claire has one more goal and one more opportunity than opponents over the course of the season, making for a 17.3 percent (23-for-133) conversion rate. Opponents have scored on 22-of-132 for a 16.7 percent mark.

Sean Garrity (*Sr.-North St. Paul, MN/North*) has led the offense with 24 points off 11 goals and a team-leading 13 assists. **Greg Petersen** (*Jr.-Maple Grove, MN/Totino-Grace*) and **Andrew Johnson** (*Jr.-Andover, MN/Anoka*) are next closest with 17 and 16 points, respectively. Petersen has 12 assists while Johnson has 11 goals, which tie for the team lead with Garrity's total.

Tyler Brigl (*So.-Eagan, MN*) has put together an impressive season between the pipes for the Blugolds. He has a 10-13-1 record with four shutouts, most ever for an Eau Claire goalie in one season. His five career shutouts are also a Blugold record. He has stopped 532 shots for a 90.3 percent save percentage. The 532 are second in the NCHA. Opponents get 2.41 goals past him per game.

Superior has done better offensively with 2.8 goals per game and has Eau Claire defensively with 2.1 goals allowed per game. The Yellowjackets post a 14.0 percent (14-for-100) power-play percentage. Opponents have succeeded 20-of-116 times for a 17.2 percentage. The team's five shutouts tie for tops in the NCHA with No. 1 St. Norbert College. It also ties for most in shorthanded goals with six. Superior plays a disciplined game, with the lowest amount of penalty minutes per game at 13.28.

Superior has seven players in double-digits for points compared to Eau Claire's four. However, only two have more than 15. They include Kevin Huck (20) and Logan Isley (19). Huck's 11 goals lead while Isley's nine follow. Derek Paige and Talon Berlando each have 11 helpers while Isley and Braden Desmet have contributed 10. Eric Bausano's three shorthanded goals are most among NCHA skaters, as are Huck's two hat tricks.

In net, Chad Beiswenger has gone 9-2-6 with three shutouts over 17 games. He has allowed just 1.83 goals per game while posting a save percentage of 93.0. Beiswenger has tallied 425 saves on the year. He ranks third behind Brigl in saves. Both goalies played when the two teams met earlier this season.

Due to the high seed, this year's playoffs will look quite different. The past three years have seen Eau Claire get swept by perennial powerhouse St. Norbert. The 2003-04 season was the last time Eau Claire faced anyone other than the Green Knights. That season the Falcons swept the Blugolds. Eau Claire's last playoff win was in 1994-9