

Men's Hockey Prepares For First Semifinal Ever

Posted: Thursday, February 28, 2008

EAU CLAIRE, Wis. - This year's UW-Eau Claire men's hockey team has made history with its postseason run and it looks to extend that playoff push on Saturday at 13th-ranked UW-Stout.

The fifth-seeded Blugolds upset fourth-seeded UW-Superior in round one to win their first Peters Cup playoff series ever. The last time the program even won a playoff game was 1995. Eau Claire won the first game of this year's series 4-2 before being shutout 5-0 in Game Two. That forced a 20-minute mini-game, which the Blugolds won 1-0 thanks to a **Sean Garrity** (*Sr.-North St. Paul, MN/North*) goal. It was also the first mini-game Eau Claire has ever won.

Saturday's contest is a one game, do-or-die affair against the third-seeded Blue Devils. Stout won easily against sixth-seeded UW-Stevens Point in the quarterfinals with games of 8-4 and 7-1. The Blue Devils have had success against Eau Claire this year, winning 2-1 on Dec. 1 and 4-1 on Feb. 1. In the first game, Stout got two third-period goals, the game-winner at 19:31. The Blue Devils scored on three of their six power-plays in the second game.

The Blugolds average 2.4 goals per game while giving up 2.7. It has the seventh-best offense and the fifth-best defense. Opponents have the edge on power-plays as well by a 17.4 percent-to-16.8 percent ratio. Those numbers both rank fifth in the Northern Collegiate Hockey Association (NCHA).

Saturday's hero, Garrity, leads Eau Claire in points with 26 off 11 goals and a team-leading 15 assists. **Andrew Johnson** (*Jr.-Andover, MN/Anoka*) and **Greg Petersen** (*Jr.-Maple Grove, MN/Totino-Grace*) are next with 18 points. Johnson has a team-leading 13 goals with five assists while the numbers are flip-flopped for Petersen. Garrity and Petersen were named to the All-Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC) First Team.

Tyler Brigl (*So.-Eagan, MN*) has been the man in the net with 580 saves and a 90.1 save percentage. He has allowed 2.5 goals per game in the 26 appearances he's made. Brigl's record is 11-14-1 and his saves are second among NCHA goalies. Brigl is an All-WIAC Honorable Mention.

The Blue Devils have a better goal margin than the Blugolds, scoring 4.3 goals per game and giving up 2.5. Stout has the second-best offense and fourth-best defense among NCHA teams. They also have opposing squads on the advantage 29.1 percent-to-16.1 percent. On the power-play, they rank first while sitting second in power-play killing percentage. Their 48 power-play goals are most in the NCHA.

Stout has five skaters above 26 points. They include Derek Hanson (39), Joel Gaulrapp (34), Jack Wolgemuth (28), Jeff Wheeler (27) and Scott Motz (27). Hanson leads the Blue Devils in goals with 21 while Motz and Wolgemuth each have 21 assists to take that category. Hanson is third in the NCHA for points while Gaulrapp is seventh. Hanson is also tied for second in goals per game with 0.78. Hanson's 13 advantage goals are most in the NCHA while Gaulrapp's 10 tie for second. Wolgemuth and Motz are tied for third in assists per game with 0.78. Gaulrapp and Wolgemuth were named to the All-WIAC First Team while Hanson, Bobby Kuehl and Andy Sternberg were honorable mentions.

The team has primarily used two goalies. Matt Koenig has played in 18 games and started 16. His save percentage is 90.2 percent while his goals-allowed average is 2.90. Mike Stone played in 16 games while starting 11. In his playing time, he allows 2.09 goals per game while stopping 92.4 percent of shots. Stone has seen the majority of the time in the playoffs after Koenig gave up four goals in the first game against Stevens Point. Koenig played the first game against the Blugolds this year while Stone played the second, so the Blugolds have seen both goalies. Stone is an All-WIAC Honorable Mention.

If Eau Claire wins on Saturday, they'd advance to their first NCHA Championship ever. They'd face either seventh-seeded St. Scholastica (MN) or top-seeded and top-ranked St. Norbert College.

Saturday's game begins at 7:30 p.m. in Menomonie.

