

2004-05 UW-Eau Claire Women's Hockey Season Preview

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EAU CLAIRE - With 13 returning letterwinners in the mix for the 2004-05 campaign, the UW-Eau Claire women's hockey team and head coach Mike Collins will look to improve on a 10-15-2 record from one season ago.

The 2003-04 Blugolds went 5-11-0 in the Northern Collegiate Hockey Association (NCHA) standings finishing in fourth place and earning a spot in the NCHA Post-Season Tournament. Last season's conference win total matched that of the previous three seasons combined for the Blugolds.

The season was highlighted by wins over conference champion and NCAA Division III national runner-up UW-Stevens Point and Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) and NCAA tournament qualifier St. Thomas.

The 10 wins earned by the Blugolds marked the first time in school history that the program had totaled double-digit wins in a single season.

Offensively, the Blugolds return their top three scorers from last season. **Amanda Schultz** (*Jr.-Stevens Point/SPASH*) returns for her junior season after leading the team last season with nine goals while adding seven assists to tie for the team lead with 16 points. **Laura Suppes** (*So.-Falcon Height, MN/Roseville*) and **Karen Hebert** (*So.-Lakeville, MN/Holy Angels*) return after scoring eight and six goals respectively, good for second and third place on the team.

Eau Claire will look to transfer **Devon Nichols** (*Jr.-Victoria, MN*) for some offensive firepower. Nichols, a transfer from Division I MSU-Mankato, led the Mavericks last season with 30 points. The first year Blugold finished with 45 points in 64 games in two seasons with Mankato.

Also returning to the Blugolds this season is **Tara Hayner** (*So.-Stillwater, MN*), who was one of four Blugolds with double-digit points last season. Hayner scored three goals while dishing out seven assists in 2003-04 for a total of 10 points. Forward **Christa Hubert** (*Sr.-Blaine, MN*) returns as the team's only senior and captain of what Collins describes as a "young, exciting team."

Defensively, Eau Claire returns just one upperclassman from last season. **Crystal Wasem** (*Jr.-Chaska, MN*) played in all 27 games for the Blugolds last season, tallying five points. A pair of underclassmen with a full year of experience also return as **Allie Campbell** (*So.-Plymouth, MN/Wayzata*) and **Allison Timberg** (*So.-Tonka Bay, MN/Minnetonka*) each return after playing in all 27 games as freshmen last season.

In the net, Eau Claire does not return a single goalie from last season. A group of three freshman goalies will look to fill the void, as **Jill Arendt** (*Fr.-Plymouth, MN/Wayzata*), **Molly Gehr** (*Fr.-New Richmond*) and **Heather Prochaska** (*Fr.-Madison*) will all compete for playing time between the pipes.

All in all, Eau Claire boasts seven upperclassmen and 15 underclassmen on its 2004-05 roster. The key is that seven of the underclassmen played in at least 22 games last season, showing that Eau Claire could be much more experienced than its roster may show. The experience may be exactly what the Blugolds and Mike Collins need to make a charge in the NCHA standings.