

# UW-Eau Claire Punches Ticket To Finals With Thriller Over UW-Whitewater

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EAU CLAIRE, Wis. - The top-seeded UW-Eau Claire volleyball team avenged a loss from earlier in the season, defeating UW-Whitewater in four sets to advance to the WIAC tournament finale in front of an electric crowd tonight at the McPhee Physical Education Center.

With the victory, the Blugolds will appear in the tournament championship for the third time in four years and face second-seeded UW-Oshkosh, who defeated UW-La Crosse earlier in the evening. The Blugolds improve to 23-10 on the season, while the Warhawks slip to 29-8.

On October 18, Whitewater handed Eau Claire its only conference loss of the season in four sets. Head Coach **Kim Wudi** said Whitewater played its best volleyball of the season against the Blugolds and expected another heated contest again tonight.

Senior **Jenna Weber** (*Antigo, Wis.*) said going into tonight's faceoff the team had one thought in mind.

"We know that we have a trip to the NCAA tournament on the line, so we came into this match with a ?refuse to lose? mentality," said Weber.

Eau Claire came out of the gate strong in the first set, jumping out to an early 6-1 lead. Faced with a deficit, Whitewater slowly chipped away at the Blugold lead and eventually grabbed momentum with a four point rally to take a 17-15 lead late in the set. The Warhawks would hold on to the first set and win by a score of 25-20.

The second set opened the way the first ended, with Whitewater posting a 10-5 lead. The Blugolds quickly went on a scoring rally and stole the lead away from the Warhawks. Eau Claire fought off a Whitewater scoring rally late in the set and hung on to the second set, winning 25-23.

In the final two sets, leads would be exchanged on several occasions, but the difference maker was five and six point scoring rallies from Eau Claire at opportune times, ultimately deciding the match. The Blugolds would win the clinch the match in the third and fourth set by scores of 25-23 and 25-19.

Three Blugolds registered double-digit kills. **Abby Freiborg** (*Sr.-Sacred Heart, Minn./Renville County West*), who was named the WIAC volleyball Scholar Athlete earlier tonight, led the charge with 13 kills to go along with a match-high 16 digs and four aces. **Emily Zupon** (*So.-St. Cloud, Minn./Apollo*) and Weber, the team's high energy leader, each had 11. **Emily Haese** (*Sr.-Mishicot, Wis.*) tallied 48 assists and 14 digs, while **Lindsey Smith** (*Jr.-Maple Lake, Minn.*) recorded 14 digs for the Blugolds.

Liz Benzschawel led the Warhawks with 14 kills, and Kelly Sorenson picked up 11. Christina DeGroot posted a match-high 45 assists and five aces, while Alyse Karls and Alyssa Bauer took home top defensive honors for Whitewater with 13 digs apiece.

Whitewater will now face UW-La Crosse in the third place match tomorrow at noon.

The Blugolds will face a tough task tomorrow in UW-Oshkosh. The two teams shared the regular season WIAC Championship. Eau Claire swept Oshkosh on October 4 at home. With an automatic entry into the postseason on the line, Weber said she and her Blugold teammates are up for the challenge.

"It doesn't have to be pretty, we just need to get the job done," said Weber.

The championship match will follow the third-place match and is scheduled to begin at 2:30 p.m.

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