

## UW-Eau Claire Falls In WIAC Championship To UW-Oshkosh

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EAU CLAIRE, Wis. - The UW-Eau Claire volleyball team fell short of capturing the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC) Tournament championship in five sets to 7th ranked UW-Oshkosh. With the win, the Titans receive the automatic bid into the NCAA tournament while the Blugolds will have to rely on one of the 19 at-large entries.

Oshkosh improves to 37-2 for the year and Eau Claire drops to 23-11 overall.

"Today was Oshkosh's day," said Blugolds' Head Coach, **Kim Wudi**. "They came ready to play and just plain beat us."

The opening set was neck and neck until midway through when the Titans produced a six point rally to take a 14-8 lead. The Blugolds were unable to recover, eventually dropping the first set by a score of 25-21. In what proved to be a back and forth second set, Eau Claire put together three major scoring outputs and took the set by the slimmest of margins, 25-23.

The third match found Oshkosh simply in the right place at the right times defensively. Several attack kill efforts by the Blugolds were dashed as the Titans back row came up with several huge digs. Wudi said the Titans were able to keep her team on its toes throughout the match.

"We just couldn't get over the hump offensively," said Wudi. "They had us running all over the court, and when you exhaust so much energy on defense it's difficult to go for kills at full strength."

Eau Claire would drop the third set 25-17 and faced elimination heading into the fourth set. Having to play from behind nearly the entire set, the Blugolds refused to lose, and with the Titans just four points away from the title, Eau Claire battled back to clinch the win and force the decisive fifth set.

Oshkosh jumped out to an early 6-3 lead in the set to 15 points, and Eau Claire was unable to make the complete comeback. Needing just one point to secure the win, the Titans closed the door and took and the championship, 15-12.

Leading the offense for Eau Claire with 14 kills was WIAC Player of the Year, **Abby Freiborg** (*Sr.-Sacred Heart, Minn/Renville County West*). **Emily Haese** (*Sr.-Mishicot, Wis.*) paced the offense with 38 assists, and **Lindsey Smith** (*Jr.-Maple Lake, Minn.*) contributed 19 digs.

The Titans were led by Katie Beining's 12 kills and 14 digs, while Katelyn Vara dished out a match-high 44 assists. Stealing the show on defense was Oshkosh sophomore libero Christina Cahoon. Cahoon picked up a match high 28 digs and made several big plays in the winning effort.

Haese said it was tough to lose such a tightly contested match, but she and her teammates are optimistic about the chance for an at-large bid.

"Obviously we wanted the automatic [bid] so there were no doubts, but we're confident that how we've played and who we've played will push us into the tourney."

Eau Claire-Oshkosh Box Score

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