

Volleyball Prepares For NCAA First Round Against Gustavus

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EAU CLAIRE, Wis. - After receiving one of the 19 at-large bids, the UW-Eau Claire volleyball team travels to the University of St. Thomas (Minn.) for the eight-team NCAA regional. In its first match of the single elimination tournament, the Blugolds will face Gustavus Adolphus (Minn.).

Eau Claire enters the regional with a 23-11 overall record. In the WIAC conference tournament last weekend, the Blugolds lost in the championship match to UW-Oshkosh in a five-set marathon. Prior to the loss, Eau Claire adorned a nine-match winning streak and won 13 of their last 15 contests.

This is the fourth consecutive year the Blugolds have reached the NCAA tournament, and the second in as many years for WIAC Coach of the Year **Kim Wudi**. Last season, Eau Claire lost in the first round to this year's host, St. Thomas, in four sets. The deepest into the tournament the Blugolds have reached is the Sweet Sixteen, with the last time coming in 2006.

WIAC Player of the Year **Abby Freiborg** (Sr.-Sacred Heart, Minn./Renville County West) leads a potent Blugold offense. Currently, she leads the team in kills with 352, digs with 371 and service aces with 64. **Emily Haese** (Sr.-Mishicot, Wis.) leads the Blugolds this year with 1,192 assists, fourth on the team with 20 service aces and fifth with 44 blocks. **Katie Fox** (Sr.-Chippewa Falls, Wis./Chi-Hi) is tops on the team in blocks with 110 on the season, and ranks second with 260 kills. **Lindsey Smith** (Jr.-Maple Lake, Minn.) is the Blugolds' defensive leader, collecting 3.89 digs per set to go along with 52 service aces this season.

Like the Blugolds, Gustavus punched its tournament ticket via the at-large bid. The Gusties are currently 26-4 on the season, and advanced to the championship match of the Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) tournament before losing to St. Thomas in four sets. Meghan Gehring leads the offense with 2.85 kills per set, while Bridget Burtzel contributes 10.48 assists per set. Three-time MIAC Defensive Player of the Year Emily Klein leads the Gusties with 6.10 digs per set.

Eau Claire leads the all-time series against Gustavus with a 6-4 record. However, the Gusties had the upper hand in the last match, beating the Blugolds in three sets last season. Thursday's match is scheduled to begin at 3:30 p.m. at Schoenecker Arena.

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