

Blugolds Fall To Stout, Lose WIAC Title Hopes

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MENOMONIE - The 10th-ranked UW-Eau Claire football team suffered a 36-21 loss at UW-Stout while both UW-La Crosse and UW-Whitewater earned victories, knocking the Blugolds out of contention for the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference title and a possible NCAA Division III playoff appearance.

The Eagles and Warhawks will battle next weekend, meaning one of the two teams will finish the conference schedule with just two losses. With Eau Claire's loss today, the Blugolds need a home win next week against UW-Oshkosh just to finish at 4-3 in the WIAC. Eau Claire is currently 6-3 overall and 3-3 in conference play. Stout improves to 5-3 for the season and 3-3 in the WIAC and is also eliminated in the WIAC title hunt.

The Blue Devils, coming off a 31-21 victory last weekend against La Crosse, sent a message on the opening kickoff as Andy Reese returned it 44 yards to the Stout 45 yard line. Quarterback Nick Ohman immediately went to work, completing five passes for 38 yards, including a four-yard touchdown to running back John Hendricks to put Stout up 7-0. After a Blugold punt, Ohman made a costly mistake, losing a fumble on his own 32 yard line. Eau Claire capitalized three plays later when **Nels Fredrickson** (*Sr.-Burnsville, MN*) tied the game with a 32-yard touchdown strike to **Tony Hull** (*Fr.-Blaine, MN/Spring Lake Park*). The Blugold defense stepped up the rest of the first half as the Blue Devils drove to the Eau Claire eight yard line but failed to convert on fourth down.

Early in the second quarter Stout regained the lead, blocking a Blugold punt out of the end zone for a safety and a 9-7 lead. Eau Claire responded late in the half, driving 80 yards on eight plays to take a 13-9 advantage. **Joe Gast** (*Jr.-Waconia, MN*) had rushes of 11 and 27 yards on the drive and Fredrickson found the end zone with a 10-yard pass to **Matt Evensen** (*Jr.-Junction City/Auburndale*). The Blugolds try for a two-point conversion was no good but Eau Claire still took a lead into halftime.

The Blue Devils took the lead for good on their first drive of the second half, when Ohman hooked up with Hendricks for a 20-yard touchdown pass to take a 16-13 lead. Stout threatened again on its next possession but **Brent Weber** (*Jr.-Rice Lake*) ended the drive with an interception in the Blugold end zone. Eau Claire turned the ball right back over five plays into the ensuing drive, when a Gast fumble was recovered by Stout's Travis Hoffman. Six plays into the following drive, Ohman made the turnover hurt with a 15-yard touchdown pass to Seth Mattison with 3:30 remaining in the third quarter. The touchdown gave the Blue Devils a two-score lead at 23-13.

After another Blugold punt, Stout found its way into the end zone yet again with an 80-yard, 11-play drive that took the clock down to 12:04 in the game. Ohman used his feet instead of his arm on the scoring drive, running for gains of 27, 14 and seven yards before scrambling for a three-yard touchdown. Evan Larsen's point-after was good and the Blue Devils owned a 30-13 advantage.

After a quick three-and-out by Eau Claire, Stout put the game away with another long touchdown drive that chewed up most of the remaining time on the clock. The Blugolds appeared to have held Stout to a three-and-out on the drive but a pass interference penalty kept the drive alive. The Blue Devils drove 61 yards for the touchdown without picking up a gain of more than seven yards. Ohman converted on a fourth-and-one with a three-yard scramble and Hendricks plunged into the end zone from one-yard out. The point-after was no good but the Blue Devils still held a commanding 36-13 lead.

Fredrickson added a touchdown run with 1:31 left in the game but it was far from being enough to bring the Blugolds back into the game. A two-point conversion finished the scoring a 36-21.

The Blue Devils dominated the line of scrimmage, racking up 311 yards rushing while holding the Blugolds to just 31 yards on the ground on 20 attempts. Ohman finished with 150 yards on 25 attempts and a touchdown while Hendricks tallied 113 yards on 20 attempts