

# Women's Basketball Catapults Into Finals In Dominating Fashion

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WHITEWATER, Wis. - Despite an onslaught of snow and rain throughout the state, the show went on in Kachel Gymnasium as the 12th-ranked UW-Eau Claire women's basketball team beat fourth-ranked UW-Whitewater 61-34 in a WIAC Tournament semifinal game.

The Blugolds improve to 23-4 overall, and pick up their seventh win all-time in tournament semifinal games. With the loss, the Warhawks fall to 22-4 on the season, and are winless in three semifinal appearances all-time.

In a battle of two WIAC offensive power houses, both teams struggled to find the basket early. Eau Claire got on the board first on a short-range jumper from **Ellen Plendl** (*Fr.-Chippewa Falls, Wis./McDonell*). A five minute scoring drought halted the scoring at 2-0, until **Heather Witt** (*Sr.-Kendall, Wis./Royall*) converted a layup off of a Warhawk turnover to take a 4-0 lead. Through the first 10 minutes of the contest, Eau Claire shot 42 percent from the field. Thanks in large part to the Blugolds' suffocating zone defense, Whitewater struggled mightily, turning the ball over four times and converting on just two of its 16 attempts.

The Blugolds found their rhythm later in the half and jumped out to a commanding 14-5 lead. In a physical first half, rebounds came at a premium and Eau Claire controlled the boards on both ends of the floor. Eau Claire caught a break with seven minutes left in the half when Whitewater's top scorer and rebounder, Tiffany Morton, was sent to the sidelines with two quick fouls.

Whitewater ended a 10 minute scoring slump on a Kelsey Hendrickson three to make the score 22-8 with 2:35 left in the half. Eau Claire answered on the next possession on a jumper from **Ashley Anderson** (*Sr.-Oakdale, Minn./North St. Paul*), her second field goal of the game. With 14 seconds left in the half, **Missy Fremstad** (*Sr.-Osseo, Wis./Osseo-Fairchild*) connected on a jumper from the left corner giving Eau Claire a 26-8 lead heading into halftime. The eight points given up by Eau Claire is the second lowest total allowed in a half since the Blugolds held UW-Superior to seven points in the 1999-2000 season.

**Head Coach Tonja Englund** credited the middle of the zone defense for its success.

"Ellen (Plendl) changed Whitewater's opportunity to get some easy looks on the inside," said Englund. "She's picked up a lot of confidence and has made a big difference for us on the defensive end."

For the half, the Blugolds connected on 37.9 percent of their shots and pulled down 25 rebounds, including nine on the offensive end. The Warhawks, who came into tonight's game leading the conference with 72.3 points per game, shot just 11.1 percent.

Eau Claire ran on all cylinders, as **Heidi Arciszewski** (*Sr.-Thorp, Wis.*) and **Hannah Mesick** (*So.-Chatfield, Minn.*) opened the second half with back-to-back buckets, giving the Blugolds a 30-8 lead. With the score 36-15, Eau Claire continued its good fortune when Anderson converted on a traditional three-point play, extending the lead to 39-15.

The Blugolds could do no wrong, making hustle plays and catching breaks throughout the second half. If the Warhawks hit a shot, Eau Claire answered with a basket of their own, running away with the 27 point victory.

"Our players played to our game plan for the entire 40 minutes," said Englund. "I don't think there was a time where our team lost its intensity or its focus."

For the game, Eau Claire shot 42.1 percent and had nine players score at least two points. The Blugolds out-rebounded Whitewater 46-28 and shot a perfect 13-for-13 from the free throw line. The Warhawks were held to a season low 34 points, shooting 17.2 percent for the game.

Leading the way for the Blugolds was a trio of double-digit scorers. Arciszewski picked up a game-high 14 points to go along with six rebounds and four assists. Witt chipped in with 12 points, five assists and four steals, and Plendl picked up 10 points on five-of-six shooting from the field.

The Blugolds now head to UW-Stevens Point, which defeated UW-Stout 76-64 in the other semifinal game tonight. Game time is set for 6 p.m.

"No matter who we play or where we play Saturday, we need to bring the same intensity to the court that we did tonight," said Arciszewski, "We need to scrap, we need to take care of the ball and we need to build our own energy and get it done."

Eau Claire-Whitewater Box Score

WIAC Tournament Website

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