

# Women's Basketball Comes Up Short In Tourney Championship

Posted: Saturday, February 28, 2009

STEVENS POINT, Wis. - For the second time in as many seasons, the 12th-ranked UW-Eau Claire women's basketball team found itself in the championship game of the WIAC conference tournament against fifth-ranked UW-Stevens Point. Tonight the Blugolds came up short, losing a 46-42 thriller at Berg Gymnasium.

At 23-5, Eau Claire will now have to rely on an at-large selection into the NCAA tournament. Stevens Point (24-3) earned the conference's automatic bid to the NCAA tournament.

"For the next 24 hours, we're going to hope that our strength of schedule, the basketball we've played this year and the 23 wins we earned will get us into the tournament," said Head Coach **Tonja Englund**.

Fans can watch the NCAA selection show at 10 a.m. on Monday on NCAA.com.

Much like the first three meetings between these two teams, high intensity and aggressive play were no stranger to the matchup. Eau Claire opened tonight's first half in a big way. In its first possession of the game, **Ellen Plendl** (*Fr.-Chippewa Falls, Wis./McDonell*) hit a jumper from short-range to give Eau Claire the early lead. Moments later, **Heather Witt** (*Sr.-Kendall, Wis./Royall*) converted on a steal and score, and the Blugolds hit another shot to take a 6-0 lead.

The Blugolds' dominating zone defense was effective early, forcing Stevens Point into errant outside shots and turnovers early. Eau Claire capitalized, pulling down key offensive rebounds and turning them into points. The Blugolds dominated the battle of the boards in the first half, 22-13.

Although Eau Claire's zone took its toll on Stevens Point early, the Pointers found a way to break through and convert late in the first half. Two three-point baskets from Katie Webber cut Eau Claire's lead to 18-17. With 56 seconds left in the half, the Pointers took their first lead of the game when Britta Peterson hit a jumper as the shot clock expired. Stevens Point got another score in the final seconds and took a 21-18 lead into halftime.

For the half, Eau Claire shot 34.6 percent on nine of 26 shooting, while Stevens Point shot 37.5 percent including 3-for-11 from three point land.

Stevens Point extended its lead to six to open the second half. After two offensive rebounds, Britta Peterson converted on a traditional three point play, giving the Pointers a 24-18 lead. Eau Claire was unable to answer early, missing its first four shot attempts in the half. Witt broke the Blugolds' slump, slashing to the hoop for two, which cut Stevens Point's lead to seven. A basket from **Heidi Arciszewski** (*Sr.-Thorp, Wis.*) pulled Eau Claire within five at 27-22.

After two **Hannah Mesick** (*So.-Chatfield, Minn.*) free throws, Arciszewski used her signature spin move to split two defenders for the score. With ten minutes remaining, the Blugolds trailed 32-26. The second half continued to go back-and-forth, with neither team grabbing hold of momentum. With seven minutes remaining, Mesick cut the Pointers lead to one on a put-back to make the score 32-31. Just when it looked as if the Blugolds would overtake Stevens Point, the Pointers rattled off five quick points to extend its lead to 37-31 with 6:22 to go.

From then on, Eau Claire found itself in a scoring drought while Stevens Point had everything go their way. Two free throws and a jumper gave the Pointers a 41-31 lead with less than two minutes to go. Eau Claire was forced to foul in the final minute, and the Pointers missed three bonus opportunities at the line.

The Blugolds took advantage of the miscues, and a desperation three from Witt with 42 seconds left pulled Eau Claire within two at 41-39. After two free throws gave the Pointers a 43-39 lead, **Pam Kaye** (*Sr.-Milwaukee, Wis./Brookfield Central*) hit a three from the corner on the ensuing possession, once again cutting Point's lead to one. With 13.4 seconds to go, Andrea Flease made good on two free throws. With the crowd on its feet, the Blugolds had one more chance to tie it. **Katie Weinberg's** (*So.-Dresser, Wis./St. Croix Falls*) three from the top of the key was long, and with two seconds left, Flease converted on one of two free

throws to seal the win for Stevens Point.

Englund said tonight's performance fell in line with the overall theme in this season's games against the Pointers.

"I think there were four or five key points in the game where we mentally slipped and they took advantage of it," said Englund. "And that's what has happened each of the times we've lost them before."

Mesick and Witt led the Blugolds' offense with 10 points apiece. Mesick also pulled down a team-high eight rebounds. Arciszewski finished with seven points and five rebounds, and **Jodi Lindner** (*Jr.-Neillsville, Wis.*) chipped in with six points and six boards.

Eau Claire-Stevens Point Box Score

- CL -