

Women's Basketball Misses Another Upset Chance

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WHITEWATER, Wis. (UWECBlugolds.com) - The UW-Eau Claire women's basketball team missed a golden opportunity to upset its second Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference leader within the span of four days, falling to UW-Whitewater, 62-54, at the Kachel Gymnasium here Saturday afternoon.

The Blugolds had the upper hand for most of the game, leading 34-25 in the first half and 46-44 with 6:40 to go in the game.

The Warhawks took the lead for good on their only three-pointer of the game by Nicole Bundy with 4:42 remaining which broke a tie and gave them a 51-48 advantage. Whitewater maintained the lead to the end although the Blugolds got within two at 54-52 with 2:45 remaining and were still within four at 58-54 with 1:11 left.

The Blugolds were coming off an 80-67 triumph Wednesday over conference leader UW-Stevens Point. The victory allowed Whitewater to maintain a share of the league lead with Stevens Point.

The game Saturday was in stark contrast to the Blugolds' 57-53 triumph over the Warhawks in Zorn Arena January 16. In that game, the Blugolds held a 50-27 advantage on the boards and a 21-10 edge at the free throw line. In its win, Whitewater outboarded Eau Claire, 39-30, with 19 offensive rebounds allowing them a chance at 14 more shots than the Blugolds. The Warhawks also hit 25 of 28 charity tosses compared to just 7 of 12 for the Blugolds.

The Blugolds also turned the ball over twice as much as Whitewater (20-10), marking the first time in six games Eau Claire has had that many miscues.

Whitewater, a team that relies on the three and launched 39 trifectas in the first meeting, was just 1 of 13 outside the arc in the rematch.

In the early going, the Blugolds got offensive production from **Hannah Mesick** (*Jr.-Chatfield, Minn.*), **Sarah Bingea** (*Fr.-Delano, Minn.*) and **Laura Olson** (*So.-Osseo, Wis./Osseo-Fairchild*). Mesick scored 14 in the first half while Bingea and Olson had nine each. Mesick finished with 22, the ninth time this season she has reached the 20-point mark. Olson, who had a career-high 29 points against Stevens Point Wednesday, was held scoreless in the second half. Bingea finished with 13 to give her 69 points in the last six outings.

Veteran coach Tonja Englund, in a post-game interview with WBIZ announcer Mike Sullivan, cited rebounding as a significant factor in the game. She also said that "in critical game situations, we broke down defensively."

After securing their largest lead (34-25) in the first half, the Blugolds failed to score in the final 3:36, during which time they missed three shots, turned the ball over three times and fouled three times allowing Whitewater to cut the deficit to three at halftime.

"Getting a key stop or scoring back to back," hurt the Blugolds throughout the game said Englund and that inconsistency has plagued the youthful Blugolds throughout the season.

Englund also credited Whitewater with stopping the Blugold "big" Saturday. In the first meeting, 6-5 **Ellen Plendl** (*So.-Chippewa Falls, Wis./McDonell*) and 6-2 Mesick combined for 38 points. Although Mesick tallied 22 Saturday, Plendl managed just four points while playing only 20 minutes because of foul trouble. She picked up her fourth with 9:10 to go and fouled out at the 3:42 mark.

Englund said the positive from the game is that "we can beat anyone in this league."

The setback dropped the Blugolds to 7-7 in the WIAC and to 8-15 overall. The Blugolds will need a victory in one of their final two games next week or a UW-Platteville loss against Stout today to secure a spot in the six-team WIAC post-season tournament (NOTE: Since posting this article, Platteville lost 50-74 to Stout). The Blugolds finish out their schedule on the road, traveling to UW-Superior Wednesday and to UW-Stout next Saturday.