

Sweeney Performs well in Football's Season Opener

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EAU CLAIRE, Wis. (UWECBlugolds.com) - **Joel Sweeney** (*Fr.-Tomah, Wis.*) scored three touchdowns in his collegiate debut to help lead the Blugolds to a 35-31 victory over Bethel University (Tenn.) at Carson Park on Saturday.

The Blugolds have won their previous four season openers, three of which have come against the Wildcats, a member of the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics. The Blugolds have never lost to Bethel, improving to 3-0 all-time against the Wildcats. Bethel falls to 0-2 on the season.

Eau Claire opened up the scoring in the first quarter at 8:20 after Sweeney found the end zone on a run from seven yards out. The touchdown capped off a drive that began after a **Mark Bader** (*Sr.-Burnsville, Minn.*) interception. It took the Blugolds just three plays to go 21 yards for the score.

Six minutes following the Blugolds' touchdown, Bethel answered with one of their own. But on the very next drive, Sweeney broke loose on the second play of the drive and scampered 53 yards for another touchdown to give Eau Claire the 14-7. Sweeney also scored the game's final touchdown that gave the Blugolds the lead for good with 4:26 left in the game.

Also scoring for the Blugolds tonight was **Connor Meloy** (*Jr.-Madison, Wis./Edgewood*) after a blocked punt midway through the second quarter and **Jesse Linsmeyer** (*Jr.-Cameron, Wis.*) on a 42-yard pass from **Austin Neu** (*So.-Iron Ridge, Wis./Hustisford*) with only two seconds left before halftime.

Bethel hung right with the Blugolds the entire night and while Eau Claire held the lead the majority of the game, the Wildcats captured a 31-28 lead early in the fourth quarter before the Sweeney touchdown to give the Blugolds the lead for good.

The teams had nearly the same offensive yard totals with Bethel finishing with 318 yards of total offense to Eau Claire's 315. The Blugolds held the advantage in rushing, coming up with 220 yards, 181 which came from Sweeney, while Bethel had 203. Sweeney's performance was one of the best a freshman has ever produced in their first season. Passing, the Wildcats had 115 yards while the Blugolds had 95.

Neu led the Blugolds in passing with 95 yards as he was 4-for-10. Linsmeyer and Sweeney were the only Blugolds to catch passes with each coming away with two. Cordarius Mann led Bethel with 105 yards rushing and Jahron Reynolds finished with 25 receiving yards to lead the Wildcats. Will Masroud had 88 passing yards going 11-for-21 while Troy Watson went 2-for-2 for 27 yards for Bethel.

On defense, the Blugolds were led by **Kyle Thorpe** (*So.-Stanley, Wis./Stanley-Boyd/Moorhead St.*) and **Andy Neumann** (*Jr.-Germantown, Wis.*) as they finished with seven tackles while Quenterius Williams also came away with seven to lead Bethel. **Nick Slade** (*So.-St. Cloud, Minn./Tech*), **Chris Olson** (*Jr.-Stratford, Wis.*) and Neumann each picked up sacks for the Blugolds.

Next weekend the Blugolds will be back at home to face ninth-ranked St. John's University (Minn.) in the Hall of Fame game. Action is set to get underway at 7 p.m.