

Women's Basketball Starts Season Tuesday in Minnesota

By: Kevin Meinholz, Sports Information Director

Posted: Sunday, November 14, 2010 at 10:18 PM

EAU CLAIRE, Wis. (UWECBlugolds.com) - The UW-Eau Claire women's basketball team will open the 2010-11 season Tuesday with a game against the College of St. Benedict at 7:30 p.m. in St. Joseph, Minn.

While the Blugolds are coming off a season in which they finished in sixth place in the WIAC, the team is led by a strong group of returners and has been picked to finish second in the league race this season. Stevens Point was the preseason favorite in the conference's preseason poll but the Blugolds received one first place vote.

Eight of the 11 letterwinners from last year's team return this season, including the top six scorers. All of the returners have significant playing experience as all but one played in 25 or more games.

Hannah Mesick (Sr.-Chatfield, Minn.) leads the group of returners. The 2010 first team All-WIAC pick led the Blugolds with 17.8 points and 8.8 rebounds per game. She started every game last year and also led the Blugolds in steals and assists. **Ellen Plendl** (Jr.-Chippewa Falls, Wis./McDonell) is the other returner who received All-WIAC recognition last year with an honorable mention selection.

This year's returners accounted for 94 percent of last year's scoring and 77 percent of the team's rebounding.

While the core of last year's team is back, the Blugolds have a total of 19 players on this year's team, including two transfers and eight freshmen. **Nicole Christianson** (Jr.-Chetek, Wis.) transferred from NCAA Division II Minnesota State-Mankato while **Castele Miller** (So.-Stanley, Wis./Eau Claire Regis) transferred from UW-Superior.

The Blugolds will be tested on the road this season, playing 15 games away from Zorn Arena in the 25-game season. Eau Claire will have already played three games on the road before its home opener on Nov. 23 against St. Norbert College. After that, the Blugolds will be at home four more times before the winter break and will play five more in Zorn between Jan. 15 and Feb. 16.

Head coach Tonja Englund starts her 11th season leading the team. Last year she reached 200 career wins, becoming only the second Blugold coach and seventh coach in the WIAC to reach the mark. Assisting the Blugolds this year will be former players Becca Bestul, Amanda Zenner and Heidi Arciszewski, while Peg Johnson will also be back.