Offense Powers Women's Hockey to Playoff Win

By: Ashley Hofer, Sports Information Student
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EAU CLAIRE, Wis. (UWECBlugolds.com) - Four unanswered goals in 10 minutes was all it took for the UW-Eau Claire women's hockey team to secure the 5-3 win tonight over Concordia University during the first quarterfinal game of the Northern Collegiate Hockey Association playoffs.

The power of the Blugold offense didn't kick in until late in the second, allowing Concordia to take a one-goal lead 14 minutes into the game. **Emily Haluska** *(So.-Stevens Point, Wis./SPASH)* notched the first Blugold score of the evening 16:30 into the second period, and commenced the scoring run that propelled Eau Claire to the win.

Three minutes later, **Kelli Johnson** *(Sr.-Farmington, Minn.)* knocked in the go-ahead goal after a hooking penalty gave the Blugolds the power play. Early into the third period, **Christine Dickinson** *(Sr.-Layton, Utah/Shattuck-St. Mary's)* and **Nikki Kothenbeutel** *(Fr.-Sauk Rapids, Minn./Sauk Rapids-Rice)* each recorded a goal to put the Blugolds up by three scores.

With the first game of the playoffs on the line, Concordia put up a fight in the final minutes of the third. The Falcons retaliated with two more goals to creep within one score of Eau Claire. The Blugold defense held strong, and **Emily Larson** *(Fr.-Bemidji, Minn.)* – assisted by **Toni Simones** *(Jr.-Rosemount, Minn./South St. Paul)* and **Casey McMullen** *(So.-Minneapolis, Minn./South)* – secured the win with a final, short-handed goal with 36 seconds remaining.

The Falcons kept fairly close to the Blugolds in the shot count, as Eau Claire led 34-29. **Mara Stormer** *(So.-Waunakee, Wis.)* guarded the net the entire 60 minutes for Eau Claire, making a total of 26 saves. The Blugolds were a perfect one-for-one on the power play and also demonstrated strong penalty kill skills, denying Concordia a goal on all three of its opportunities. Eau Claire is now 14-7-5 overall.

The Blugolds will look for more success against the Falcons tomorrow in the second game of the quarterfinals. If the Blugolds win, they will advance to the NCHA semifinals and finals next weekend. In the case of a loss, a mini-series will determine which team advances. Tomorrow's game is set for 7 p.m. in Hobbs.