

## Four Ranked Teams Highlight 2003 Football Schedule

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EAU CLAIRE - 2002 NCAA Division III national semifinalist St. John's (MN) and three Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC) teams receiving pre-season rankings highlight the 2003 UW-Eau Claire football schedule.

St. John's is ranked second in both Street and Smith's and Lindy's Sports Annual 2003 Division III Pre-Season Top 25 polls. UW-Stout is ranked 11th by Lindy's and 16th in Street and Smith's while UW-La Crosse is ranked 11th in Street and Smith's and UW-Stevens Point is 21st in Lindy's and received votes in the "Best of the Rest" portion of Street and Smith's.

Minnesota Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (MIAC) schools Augsburg, Bethel and St. John's will fill the non-conference portion of the schedule. The Blugolds went 3-0 versus the same three schools in 2002, winning by a combined score of 105-34.

The WIAC schedule has been changed in 2003 so that schools will now open conference play against schools that they have traditionally played in the second half of the season.

The 2003 season kick-offs on September 13 when Augsburg comes to Carson Park for the annual Clear Water Bowl. The Blugolds have won the last three meetings between both schools. Kick-off is set for 7:00 P.M.

The Blugolds travel to Clemens Stadium on September 20 to visit national power St. John's in Collegeville, Minnesota. The Johnnies were the national runner-up in 2001 and a national semifinalist in 2002. The Blugolds have won two straight games between both schools including a thrilling 28-21 overtime victory in Carson Park last season and a 24-10 decision in 2001 at Clemens Stadium.

Conference play starts September 27 with a trip to Ramer Field to face UW-River Falls. The Falcons will feature a youthful look in 2003 and feature a wishbone attack that has led the WIAC in rushing every year since 1974.

The Blugolds will face a non-conference opponent for homecoming for the first time since 1954 when the battle Bethel on October 4. After a 40-0 setback to the Blugolds last year the Royals ended their season on a positive note as they went 4-1 to end the season, their only loss coming to St. John's 31-26 at the Metrodome. Bethel will feature the return of All-American quarterback candidate Scott Kirchoff who missed all of 2002 due to an injury.

Defending WIAC champion and NCAA playoff participant UW-La Crosse comes to Carson Park on October 11. The game will be televised live on WXOW and WQOW. Kick-off is set for 11:30 A.M.

A two-week roadtrip awaits the Blugolds starting October 18 at UW-Stevens Point and ends October 25 against UW-Whitewater. The Pointers feature senior quarterback Scott Krause, a First Team All-WIAC selection in 2002. The Warhawks will be led by the ground attack of senior running back Chad Wurth who is attempting to record his fourth consecutive season of breaking the 1,000-yard mark.

The Blugolds end the home portion of their schedule November 1 and 8 when UW-Platteville and UW-Stout travel to Eau Claire. The Pioneers feature the talents of senior quarterback Tom Stetzer who owns all but one Platteville passing record and holds several WIAC conference marks. The Blue Devils return all 11 starters from an offense that led the WIAC in total offense averaging 398.1 yards per game.

UW-Oshkosh will host the Blugolds in the regular season finale November 22 at Titan Stadium. The Titans lost four games by four points or less in 2002 including a 12-10 loss to the Blugolds at Carson Park.

Head Coach Todd Hoffner feels UW-Stout and UW-Oshkosh are the favorites to battle for the WIAC crown this season as both teams are solid in all facets of the game and return a large number of starters in 2003. No game will be easy in the WIAC in 2003 according to Hoffner because of the balance and talent that currently exists in the league.