

2003 Volleyball Season Preview

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EAU CLAIRE - With a strong core of experienced players returning for the 2003-04 season, the UW-Eau Claire volleyball team and head coach Lisa Herb look to improve on its fourth place finish in the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC) one year ago.

The 2002-03 Blugolds finished the season with an overall record of 24-11, including a mark of 5-3 in WIAC matches. Eau Claire finished fourth in the conference standing during the regular season, giving them home court advantage for the first round of the WIAC playoffs. In the first round, Eau Claire defeated UW-Oshkosh three to one to advance to the semifinals where they fell to UW-River Falls. The Blugolds then fell to rival UW-Stout in the third place match to finish with a fourth place finish in the WIAC playoffs.

The 2003-04 season will be tough for all teams as the WIAC looks to be one of the strongest conferences in NCAA Division III volleyball competition. WIAC member UW-Whitewater not only participated in the national tournament last season but won the national championship while UW-River Falls, UW-Stout, and UW-Oshkosh all look to be contenders. Do not count the Blugolds out though as they return a multitude of contributing players from a year ago.

Heading the list of returning players is American Volleyball Coaches Association All-Midwest Region Team member and 2002 First Team All-WIAC selection Brooke Wozniak-Schmidt (Sr.-Stanley/Stanley-Boyd). As a junior, Wozniak-Schmidt finished third in the WIAC in hitting percentage (.328), fourth in kills per game (3.82), and 12th in blocks per game (0.85). Another key returning contributor is Becca Carstensen (Jr.-Eau Claire/Memorial) who finished seventh in conference in blocks per game (1.03) and 11th in hitting percentage (.249) while setting a Blugold record in blocking assists in a single season (96). Jenny Wolter (So.-Osceola) will also see time at middle hitter after compiling 162 kills and leading all Blugold newcomers with 54 blocks in 2002.

Looking to step up big in 2003 are outside hitters Lindsay Anderson (Jr.-Deephaven, MN/Hopkins), Annie Kabat (Sr.-Greenleaf/Wrightstown) and Molly Menard (So.-Eau Claire/Memorial). Anderson totaled 11 service aces, 21 kills and 54 digs in 46 games last season. Kabat finished 2002 with 125 digs and 138 kills in 58 games for the Blugolds. Menard led all newcomers in 2002 with 195 kills.

Other key players returning include Missy Malvitz (Jr.-Elkhorn), Jessica Menzel (Sr./Jr.-Green Bay/Preble) and Amy Olson (So.-Plymouth, MN/Maple Grove). Malvitz is a back row specialist who accumulated 170 digs in 85 games while. Menzel saw limited action last season for the Blugolds and will compete for time at setter. Olson, the Blugold Rookie of the Year in 2002, totaled 174 digs in 91 games. Expect Olson to see time both in the back row and as a setter. Both Menzel and Olson will look to fill the setter role left by All-WIAC Honorable Mention member Andrea Hemple who finished her Blugold career in 2002 by leading Eau Claire in assists with 1,394 and service aces with 69.