

Men's Basketball Wins 7th Straight Classic Championship

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EAU CLAIRE - The UW-Eau Claire men's basketball overcame poor first half shooting and a determined opponent as the Blugolds defeated Finlandia University of Michigan 70-64 in the 37th annual UW-Eau Claire Holiday Classic here tonight at W.L. Zorn Arena.

The victory marks the seventh straight Classic championship for the Blugolds who have not lost a game in their own tournament since 1998.

The win is the fifth straight for the Blugolds, who end a seven-game homestand with a 5-2 record. The Blugolds end 2005 with an 8-3 record as they head into the New Year.

The Blugolds struggled from the field in the first half, making 8-of-29 shots (27.6%) being unable to finish several shots from inside the paint. Free throws kept the game close for the Blugolds in the first half making 9-of-12 shots from the charity stripe. Finlandia held the lead throughout the first half as the Blugolds were unable to get any closer than 28-25 with 1:34 remaining before half time.

The Blugolds came out of the locker room and started the second half on a 12-4 run to take their first lead a 37-34. The Lions would not go away trading baskets and until going on an 11-2 run that took little over 2.5 minutes to retake the lead at 48-47 with 10:50 remaining to play.

Zack Ryan (So.-*Lake Elmo, MN/Tartan*) would hit a three-point shot with 10:12 to play to regain the lead for the Blugolds at 50-48. The Blugolds would extend the lead to as many as eight points but the Lions would roar back cutting the lead to 60-56 with 6:09 remaining. The Lions would get no closer as the Blugolds held off the Lions to preserve the victory.

The second half saw a much improved shooting performance from the Blugolds who made 16-of-30 shots (53.3%) from the floor, including five three-point field goals. Both teams combined for just 14 turnovers. The Blugolds committed four turnovers in all with just one turnover in the second half. The Lions outrebounded the Blugolds 42-37.

Dan Ottney (So.-*Glenwood City*) led the Blugolds in scoring with 19 points making 7-of-11 shots from the floor and 5-of-6 shots from the free throw line. Ryan would score 16 points, all coming in the second half, to go with three assists and no turnovers. **Jared Bardon** (So.-*DeForest*) also posted double-digit points chipping in 11. Ottney and **B.J. Vetterkind** (Fr.-*Mondovi*) both led the Blugolds with six rebounds apiece.

Ryan was named Most Valuable Player for the Holiday Classic. Ottney was named to the All-Tournament Team while **Matt Riley** (Jr.-*Cadott*) earned the Hustle Award winner. Ryan Artley and Tyler Lloyd of Finlandia were both named to the All-Tournament Team along with Aaron Arneson of Northland and Brensley Haywood of St. Mary's. Lloyd was named King of the Boards grabbing 26 rebounds. Haywood won the Playmaker Award collecting 12 assists in two games. Terrence Smith was presented with the Fireman Award which is presented to the top non-starter.

The Blugolds get back into Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC) action on Wednesday, January 4 as they travel to UW-Whitewater. Tip-off is set for 7:00 p.m.

Eau Claire-Finlandia Box Score