

Soccer Set to Open 2011 with Two Games in Illinois

By: Kevin Meinholz, Sports Information Director

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EAU CLAIRE, Wis. (UWECBlugolds.com) - The UW-Eau Claire soccer team will kick off the new season this weekend with two games in Wheaton, Illinois.

Eau Claire will face DePauw University (Ind.) on Friday at 11:30 a.m. and will complete the weekend against perennial power Wheaton College (Ill.) at 4:30 p.m. Saturday. The Blugolds are 1-0 all-time against DePauw with the first and only meeting occurring in 1994 while Wheaton holds a 9-0-2 advantage over Eau Claire in the series, though the teams have played to a tie twice in the last three meetings.

The Blugolds return a strong group from a season ago and will look to contend in the fight for the conference title.

Rachel Nerison (Sr.-Maple Grove, Minn.), last season's leading scorer, both on the team and in the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, returns to lead the Blugolds' offense. She finished with nine goals and five assists (23 points) last year.

The Blugolds bring back players that accounted for 35 of the team's 40 goals a season ago and 99 of the 116 points. The top six point scorers from a season ago will compete for Eau Claire again this season.

On the defensive side of the ball, the Blugolds return all three of their goalkeepers from a season ago.

Amanda Hakala (Jr.-Stillwater, Minn./Stillwater Area) saw the bulk of the action last year but **Nina Behrenbrinker** (So.-St. Paul, Minn./Cretin-Derham Hall) and **Joan Mattheisen** (Fr.-St. Cloud, Minn./Apollo), who suffered a season-ending injury a season ago, will play key roles this season.

In the field on defense, two-year captain **Alyssa Walker** (Jr.-Madison, Wis./West) will lead the charge for the Blugolds. As a freshman on a very strong team in 2008, she started 22 games while starting 17 the following season.

A total of 26 players are on the 2011 roster, 19 of whom are returning letterwinners. The other seven newcomers are true freshmen.

The Blugolds face a tough opening schedule as they play their first four games on the road. Their first home game is Sept. 14 against UW-Superior in the conference opener. They will then play four more road games before playing seven of the next eight at home.