

Blue Devil Report

1999–2000 athletic seasons a roller coaster ride

Faced with their share of ups-and-downs, the UW-Stout athletic schedule is anything but dull and the 1999-2000 winter and spring seasons were no exceptions.

Women's Basketball

Hang onto your seats. The 1999–2000 women's basketball season was a roller coaster ride.

The Blue Devils finished the season at 15-10 and in fourth place in the Wisconsin Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (WIAC).

"We hit some really big highs where we were playing well and then hit some lows where we just didn't play well," said 13th year head coach Mark Thomas.

The Blue Devils played some nationally ranked teams down to the wire, but also lost some games that Thomas didn't think his team would.

"We had some games that we absolutely dominated," Thomas said, "and we had some where we were dominated."

Perhaps the highest point of the year came in the final game of the year when the Blue Devils bowed out of the season with a loss. But the nature of the game — a 61-59 last second loss to undefeated and No. 2 nationally ranked UW-Eau Claire — gives Stout quite a bit to build on.

The Blue Devils got all-conference performances from Andrea Bresette (*Sr., Ashland*), Stacie Anderson (*Jr., Clayton*) and Heather Peterson (*Sr., Altoona*).

Men's Basketball

A look at the 1999–2000 UW-Stout men's basketball season, and one has to ask the question "What happened to the middle of the season?"

Using momentum they encountered from the 1998–99 WIAC basketball tournament (*advancing to the championship game, only to lose to eventual NCAA Division III champion UW-Platteville*), the Blue Devils had high hopes heading into the season. Following a 5-0 start, something happened and the Blue Devils dropped nine of their next 10 games, including their first seven conference games.

Stout finished the season 5-5, knocking off two-time national champion, UW-Platteville, 69-67, in the final home game of the season. Stout advanced to WIAC tournament play and looked to repeat their "Cinderella" performance of the year before.

The Blue Devils drew UW-Eau Claire — just like the previous year — at Zorn Arena, and played the Blugolds, who would go on to finish as the NCAA Division III runner-up, to a dead-heat in regulation. But the clock struck early this season as Eau Claire took a 92-85 overtime win and Stout finished the season at 11-14, 5-11 in WIAC play.

This season marked the emergence of junior post player Aaron Vachowiak (*Wausau*), who led the team in scoring with 15.2 points per game, in rebounding with 6.8 rebounds and blocked shots (37). Vachowiak shot a very respectable 60.2 percent from the floor, and kept his career shooting percentage at an all-time Stout high of 63.3 percent.

Vachowiak scored a career-high 27 points in the final game with Eau Claire. Vachowiak led the team in scoring 11 times and nine times scored more than 20 points. Vachowiak was the team's most valuable player along with senior guard Jeremy Leibfried (*Dickeyville*). Both players were named WIAC honorable mention.

Leibfried leaves the university with his name

firmly entrenched in the school record book. Not only is he currently ranked No. 7 in scoring (1195 pts.), he set the school career record in 3-pointers made (186) and assists (358).

Coach John Muraski resigned from the team after 10 seasons to return to coaching high school. Former UW-Stout assistant Ed Andrist has been tabbed to pick up the reigns.

Hockey

UW-Stout hockey coach Terry Watkins can be the eternal optimist. The long-time Stout coach is looking at the positive side to a 5-21-1 season.

"When you have a bad year, there is always something to learn from it," Watkins said. "We played a lot of really good teams, really close. It's not like we were getting beat 10-2 all the time. We were very, very close to being a good hockey team."

"A lucky goal here, fewer injuries there. Our defense and goaltending was good. Offensively, we just didn't get it done."

"We obviously expected a whole lot more than what happened," Watkins said. "Coming into the season on paper, wow, we looked pretty good. Then we had a number of one, two goal losses and mentally, that takes a toll."

But the season did provide an opportunity for a number of younger players to gain some valuable ice time in the always tough Northern Collegiate Hockey Association (NCHA).

"We were pretty young," Watkins said. "We were playing nine or 10 guys per night who this was their first year in the league. We took a step in the right direction for a year or two down the road in that we played a lot of guys."

Watkins was pleased with the team's play in the goal. Justin Wiskie (*Fr., Janesville*) finished the season starting eight of the last nine games. Wiskie set a new school record for goals against average in a single season, finishing up with a GAA of 3.73 and was named to the first team of the WIAC, the first Blue Devil named first team all-conference since the team returned to varsity status in 1996.

The year marked the final season for seniors Jason Jones (*Plymouth, Minn.*), RJ Schriefer (*Cottage Grove, Minn.*), Steve Holeczy (*Lincolnshire, Ill.*) and Luke Murray (*Bloomington, Minn.*).

"This year was a wake-up call for us," Watkins said. "We had a pretty good year last year and were just expecting for things to get a bit easier this year. We had guys here who realized (*after the season*) they didn't work hard enough in the off-season. If they want to be a part (*next season*), they will work harder."

Gymnastics

The dual season record may not show it, but the Blue Devil gymnastics team showed a vast improvement over the previous season, and second year coach Jeff Richards received honors for the turnaround when he was named the National Collegiate Gymnastics Association (NCGA) and the WIAC coach of the year.

Leading the way for the Blue Devils this season were freshman Tasha Pasch (*Northfield, Minn.*) and Katie Hanson (*Duluth, Minn.*), who both advanced to the national meet. Pasch earned All-American honors when she placed sixth in the all-around event. Pasch also captured the WIAC all-around crown.

Softball

Throw out the overall record of the fastpitch softball team for this season. It doesn't accurately reflect the level of play the team achieved.

Stout posted a 17-28 overall record — almost twice as many wins as last season. But the young (*only three seniors and two juniors were on the roster*) Blue Devils had 14 one-run games throughout the season and went 4-10 in the nailbiters. Stout also had seven extra inning games, but could only pull out one in overtime.

"Our record doesn't accurately reflect the talent we had," second year coach Chris Stainer said. "We made lots of improvements both offensively and defensively. We almost doubled our wins totals, and that was a nice thing. We made some strides."

Stainer believes her outfield improved tremendously from the previous season, as did the infield play. Errors were down and play was more aggressive.

And on the base paths, the Blue Devils sizzled — sizzled to the tune of a new school record as Stout stole 153 bases. Among conference teams, there was no competition in stolen bases and the Blue Devils ranked sixth in the country. The aggressiveness also showed up in the scoring column, where Stout finished second in runs scored, runs batted in and hits.

Shortstop Angie Pinnow (*Jr., Bruce*) had a lot to say about all of the offensive categories.

Pinnow led the league in stolen bases (33-for-38) — and stole more bases than two teams did — home runs (*a school record nine*), total bases (103) and runs scored (49). A first team all-conference player, Pinnow also improved her defensive game, Stainer said, nearly cutting her number of errors in half from the previous season.

The season was the final for seniors Cara Fenhouse (*Superior*) and Rebecca Zimmerman (*Fall Creek*).

Fenhouse was a third team all-region catcher, despite breaking two bones in her hand. Fenhouse, a first team all-WIAC choice, hit .346, going 46-for-133 with 25 runs scored, 14 doubles, four triples, two home runs, 28 runs batted in and 18 stolen bases. From the catchers' crouch, Fenhouse gunned down 20 runners attempting to steal. Fenhouse and Pinnow were co-MVP.

Zimmerman was the pitching workhorse of the team — and the league. She pitched a league-high 196.1 innings and posted an earned run average of 3.64 on her way to a 10-20 season, which included three shutout wins. Zimmerman was an honorable mention all-conference choice. Dyan DePas (*Fr., Waunakee*) and Erin Slaikeu (*Fr., North St. Paul, Minn.*) were also honorable mention picks.

Baseball

The 2000 season marked the end of an era when coach Terry Petrie hung up the cleats after 30 years at the helm. Since 1971, Petrie posted a 537-401 overall record. One of Petrie's former players, Joe Vavra, will take over as the Blue Devil coach. Vavra played for the Blue Devils in the early 1980s and was drafted by the Los Angeles Dodgers. After his playing career, Vavra coached in the Dodger system for 13 years.

On the field, Brad O'Connell (*Jr., Elk Mound*) was the biggest story, rewriting parts of the Blue Devil record book as Stout posted a 19-17-1 season record. O'Connell, who was a finalist for the WIAC player of the year and a first team all-region player, finished the season hitting a

team-high .400, going 58-for-145. O'Connell broke Stout single season records in stolen bases (26 in 26 attempts) and home runs (15). He also led the team in runs scored (53), doubles (12), total bases (119), at bats (145), slugging percentage (.821), hits (58), stolen bases and attempts (26), games played (37), on base percentage (.467), runs batted in (46), home runs (15), and total plate appearances (166).

Named to the WIAC honorable mention squad were first baseman JR Dachel (*Sr., Bloomer*), pitcher Scott Meyer (*Sr., Austin, Minn.*) and third baseman Dave Rueber (*Jr., Afton, Minn.*).

Dachel finished the season hitting .367, going 47-for-128, with 10 doubles, two triples and seven home runs. Dachel stole eight bases. Finishing his four-year career, Dachel left his name all over the Stout record book, placing in the top 10 in most hits (159, *sixth*), doubles (30, *sixth*), stolen bases (40, *ninth*), triples (6, *fourth*) and home runs (23, *fifth*).

Meyer finished the season with a 6-6 overall record, pitching in a team-high 76.2 innings with a team-high 41 strikeouts and allowed only 13 walks. Meyer posted a 4.46 earned run average.

Rueber, a transfer from Iowa Lakes Community College, gave Stout stability at the third base side and also offered a strong bat. Rueber hit .365, going 46-for-126 with 41 runs scored, seven home runs and 39 RBI, second behind O'Connell. On the basepaths, he was a perfect 7-for-7 in stolen bases.

Men's Track and Field

After a poor showing at the indoor national championships, Jamie Buchholtz (*Jr., Bloomer*) regained his All-American pole vault form at the outdoor championships, taking fourth in the meet. Buchholtz was the WIAC indoor pole vault champion and runner-up in the outdoor meet.

Buchholtz was never lonely in the pole vault pit, with teammate Jeff Rotering (*So., Waumandee*) matching him quite a bit of the way. Nationally, Rotering was 10th in the outdoor pole vault and seventh in indoor pole vault. On the conference level, Rotering was fifth in the outdoor and fourth at the indoor meet.

Eric Hanson (*Sr., Winona, Minn.*) rounded out his career by advancing to the outdoor national meet, placing 12th in the 1500-meter run.

Women's Track and Field

Sara Pivec (*So., Coon Rapids, Minn.*) flexed her muscles all season long and advanced to the national indoor and outdoor track and field meets in the shot put. Pivec, the team's MVP, earned All-America honors at the indoor championships by placing fourth. She was 16th at the outdoor championships. On the conference level, Pivec placed second in both the indoor and outdoor meets in the shot put and was seventh in the outdoor hammer throw.

Pivec chased the school shot put record all indoor season, setting new marks almost every time she competed, finally finishing with a school record 43-foot, 2-inch toss at the national meet.

Dana Rozmenoski (*So., Black River Falls*) set a school indoor pole vault record with a leap of 8-feet, 4.75-inches, while Andi Schwabenlender (*So., Bristol*) set a new outdoor mark at 8-feet, 10.25-inches.

Head coach Carlene Hochhalter resigned her position at the end of the season, and Joe Harlan, who coached four seasons at Clark College in Vancouver, Wash., will assume the role.