Alaska Anchorage won one game last season.

If the 2004 NCAA men's field was picked today, Anchorage would have a shot to be among the 16 teams. The Seawolves are ranked No. 12 with six weeks left in the regular season.

That's how competitive the Western Collegiate Hockey Association is. Even one of the league's lesser teams - with a record of 8-9-3 - is rated among the national elite.

Of the top 17 teams in the PairWise Rankings, which mimic the NCAA tournament selection process, eight are from the WCHA, including No. 1 North Dakota.

WCHA members have won three of the last four Division I titles. WCHA players have won two straight Hobey Baker Memorial Awards.

"Look at the commitment to excellence by the administrations of our schools. We have great buildings and good coaches, which attract great players," said North Dakota coach Dean Blais. "We've got things no other league has.

"But along with that comes the pressure to fill those buildings. I think that just makes us work harder to be better, and the only way you do that on the ice is to play better teams. This might be the strongest the conference has ever been."

When the NCAA tournament expanded to 16 teams in 2003, the WCHA led the way with five qualifiers. The league led with four in 2002 and five in 2001.

Some think there could be six qualifiers in 2004.

"I don't know if the WCHA has ever really had a down period," said Hockey East commissioner Joe Bertagna, in his 22nd season as a hockey administrator including 15 with the Eastern College Athletic Conference.

The NCAA selection committee looks favorably on teams that play difficult schedules. WCHA members start with 28 league games and then seek the best available nonconference opponents.

In nonconference games this season, the WCHA is 47-18-9, a winning percentage of .723. The record was 57-27-8 (.679) last season and 56-24-2 (.700) the season before.

Denver (10-0) and Colorado College (7-0-1) are undefeated in games outside the WCHA this season, yet a combined 9-16-5 in the league.

The WCHA holds a nonconference edge over each of the other five Division I leagues. The most one-sided is 12-1-1 against College Hockey America, while the closest is 6-5-3 against Hockey East.

Rensselaer Polytechnic, an ECAC member, has just one WCHA opponent on its schedule this season. No. 4-ranked St. Cloud State came to Troy, N.Y., in November and lost two one-goal games to RPI.
"One year Hockey East is the dominant league, and one year it's the CCHA, and now it's the WCHA's time," said Dan Fridgen, 44, in his 10th season as RPI's coach. "But I don't know if this is just cyclical. The WCHA has taken the lead in things like budgets and new buildings.

"I think that philosophy is filtering east. It's important for college hockey to feed off the kind of exposure the WCHA has."

Six WCHA buildings are new since 1993. Two others, UMD and Michigan Tech, have been remodeled in that time.

Those facilities are attracting a record number of fans. The WCHA led Division I in attendance again last season with 1.5 million. There were 72,786 for five games at the 2003 WCHA Final Five at St. Paul's Xcel Energy Center, which provided about $100,000 to each school.

"This league is in a terrific position to maintain this status," said WCHA commissioner Bruce McLeod. "When you look at everything from international travel during the summer, to the post-season tournament, to good coaching, we have a lot of factors in our favor. That means getting a lion's share of top recruits."

Professional scout Chuck Grillo, a Hibbing native, watches about 220 games a season from high school to Canadian major-junior hockey. He's impressed by the WCHA's rinks, but lists coaching as the top reason for the league's dominance.

Some of the most successful Division I coaches of the past decade are in the league led by Blais, Minnesota's Don Lucia, St. Cloud State's Craig Dahl and Denver's George Gwozdecky.

Three WCHA teams made the 1999 NCAA field, but none got to the semifinals. Three Hockey East teams were in the Frozen Four that year and one, Maine, claimed the championship in Anaheim.

In the nine years from 1991 through 1999, the only WCHA member with a Division I championship was North Dakota in 1997. The Fighting Sioux won again in 2000 to put the league back on track, and Minnesota has won the last two NCAA titles.

The three highest-scoring teams in Division I are from the WCHA - North Dakota, Minnesota and UMD. Five of the top 10 scorers are from the WCHA.

WCHA teams have wins over four teams ranked in the PairWise top 10 - Boston College, Ohio State, Michigan and New Hampshire.

Anchorage is the one WCHA team that has made it's name inside the league, rather than outside. The Seawolves are 6-3-1 at home with wins over Minnesota, Colorado College and St. Cloud State.

"The WCHA has had some big wins over top teams, and you benefit by beating teams in the PairWise," said Randy Moy, the radio voice of RPI hockey for 12 years and general manager for U.S. College Hockey Online. "It's almost insane to see eight WCHA teams in the top 16, that's a hefty number, but it makes sense when you look at what they've done so far."
PLUS

+ The Gophers men played defense against No. 1-ranked North Dakota as well as they have in two seasons. The Fighting Sioux brought the top offense in college hockey into Mariucci Arena but put just 40 shots on net in two games, with hardly a good scoring chance during the second and third periods of Minnesota's 2-1 victory on Saturday night.

+ Minnesota-Duluth hasn't lost in men's hockey this year. The Bulldogs are 8-0 in January and have tied North Dakota for first place in the WCHA, although the Sioux have played two fewer games. The Bulldogs, who swept Michigan Tech over the weekend, are 13-3-1 in their past 17 games.

+ Minnesota State (Mankato) goaltender Shari Vogt makes all the right moves. Vogt stopped 33 shots Sunday afternoon as the Mavericks defeated the No. 1-ranked Gophers women 3-2 in overtime. Vogt, a senior, made numerous saves earlier this season when Mankato tied Minnesota 1-1, the lone blemish on the Gophers' record before they lost earlier this month at Minnesota-Duluth. MINUS

-- Oh, the pain of the Potulnys. Gophers senior forward and captain Grant, who missed a third of last season with a broken leg, went down with a shoulder injury Saturday against North Dakota and will miss at least five weeks. His younger brother Ryan, a Gophers freshman, was already out for this season after needing surgery to repair a leg injury early in October.

-- Any list by famous Olympian Mike Eruzione earns a minus. This week Eruzione, through the College Sports Television Web site (www.cstv.com

- Denver, which went into the weekend winless in WCHA men's play on its home ice, finally recorded a league victory at Magness Arena by defeating Alaska Anchorage 2-1 in overtime. The Pioneers then turned around and dropped a 5-3 home decision to the Seawolves the next night. Denver plays host to Minnesota on Feb. 27-28.
Recruiting wears on Keller

It's not always as fun as it sounds, being a highly sought-after college basketball recruit.

Just ask 6-foot-7 Oostburg senior Jimmy Keller.

At the end of his freshman season, when Keller had his coming-out party at the Division 3 sectionals in West Bend, college scouts began keeping an eye on the tall and talented player. After all, you can't teach height.

When Keller's sophomore season began, and the scouts realized that his showing at sectionals was not a fluke, the mail started pouring in.

It hasn't stopped.

Keller said he has received an average of 3-to-4 letters from colleges every day for the last three years.

"I don't even open them anymore," said Keller.

Letters can be avoided, though. Phone calls cannot.

"They still call every night," he said. "I sometimes dread answering the phone, thinking it's going to be another one."

As of now, Keller has received two full scholarship offers from a pair of NCAA Division II schools, Michigan Tech and Minnesota State. North Dakota State, which makes the move to Division I next year, is also very interested. Keller is planning a trip there after the season.

Division II Minnesota-Duluth is also interested, as is DII Augustana (S.D.) and nearly every Division III team that's heard of him.

Of all the DII programs, Keller most enjoyed his trip to UW-Stevens Point, which has become a national powerhouse under coach Jack Bennett.

Keller plans on making a decision after the season is over, which he hopes comes in mid-March - after the state tournament concludes.

Until then, the phone will likely keep ringing and the mail will keep coming.

"Other kids don't get to go through this," said Keller. "I guess I'm lucky. I don't know."

Boys basketball

Cedar Grove poised to make some noise -- While teams like Oostburg, Sheboygan Christian and Sheboygan Lutheran garner much of the attention in talking circles, Cedar Grove is quietly climbing through the Central Lakeshore Conference standings, just like last year.

"I am quite pleased with how the team has matured," said eighth-year coach Jim Meinen. "Especially by the growth of our junior class."

That class, which includes four players who played regularly for Cedar Grove last year (and one who started as a freshman), has developed into a force.

Luke Meinen was a starter two years ago as a freshman, while 6-8 center Mark Slotman and guards Rob Lorge and Kyle Voskuil were regulars last year and are very dependable now as upperclassmen.

"I thought if it took them seven or eight games this year, to play like it is their second year at this level, we could make some noise," said coach Meinen. "And that's what's happened."

In addition, a handful of seniors are making clutch plays for the Rockets. Chris Narus has taken over a leadership role, and Mike Molter hit a big shot
to lift the team over Random Lake last week for a road win.

Tonight's game at Oostburg "will be a good test to see how far we've really come," said coach Meinen. Cedar Grove split with Oostburg last year.

"Regardless, now it's time to take the next step," he said, "and see if we can play with the elite teams in the conference."


Meinen, who is second on the team in scoring and first in rebounding, assists and steals, injured his finger. X-rays were scheduled for today, but coach Meinen, Luke's father, believes the prognosis will be that the finger is broken.

If that is the case, a splint will be put on the finger, likely for 3-to-4 weeks, during which time Meinen will not be able to play for the Rockets.

Coach Meinen believes this could be a time when the squad grows in his absence.

"There have been a lot of guys who have been working hard," he said. "I told them, 'this may be your day to shine.' (Because of that) It may make our team better in the long run."

Swimming

'Tait to State' -- Sheboygan South senior Rob Tait wants to get to the state swim meet in Madison. Every swimmer does.

While Tait's times in the freestyle events are right on the border of likely qualifying times, the pressure has been put on his shoulders, thanks to the South school newspaper.

Tait was the focus of a story in the paper. The headline? "Tait to State."

The article has only motivated Tait to accomplish the mission.

"Everybody already thinks I'm going to State," said Tait. "It put a lot of pressure on me.

"I guess I have to go to State now."

Since the publication, Redwings coach Peter Toutenhoofd has seen a new Tait in the pool.

"He set new goals for himself about two weeks ago. He has a renewed sense of urgency," said Toutenhoofd. "Hey, whatever works.

"It really comes down to sectionals. We'll see what happens."

Et cetera

Events to watch -- This week's area schedule features both interesting and important games and events.

In boys basketball, Oostburg hosts Cedar Grove tonight and Sheboygan Falls, winner of 11 straight, steps out of the Eastern Wisconsin Conference for a night to host Green Bay Preble of the FRVC. On Friday, Sheboygan North hosts Manitowoc and Sheboygan Lutheran hosts Oostburg in some key conference matchups.

Sheboygan North's girls hoops team hosts Two Rivers tonight in what could be a great non-conference affair.

On Thursday, Sheboygan Lutheran hosts Sheboygan Christian in a rivalry game, Ozaukee hosts Elkhart Lake in a big CLC game and EWC leader Plymouth hosts Two Rivers. On Saturday, Elkhart Lake hosts Oostburg and Cedar Grove plays at Ozaukee in a battle of the top two teams in the CLC.

Tonight at Plymouth, the Panthers wrestling team hosts Ozaukee. And on Saturday, Plymouth hosts the Small Schools Swimming Invitational.

Reach Adam Thompson at cthompson2@sheboygan.gannett.com
FORWARD PAUL CABANA missed the little things about hockey while nursing...

FORWARD PAUL CABANA missed the little things about hockey while nursing a shoulder injury during the first three-quarters of the 2002-03 season with the Columbia Inferno.

The sound of skates slicing through the ice, the locker room banter and the feel of the jersey as it slides on before a game; Cabana missed all of these things, but most importantly, he missed being a part of a team.

After joining the Inferno for three games following his senior season at Michigan Tech, the 25-year old forward looked forward to making an impact during the 02-03 season. But a broken hand early in the season coupled with a separated shoulder in December left the Calgary, Alberta, native on the outside of the locker room wondering when he would be able to get his professional career started.

I dont think it was a big secret that I was pretty down last season following the injuries, Cabana said. I started to get down in the dumps and withdraw from the team.

After I had the surgery I had to get away so I went back up to Michigan Tech and hung out with my girlfriend for three weeks. It turned out that the best thing for me was to get away so that I could come back and have a shot in the playoffs.

Cabana rejoined the team for the last few weeks of the regular season and received valuable postseason experience. The forward skated in the teams final regular-season games and participated in the playoffs, scoring two goals.

Because of his injuries, Cabana was unsure if he would fit into the Vancouver Canucks plans for this season, but his worries were eased when the parent club re-signed him to a two-way AHL contract before the beginning of the 2003-04 season. Cabana hopes that a solid campaign this season will help him return to the Manitoba Moose, the Canucks AHL affiliate.

Getting re-signed to the two-way contract has provided a lot of motivation for me this season, Cabana said. The organization took a gamble on me and I want to prove them right.

I was fortunate enough to return to a coach who had faith in my abilities and knew what I could do with the puck. I want to help the team offensively, drop the gloves when necessary and most importantly just prove I belong here.

Being paired with one of the best young coaches in the league and the former assistant coach of his alma mater has benefited Cabanas play this season. Coach Scott White recruited Cabana to Michigan Tech in the late 1990s while serving as the teams assistant coach.

Still considered a rookie because he had played less than 25 professional games entering this season, Cabana is tied for first in the league with Toledos Jim Abbott for most goals among rookies with 19 and is third in overall points with 39.

On-ice accomplishments aside, Cabanas biggest thrill this season is just being one of the guys, a feeling he has no intention of relinquishing.

Before my injury last season I had played 21 years of hockey without ever missing more than a week because of an injury. I just hope its not an experience I have to deal with again anytime soon.
Wis.-Milwaukee rips Detroit Mercy

Tom Markowski

DETROIT: Detroit Mercy found out what it will take to win the Horizon League title Saturday. Quite shockingly for the Titans, it was Wisconsin-Milwaukee that showed them the way.

The Panthers were at their best and handed the Titans their worst home league loss in 10 years, 85-68, before 3,218 at Calihan Hall.

Although this defeat didn't reach the depths of Dayton's 93-62 victory over UDM in 1994, the manner in which the Titans lost led Coach Perry Watson to question his team's courage and toughness.

"It looked to me like they were scared," Watson said of his team. "It just seemed to me they were a little afraid."

Joah Tucker led Milwaukee (13-5, 8-0) with 26 points. Dylan Page had 21 and Ed McCants 19.

"This is our best game to date," Coach Bruce Pearl said.

Willie Wallace was the only player who scored in double figures for UDM (9-8, 3-4), finishing with a career-high 23.

Mid-American

(At) Western Michigan 70, Ball State 66: Anthony Kann had 17 points and 10 rebounds for Western (13-2, 6-1). Dennis Trammell scored 20 for Ball State (8-7, 5-2).

(At) Akron 75, Central Michigan 62: Derrick Tarver scored 33 for Akron (9-6, 3-4). Kevin Nelson had 12 for Central (3-14, 0-7).

(At) Miami (Ohio) 74, Eastern Michigan 46: Gene Seals scored 13 for Miami (9-6, 5-2). John Bowler had 19 for Eastern (6-9, 1-6).

Mid-Continent

(At) Oakland 82, Missouri-Kansas City 67: Mike Helms scored 29 for Oakland (8-12, 2-6), which ended a five-game losing streak. Michael Watson and Mike English had 15 each for UMKC (9-9, 4-3).

GLIAC


(At) Michigan Tech 68, Findlay 63: Josh Buettner had 14 points and 12 rebounds for Tech (12-3, 6-2 Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference). Frank Phillips scored 17 for Findlay (14-5, 6-3).

Ashland 72, (at) Lake Superior State 71: Alex Jones scored 15 for Ashland (9-10, 2-7). Jim Clement had 23 for Lake Superior (7-11, 1-8).

Gannon 72, (at) Grand Valley State 68: Forrest Kirby scored 20 for Gannon (15-4, 6-3). Marcus Wallace had 17 for Grand Valley (10-6, 2-5).

Hillsdale 65, (at) Northwood 61: Tom Farmer scored 25 for Hillsdale (11-7, 4-4). Dallas Logan had 24 for Northwood (10-8, 4-5).

(At) Ferris State 80, Mercyhurst 66: Joshua Helm scored 32 for Mercyhurst (13-6, 7-2). Willie Thomas had 24 for Ferris (7-11, 7-2).

MIAA

(At) Hope 96, Calvin 75: Andy Phillips scored 24 for Hope (14-3, 4-1 Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association). Dan Aultman had 12 for Calvin (10-7, 4-2).

Albion 84, (at) Alma 48: Brandon Crawford scored 15 for Albion (12-5, 3-2). Alma is 2-15 and 0-5.

Adrian 67, (at) Kalamazoo 60: Billy Collins scored 20 for Adrian (9-7, 3-2). Jevon Caldwell-Gross had 24 for Kalamazoo (6-11, 1-4).

Pruitt had 25 points and 11 rebounds for Olivet (9-8).

WHAC

Cornerstone 73, (at) Aquinas 63: Keith Wurn scored 17 for Cornerstone (19-4, 5-1 Wolverine-Hoosier Athletic Conference). Damien Mayo had 16 points and 12 rebounds for Aquinas (13-8, 3-2).

Siena Heights 100, (at) Spring Arbor 87: Doug Gray scored 22 for Siena Heights (20-3, 4-1). Micah Lancaster had 22 for Spring Arbor (8-12, 0-5).

(R) Indiana Tech 91, Madonna 68: JuJuan Cooley scored 22 for Tech (16-5, 3-2). Chad Nadolini had 21 points and 20 rebounds for Madonna (8-13, 2-4).

Rochester 80, (at) Concordia 66: J.D. Austin scored 22 for Rochester (12-10). Damon Friday had 14 for Concordia (5-13).
WCHA ROUNDUP: Duluth routs Tech

Herald Staff and Wire Reports

Tim Stapleton and Tyler Brosz each scored twice as Minnesota Duluth rolled past Michigan Tech 8-3 Saturday in Duluth, Minn.

Chris Conner scored twice for Michigan Tech (4-16-4, 2-12-2 WCHA), which was outshot 38-25.

After Stapleton’s first-period goals, Luke Stauffaucher scored the only goal of the second period for Duluth (17-8-2, 13-5-0). The Bulldogs scored four times in the third and fired 14 shots on goal.

Bryce Luker had 30 saves for the Huskies.

Duluth has won nine straight home games, equaling its second-longest home winning streak ever.

Isaac Reichmuth stopped 22 shots for Duluth and is now 12-1-0 in conference games this season.

Minnesota State-Mankato 7, St. Cloud State 6: Ryan McKelvie scored the game-winning goal at the 9:51 mark of the third period as Mankato beat St. Cloud at the National Hockey Center.

Mankato jumped out to an early 3-0 lead in the first period, but the Huskies responded by scoring the next four goals.

Jeff Marler evened the game 4-4 with 10 seconds left in the second period. Dave Iannazzo scored the second of his two goals to put the Huskies up 5-4, but the Mavericks scored the next three goals to take the victory.

Dana Sorensen scored two goals for Mankato. Maverick goaltender Jon Volp made 35 saves. Jason Montgomery stopped 29 shots for the Huskies.

Colorado College 3, Wisconsin 1: Colin Stuart and Brett Sterling scored third-period goals to lead the Tigers past the Badgers in Colorado Springs.

Both of the deciding goals were on power plays.

Robbie Earl gave Wisconsin a 1-0 lead after one period. But Scott Thauwald tied it in the second period.

Colorado College had a 34-31 edge in shots on goal, as Tiger goalie Curtis McElhinney had 30 saves.
Gophers women beat Mavericks

From news services

The top-ranked University of Minnesota women’s hockey scored three goals in the first period and went on to beat Minnesota State (Mankato) 3-2 in a Western Collegiate Hockey Association game Saturday at Ridder Arena.

Noelle Sutton opened the scoring for the Gophers at 6:58 in the first period. Krissy Wendell scored her 17th goal of the season at 8:01 of the period, and Kelsey Bills made it 3-0 at 18:14.

Ohio State 3, Bemidji State 1: Ohio State scored two goals on eight shots during the second period and went on to beat Bemidji State at the John Glas Fieldhouse.

MEN’S GAMES

Minnesota-Duluth 8, Michigan Tech 3: Tim Stapleton and Tyler Brosz each scored two goals as Minnesota-Duluth rolled past Michigan Tech for its ninth consecutive home victory, equaling its second-longest home winning streak.

Chris Conner scored twice for Michigan Tech, which was outshot 38-25.

Bryce Luker made 30 saves for the Huskies.

Isaac Reichmuth stopped 22 shots for Duluth.

Colorado College 3, Wisconsin 1: Marty Sertich scored a power-play goal, and Brett Sterling added an insurance goal to lift host Colorado College to a victory over Wisconsin.

The Tigers snapped a seven-game conference losing streak.

Alaska Anchorage 5, Denver 3: Nick Lowe scored two of Alaska Anchorage’s four third-period goals as the Seawolves won at Denver.

Bemidji State 6, Wayne State 1: Bemidji State’s completed only its second four-game regular-season sweep of a College Hockey America foe, downing Wayne State (Mich.) at CompuWare Arena in Plymouth, Mich.

As they did in Friday’s 6-2 victory, the Beavers scored twice in each periods getting goals from six players.

Freshman Rob Sirianni opened the scoring with his third goal of the season at 8:03 of the first period. Jason Baclig tied the score 1:39 later, but Ryan Miller answered to put the Beavers up 2-1 and the rout was on.

Minnesota State (Mankato) 7, St. Cloud State 6: Ryan McKelvie scored the winning goal at 9:51 of the third period as Minnesota State (Mankato) edged the host Huskies.

The Mavericks led 3-2 after one period, but the Huskies tied the score 4-4 heading into the third.

Dave Iannazzo’s second goal of the game put the Huskies ahead 5-4, but Chad Clower, Kurtis Kisio and McKelvie scored within five minutes of each other to push the Mavericks to victory.
Michigan Tech 68, Findlay 63

HOUGHTON, Mich.

Jeff McHenry scored 19 points and Michigan Tech converted four free throws in the final 19 seconds - finishing with just five for the game - in a 68-63 victory over Findlay on Saturday.

McHenry's layup with 3:07 left put the Huskies (12-3, 6-2 Great Lakes Intercollegiate) ahead to stay 61-59. They led 64-63 when Bob Evans hit two free throws with 19 seconds remaining and Jason Marcotte added two more with 6 seconds left.

Josh Buettner had 14 points and a game-high 12 rebounds and Marcotte and Radayl Richardson had 13 points apiece for Tech.

Frank Phillips led the Oilers (14-5, 6-3) with 17 points.
Minn.-Duluth 8, Michigan Tech 3

DULUTH, Minn.

Tim Stapleton and Tyler Brosz each scored twice as Minnesota Duluth rolled past Michigan Tech 8-3 Saturday.

Chris Conner scored twice for Michigan Tech (4-16-4, 2-12-2 WCHA), which was outshot 38-25.

After Stapleton's first-period goals, Luke Stauffaucher scored the only goal of the second period for Duluth (17-8-2, 13-5-0). The Bulldogs scored four times in the third and fired 14 shots on goal.

Bryce Luker had 30 saves for the Huskies.

Duluth has won nine straight home games, equaling its second-longest home winning streak ever.

Isaac Reichmuth stopped 22 shots for Duluth and is now 12-1-0 in conference games this season.
COLLEGE HOCKEY: U-M's Gajic extends scoring streak

FREE PRESS STAFF AND NEWS SERVICES
KALAMAZOO

Milan Gajic extended his scoring streak to four games in Michigan's 4-1 win over Western Michigan on Friday.

Gajic started the scoring in the second period, but after Western (13-10-3, 9-7-2 Central Collegiate) tied it early in the third, Michigan scored three goals.

Al Montoya stopped 21 shots for the Wolverines (15-7-1, 10-4-1).

Michigan State 4, Ohio State 2: Despite being outshot, 44-26, the visiting Spartans were boosted by two goals and an assist from Jim Slater. Dominic Vicari and Matt Migliaccio combined for 42 saves for MSU (14-12-1, 10-6-1 CCHA). Ohio State is 15-11, 10-8.

Northern Michigan 4, Notre Dame 3(OT): Darin Olver scored the winning goal in overtime for host Northern Michigan (11-11-1, 9-10-0 CCHA). Notre Dame is 12-8-3, 8-7-2.

Ferris State 4, Findlay 2: Simon Mangos scored two power-play goals for host Ferris (12-11-2).

Providence 3, Lake Superior State 0: Bobby Goepfert made 18 saves for visiting Providence. Chris Chaput's goal broke a scoreless tie early in the third period. He was followed by Jeff Mason and Bill McCreary with a goal each for Providence (9-8-6). The Lakers are 6-10-5.

Minn.-Duluth 3, Michigan Tech 1: Nick Anderson scored two goals as Minnesota-Duluth (16-8-2, 12-5 Western Collegiate) won its ninth straight home game. Chris Conner scored for Michigan Tech (4-15-4, 2-11-2).
Bulldogs hound Huskies
UMD MEN: Nick Anderson's early goals set the tone as the Bulldogs win their seventh consecutive game to maintain their grip on second place in the WCHA

BY KEVIN PATES
NEWS TRIBUNE
STAFF WRITER

Minnesota Duluth won a seventh consecutive game Friday night by doing most everything right.

In a grinding effort against Michigan Tech, the Bulldogs had more than twice as many shots on goal, blocked more than twice as many shots, and got another solid goaltending performance.

That translated into a 3-1 Western Collegiate Hockey Association men's victory before 4,667 at the DECC.

The No. 4-ranked Bulldogs (16-8-2, 12-5 in the WCHA) now have their most consecutive victories since 1989-90, and have won eight in a row at home for a 10-2 mark at the DECC.

Goals 29 seconds apart by junior winger Nick Anderson in the first period gave UMD all the scoring it would need.

"Since the second half of the season began we've been steady. Isaac (Reichmuth) has been outstanding in goal and we've been rolling out four lines."

Last-place Michigan Tech (4-15-4, 2-11-2) fell behind 3-0 after two periods and never really pressured UMD. The Huskies had numerous turnovers, but were held in the game by freshman goalie Bryce Luker, who had 43 saves.

UMD scoring leader Junior Lessard earned his 19th goal of the season and 61st of his career on a power play with 49 seconds left in the second period. Evan Schwabe's assist on the play stretched his scoring streak to 14 games. Michigan Tech's only score came with a two-man advantage early in the third period as Chris Conner got his 18th goal of the season.

"Bryce Luker bailed out a lot of our guys tonight," said Michigan Tech first-year coach Jamie Russell. "Some of our guys played well, but a lot of them dropped the ball."

"Duluth is a very powerful team and played very well defensively. We didn't generate much offense."

UMD had 19 shots in the first period and gained a final advantage of 46-20. The scoring began at 8:30 when Anderson created a turnover and winger Luke Stauffacher took the puck. Luker stopped a Stauffacher shot, but Anderson was open at the left edge of the net for a goal. Seconds later, Anderson battled with a defender in front of the Michigan Tech net, then got loose long enough to convert a T.J. Caig pass.

However, the two goals in 29 seconds by the same player wasn't close to a UMD record. Defenseman Brett Larson had goals 12 seconds apart against Northern Michigan in 1994.

Although Michigan Tech led 7-6 in shots early in the first period, it was 19-9 in UMD's favor after 20 minutes and the Bulldogs had a 18-2 edge in the second period.

"Ever since our schedule started again this month, our defense has made a big difference," said UMD defenseman Steve Czech. "Our forecheck tonight forced them into mistakes and when we got into the offensive zone we controlled the play. It's hard for the other team to get much going when they don't have the puck."
Reichmuth has played every game during the winning streak and ran his record to 11-1 in the WCHA. In his last start against Michigan Tech, on Dec. 5 in Houghton, Mich., the Huskies scored on four of seven shots and Reichmuth was replaced after the first period of a 6-5 loss.

In the rematch, Reichmuth was solid, especially in the third period. After the Huskies got within 3-1, the UMD sophomore got a stick out during a Conner breakaway at 8:00 and finished with eight stops in the final 20 minutes.

The Bulldogs are 12-3-1 the past 16 games and remain second in the WCHA, two points behind No. 1-rated North Dakota.

"It was a hard-fought game and what I liked best is that we didn't give them a lot. We closed off lanes and closed gaps," said UMD coach Scott Sandelin.

**Michigan Tech** 0-0-1--1 Minnesota Duluth 2-1-0--3


Second period -- 3. UMD, Junior Lessard 19 (Beau Geisler, Evan Schwabe), 19:11. (4x3 pp). Penalties -- Brett Engelhardt, **Michigan Tech** (interference), 8:07; Neil Petruic, UMD (holding), 8:51; Colin Murphy, **Michigan Tech** (holding), 14:27; Engelhardt, **Michigan Tech** (roughing), 17:41; Caig, UMD (roughing), 17:41; Brown, **Michigan Tech** (tripping), 18:18.

Third period -- 4. **Michigan Tech**, Chris Conner 18 (Brandon Schwartz, Taggart Desmet), 1:47 (5x3 pp). Penalties -- Tim Hambly, UMD (hooking), :25; Petruic, UMD (slashing), 1:02; Murphy, **Michigan Tech** (slashing), 8:36; Marek Dora, **Michigan Tech** (tripping), 18:21.

A.J. Degenhardt's hard slap shot from the right faceoff circle found the net with 4:58 to play, and Wisconsin went on to beat Colorado College 4-2 Friday night at Colorado Springs, Colo.

The Badgers won despite being outshot 38-18. It was Colorado College's seventh straight loss to a Western Collegiate Hockey Association opponent.

Goalie Bernd Bruckler finished with 36 saves for Wisconsin, which snapped a three-game winless streak.

Ross Carlson and Rene Borque led the Badgers with a goal and an assist each. Adam Burish added two assists.

Colorado College defenseman Brady Greco's power-play goal put the Tigers ahead 1-0 at 7:54 of the first period.

Wisconsin's Dan Boeser of Savage tied the score at 3:19 of the second period, and a power-play goal by Carlson 2:01 into the final period put Wisconsin ahead 2-1.

Colorado College's Marty Sertich tied the score 2-2 at 4:03 of the final period before Degenhardt scored the game-winner. Borque closed out the scoring with an empty-net goal in the final minute.

Minnesota-Duluth 3, Michigan Tech 1: Nick Anderson scored two goals less than 30 seconds apart to spark Minnesota-Duluth to a WCHA victory over visiting Michigan Tech.

The Bulldogs have won nine straight home games.

Anderson scored UMD's first goal at 11:30 of the first period, then scored again less than 30 seconds later to give the Bulldogs a 2-0 lead just 12 minutes into the game.

Junior Lessard added another goal for Duluth late in the second period.

Chris Conner scored Michigan Tech's only goal at 1:47 of the third.

St. Cloud State 8, Minn.-Mankato 5: Billy Hengen and Dave Ianuzzi each scored twice as St. Cloud State scored five goals in the second period and beat Minnesota State (Mankato) at the National Hockey Center.

Chad Clower scored twice for Mankato.

Wis.-Stevens Point 3, Lake Forest 2: Justin Micek, Ryan Kirchoff and Jordan Blair scored for the Pointers (10-4-3, 7-2) to a home victory over Lake Forest (5-17-1, 3-12-0) in a North Central Hockey Association game at Stevens Point, Wis.

Wis.-Stevens Point 4, Wis.-River Falls 2: Jennifer Norris scored two goals to spark the Pointers (10-4-3, 7-2) to a home victory over River Falls (9-8-0, 5-4-0).
Nick Anderson scored two goals as Minnesota Duluth skated past Michigan Tech 3-1 Friday night.

The Bulldogs (16-8-2, 12-5-2 WCHA) have now won nine straight home games.

Anderson got Duluth on the board with a goal at 11:30 in the first period. He scored again less than 30 seconds later to push Duluth to a 2-0 lead.

Junior Lessard added another goal for Duluth late in the second.

Chris Conner scored Michigan Tech's only goal of the game at 1:47 in the third.

The Huskies (4-15-2, 2-11-2) got 43 saves from Bryce Luker, including 17 stops in each the first and second period.

The Bulldogs fired 46 shots compared with the Huskies' 20.
ON THEIR WAY
TWO NEW SCHOLARSHIPS MEAN THREE STORM PLAYERS WILL INVADE WCHA NEXT SEASON

BY DALE WOODARD
HERALD-TRIBUNE
SPORTS WRITER

The Daily Herald-Tribune
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Grand Prairie, Canada: SPORTS; Pg. 13

We're not sure how many players are in an invasion, but suffice it to say that there will be sizable infusion of Grande Prairie Storm players in the Western Collegiate Hockey Association next season.

Earlier this week, the team announced that two more of its players will head south of the border in the 2004-2005 season to join up with WCHA teams on NCAA scholarships.

Defenceman and team captain Mark Malekoff is off to Houghton, Michigan, where he'll suit up with the Michigan Tech Huskies.

Second-year forward Scott McCulloch meanwhile, has accepted a scholarship from the Colorado College Tigers in Colorado Springs.

They will join defenceman Kyle Radke, who last summer accepted a scholarship from the WCHA's North Dakota Fighting Sioux.

"It's really exciting. It's nice to have the decision done. I'll put my full attention on this year now," said Malekoff Wednesday afternoon as the Storm prepared for a two-game tilt against the visiting Bonnyville Pontiacs tonight and Saturday at the Canada Games Arena.

The Huskies have several NHL players amongst its alumni, including Hall of Fame goalie Tony Esposito, Damian Rhodes, Andy Sutton and Randy McKay.

"They had quite a lot of success in previous years and not as much recently. But they're hoping to get the program in the right direction," said Malekoff, a 19-year-old product of the Grande Prairie Minor Hockey Association.

Malekoff, who has nine points in 32 games this season, took a trip to the northern Michigan city two weeks ago.

"I liked the place. It's right on Lake Superior and I really like the town," he said.

Like Malekoff, McCulloch was just happy to have his deal signed, sealed and delivered.

"It's just nice to get the decision out of the way and focus on this year," said McCulloch, who hails from Lacombe and will turn 18 in March.

McCulloch has potted 17 goals and 41 points in 35 games this season but has been out of the lineup since early December after suffering his shoulder in practice in early December.

The downtime gave the six-foot-one, 200-pound forward a chance to fly down to Colorado Springs and check out the place he'll call home next season.

"I went down there a couple weeks ago. It's a smaller college, about 2,000 students, but it's big-time hockey. They have a great organization there, they treat the players well and academically the school is very good. The campus is smaller, but it's still a nice school and it's beautiful down there with the mountains," McCulloch said of the university, which boasts defenceman Doug Lidster and legendary NHL coach Badger Bob Johnson among its alumni.

Though excited about next year's prospects, nobody has to remind either member of the Storm that there's still lots of hockey to be played this year.

And right in front of the Storm is this weekend's homestand as the Pontiacs pull into town.

The Storm seek to set to right the ship after being handed a 5-0 shutout loss Monday in Drayton Valley at the hands of the Thunder.

"My main priority has always been here. I'm focused on the games this weekend and the rest of the season," said Malekoff, looking back on the loss in Drayton Valley. "You don't like losing games like that. That's quite a bit of in-
centive for us in practice to get things going. You want to be playing your best hockey going into the playoffs."

The stretch drive to the playoffs is only going to heat up from here on in as the likes of the Sherwood Park Crusaders, St. Albert Saints and Fort McMurray Oil Barons try to knock the Storm off the top rung of the North Division.

"I usually try not to look at that stuff too much. You have to take it on a game-in, game-out basis. Statistics are in the past, you have to focus on what's going on right now," he said.

Game time tonight and Saturday is 7:30 p.m.

NOTES: Both games are Internet broadcasts, log onto www.dailyheraldtribune.com and follow the links to listen...Gow is approaching a career milestone that should be reachable this season. He's seven games away from the 400-win mark in the AJHL. He's currently second in all-time wins with 393 to Calgary Canuck's Don Phelps who sits at 659 and counting. The annual Ernie's Sports Experts Teddy Bear Toss takes place in Saturday's game. All fans are invited to bring a newer, clean stuffed animal to the game and toss it onto the ice when the Storm score their first goal. The stuffed animals will be collected and presented to the pediatric ward at the QEII Hospital. Fans are asked, if possible, to wrap their stuffed animals in clear plastic before they toss them onto the ice to protect them from getting wet and dirty. By the way, if the Storm don't score a goal Saturday, fans will be asked to throw their stuffed animals when the final buzzer sounds...As a capper to Minor Hockey Week in Grande Prairie, there will be a draw at tonight's game for a McDonald's Limited Edition 2003-04 Atomic framed hockey card set. Tickets are still on sale at the GP Minor Hockey office at the Coca-Cola Centre or from any atom-or peewee-aged player in Grande Prairie.

GRAPHIC: photo by Randy Vanderveen; Storm captain Mark Malekoff will play for the WCHA's Michigan Tech Huskies next season.
MICHIGAN TECH (4-14-4) AT MINN. DULUTH (15-8-2)

The series at a glance

What: WCHA men's series  When: 7:05 p.m. today and Saturday  Where: DECC (5,333)
Ranking: UMD is No. 4 in PairWise; Michigan Tech isn't ranked  Radio-TV: KDAL, 610 AM; Saturday on WDIO-TV, Chs. 10&13

Coaches

Jamie Russell is 4-14-4 in first season at Michigan Tech

Scott Sandelin is 57-75-14 in four seasons at UMD  Huskies update Michigan Tech is last in the WCHA and 1-7-1 the past nine games overall. Freshman G Bryce Luker, who starts today, is ranked the third-best college goalie available for the 2004 NHL entry draft. He had 30 saves in a 6-5 home win over UMD on Dec. 5. The Huskies had four power-play goals and a short-handed goal in the win. Sophomore F Chris Conner leads in goal-scoring with 17 and junior W Colin Murphy in overall scoring at 14-13-27. Former Cloquet-Esko-Carlton D Clay Wilson has 1-6-7 in 22 games. Former Hermantown C B.J. Radovich has 1 assist in 18 games. The Huskies are 1-7-2 on the road

Bulldogs update

UMD has won seven straight home games, the best streak in 11 years, and has six straight wins overall. During the past six games sophomore G Isaac Reichmuth has marks of .929 and 2.00. Junior C Evan Schwabe has a 13-game scoring streak, the best UMD mark since 1992-93. RW Junior Lessard has a six-game scoring streak and is No. 2 nationally in goals (18). He's within 4 points of his point total from last season. UMD's power play is second in the WCHA (26.3) and third-best nationally. Out with an injury is F Dan Kronick

PROBABLE LINES

Tyler Brosz-Tim Stapleton-Brett Hammond Marco Pelson-Bryan McGregor-

DEFENSIVE PAIRS

Tim Hambly-Steve Czech Neil Petruic-
Todd Smith Beau Geisler-Ryan Swanson
Jay Hardwick

GOALIES

Isaac Reichmuth, Josh Johnson, Matt Klein

KEVIN PATES, NEWS TRIBUNE
Anchorage: The Seawolves' 6-3 victory over St. Cloud State last Saturday ended their 21-game winless streak against the Huskies. The last time Anchorage had beaten St. Cloud prior to that was on Feb. 8, 1997. This weekend, Anchorage plays at Denver, and the Seawolves are winless in their last 10 meetings with the Pioneers.

Colorado College: The Tigers have lost six straight WCHA games and have just one win (1-7-2) in their last 10 league games ... . The Tigers are averaging just 1.33 goals a game in their 6-game WCHA losing streak ... . CC is 10-0 when leading after one period.

Denver: The Pioneers are looking for their first WCHA win at home this season when they entertain Alaska Anchorage this weekend. The Pioneers are 0-6-1 in WCHA games played at Magness Arena ... . Denver sports the best nonconference won-lost record among WCHA teams, posting a 10-0 mark.

Michigan Tech: The Huskies are in a tough stretch in which they play 11 straight contests against nationally ranked opponents ... . The Huskies have been shut out five times this season ... . Tech's power play, clicking at 19 percent, ranks third in the WCHA.

Minnesota: The Gophers’ unbeaten stretch of eight games (6-0-2) is the second-longest active streak in the nation behind North Dakota’s 13-game streak. (11-0-2) ... With four shutouts, Kellen Briggs has set a Minnesota rookie record for goalies, breaking the mark of three by Adam Hauser in 1998-99 ... . Minnesota has scored at least one power-play goal in 11 straight games. On the flip side, the Gophers have killed off 24 straight opponent power plays.

Minnesota-Duluth: The red-hot Bulldogs are unbeaten in 2004 with a 6-0 record since the calendar turned. ... . The six sweeps by Duluth this season are the most since the 1992-93 season ... . Senior wing Junior Lessard continues to make a push for the Hobey Baker Memorial Award, his 18 goals ranking second in the nation to the 20 scored by UND’s Brandon Bochenski ... . Evan Schwabe has points in 13 straight games, and the last Bulldog to have more than that was 1994 Hobey Baker winner Chris Marinucci.

St. Cloud State: Senior Matt Hendricks became the 18th player in school history to reach 100 career points when he scored a goal in a win over Anchorage last Friday ... . Junior forward Garrett Larson, from Park River, N.D., picked up his first career game-winning goal against Anchorage. Larson has five points in his last seven games ... . Defenseman Matt Gens, from Baudette, Minn., suffered a "burner" in his shoulder in last Friday’s game at Anchorage and sat out the next night.

Wisconsin: The Badgers have set a school record with six ties. The Badgers have played in nine overtime games this season, two shy of the school record ... . Wisconsin drew the seventh-largest crowd to the Kohl Center (14,242) for its game with Notre Dame ... . The Badgers, who play at Colorado College this weekend, are unbeaten (6-0-2) in their last eight road games, one shy of the school record ... . The Badgers are winless (0-5-4) in their last nine games against Colorado College.
After losing twice at the DECC last weekend, Colorado College men's hockey coach Scott Owens said of victorious Minnesota Duluth:

"They're going to be good in this building all year. They've got a team built for this rink."

Owens was making a point that UMD's small, speedy team is more effective with its transition game in a smaller rink. (Colorado College plays on an Olympic-size surface, 200 feet long by 100 feet wide.)

The DECC does have the smallest icesheet in the Western Collegiate Hockey Association -- 190 by 85. And UMD is 9-2 at home this season.

Yet the Bulldogs aren't conceding anything to rink size.

"We don't recruit players because they'll be the best players at the DECC. Good players will adapt," said UMD coach Scott Sandelin. "We're a better-skating team than we were two years ago, we've gotten quicker and we're more of an offensive team.

"You hope playing at home is an advantage, but we've been good on the road and on bigger rinks this season."

The Bulldogs opened the WCHA season at Mariucci Arena (200 by 100) and played two of their best games in a sweep of Minnesota Duluth.

No. 4-ranked UMD is 6-6-2 away from the DECC, including two sweeps. The Bulldogs have won six straight overall and seven straight at home entering this weekend's series against Michigan Tech at the DECC.

"We're not a big, physical team, so I don't know if a smaller rink, where it's easier to make hits, is any real advantage," said UMD junior winger Tyler Brosz. "We have some speed, and that's helped us at home and on big rinks."

UMD's remaining road series are on Olympic rinks at Minnesota State-Mankato, Colorado College and Wisconsin (200 by 97). The Bulldogs don't travel to Alaska Anchorage, which also has an Olympic rink.

Sertich, 57, was behind the bench for 21 years as a head coach, 18 at UMD and the last three at Michigan Tech. He stepped down after last season in Houghton, Mich., with a career mark of 375-397-53.

In his first winter of retirement, Sertich can usually be found on Island Lake fishing, at the Blue Max Resort bartending twice a week, or home with his wife, Audie. His trips to the rink were Oct. 24 when Michigan Tech played at St. Cloud State, and last Friday when Colorado College played at UMD. Sertich's nephew, Marty, is a sophomore center for Colorado College.

Two members of Sertich's final UMD recruiting class -- defenseman Beau Geisler and winger Junior Lessard -- are Bulldog leaders this season.

"It was fun to see those two. I had always expected Junior to be a good scorer, and I knew Beau had the ability to be a top defenseman because he's so skillful and diligent in his game," said Sertich. "From what I saw this is a good team that could go a long way."

Sertich said he hasn't had a burning desire to see a lot of hockey this season, but he'll be back at the DECC the weekend of Feb. 27-28 when UMD has a reunion for its 1983-84 team. That group,
with Sertich as coach, finished second in the Division I tournament in a four-overtime title game against Bowling Green.

MANKATO HURTING

UMD has a one-week break after facing Michigan Tech then goes on the road Feb. 6-7 to Mankato. The Mavericks, an NCAA tournament team last season, have had a tough time lately.

Minnesota won 6-0 and 10-3 in Mankato last weekend, scoring the most goals against the Mavericks in one series in Mankato’s 4 seasons in Division I.

Mankato is 1-9-2 the past 12 and plays at St. Cloud State this weekend. The Mavericks (4-14-4) lost senior forward Cole Bassett on Tuesday when he left the team for personal reasons.

"It's a rough situation," Mankato coach Troy Jutting told the Mankato Free Press. "We're asking a lot of our young kids at key positions."

UMD swept Mankato on Nov. 28-29 in Duluth.

KEVIN PATES covers UMD men's hockey for the News Tribune. He can be reached at (218) 723-5306, (800) 456-8181 or e-mailed at kpates@duluthnews.com
ST. FRANCIS REMAINS UNBEATEN IN NEC

Fairleigh Dickinson did a good job defensively against St. Francis, Pa., center Beth Swink, the Northeast Conference's leading scorer with a 21.3 points per game average.

The Knights held Swink to nine points – two in the first half – but couldn't contain St. Francis. Tonjee Ward scored 18 points and Sarah Bolten added 12 as the Red Flash scored a 69-50 victory at the Rothman Center in Hackensack, N.J.

St. Francis raised its overall record to 8-5 and is undefeated in four NEC contests. Fairleigh-Dickenson dropped to 4-10, 1-4.

The Red Flash made 41.5 percent of its field-goal attempts for the game and connected on 44.8 percent of its shots in the second half.

Other women's games

* Monmouth 59, Robert Morris 49: Host Monmouth (6-6, 2-1) overcame 22 turnovers in this NEC victory in West Long Branch, N.J. Arlene Mull had 11 points and Johanna Stephens added 10 points and 14 rebounds for Robert Morris (1-12, 0-4), which had 20 turnovers.

* Gannon 53, Michigan Tech 50: Emily Thompson scored 13 points and Christina Johnson added 12 points and nine rebounds as Gannon (11-5, 4-2 Great Lakes) edged visiting Michigan Tech (8-5, 3-2) in Erie.

* Northern Michigan 71, Mercyhurst 39: Mercyhurst (0-13, 0-6 GLIAC) shot just 19 percent in the first half in this home loss. Emily Belland led Northern Michigan (12-1, 4-1) with 16 points. Coco Opyrchal led Carlow with 15 points.

* Pitt-Bradford 61, Thiel 41: Thiel rallied from a 22-point halftime deficit but ended up losing to visiting Pitt-Bradford (1-10). Calista Walker scored 20 points for Pitt-Bradford and had four steals. Nicole Valentino had 12 points for Thiel (5-9).

* Loyola of Chicago 55, Youngstown State 45: Loyola outscored Youngstown State, 32-21, in the second half to secure the home-court victory. Jessica Olmstead had 14 points for Youngstown State (1-14, 0-5).

Men's games

* Michigan Tech 76, Gannon 71: Visiting Michigan Tech jumped out to a 35-27 halftime lead and held on to defeat Gannon (13-3, 4-2 GLIAC). Josh Buettner scored 28 points for Michigan Tech (10-2, 4-1). Brandon Andrews had 20 points for Gannon.

* Northern Michigan 74, Mercyhurst 58: Northern Michigan (8-6, 2-3 GLIAC) made 52.1 percent of its field-goal attempts in winning at Mercyhurst. Joshua Helm scored 20 for Mercyhurst (11-5, 5-1).

* St. Vincent 72, Urbana 61: Tony Washam scored 31 points for St. Vincent and is 14 points away from the school's career scoring record. Felix Indaye added 16 points for the Bearcats.

* UW-Milwaukee 80, Youngstown State 74: The University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee (10-5) made 22 of 38 free throws in the home victory against YSU (4-11). Doug Underwood scored 29 points for Youngstown State.