Not facing Badgers could be thorn in U-M's side

BY JOHN ELIGON, FREE PRESS SPORTS WRITER

It has been one of Michigan's mottos the entire season: "I think you're wasting energy and time if you concern yourself with things that you have no control over," coach Lloyd Carr said Monday.

Unfortunately for the Wolverines, an undefeated Big Ten football season might not be good enough for a Rose Bowl berth.

Wisconsin won Saturday at Purdue, making the Badgers and Wolverines the only teams still unbeaten in Big Ten play. But Wisconsin and Michigan don't play each other this season, which means that should both squads finish undefeated in league games, the Badgers would be first in line for a Rose Bowl berth because they would have a better overall record.

No. 6 Wisconsin is 7-0 overall, 4-0 in the conference. No. 13 Michigan is 6-1, 4-0.

"It would be nice to play against the other undefeated team in the Big Ten," tailback Marlin Jackson said. "But we don't. We need to focus on the task at hand, and Purdue is that task right now."

The Wolverines play Saturday at No. 12 Purdue (5-1, 2-1).

In all likelihood, Wisconsin must lose a game for Michigan to have a shot at the Rose Bowl. But even if the Badgers finish the season unbeaten, U-M still could qualify for the Rose Bowl if Wisconsin gets an invitation to the Orange Bowl -- this year's Bowl Championship Series title game.

It is conceivable that both Michigan and Wisconsin could win the rest of their games and play in BCS bowls, which include the Orange, Sugar, Fiesta and Rose.

After Purdue, U-M finishes off the season with home games against Michigan State and Northwestern and a showdown at Ohio State, which is 0-3 in the Big Ten.

Wisconsin's road might be a bit tougher. The Badgers' next two games are at home against Northwestern and Minnesota. But they finish the season with road games at Michigan State and Iowa, both of which have played well recently.

The Spartans are coming off a 51-17 thrashing of Minnesota, and Iowa beat Ohio State, 33-7, on Saturday.

Michigan, the defending conference champion, knows the stretch run will be difficult.

"There's so many teams in the Big Ten, you can't go out one week and take anybody lightly," Jackson said. The Purdue game "is a key step toward (the league title). We can't afford to lose a game, or you're out of the race."

WOODS TO START: Linebacker Pierre Woods, who has not started since the Sept. 4 season opener against Miami (Ohio), was listed as a starter on the team's depth chart, released Monday.

Woods has been hampered all season by an injury, and in his absence, sophomore LaMarr Woodley has made 27 tackles -- sixth most on the team. Woods will return to the starting lineup, Carr said, because he has made big strides.

"He's continued to work hard and he's a guy that's been around," Carr said.

"He's done a great job in every area. He's getting a little bit healthier."

Woods, who led the team with seven sacks last season, has only 14 tackles this year and no sacks.

DURABLE HART: Freshman tailback Michael Hart has touched the ball more than 40 times in two consecutive games, making him the first player in U-M history to do so.

Against Minnesota two Saturdays ago, Hart rushed 35
times for 160 yards -- both freshman records -- and caught six passes for 53 yards. Hart broke his own records at Illinois on Saturday, gaining 234 yards on 40 attempts. He also caught three passes for 23 yards.

Players of the week: Big Ten - Michigan State sophomore quarterback Drew Stanton of Farmington Hills Harrison (20-for-31 passing for 308 yards and three touchdowns, 13 carries for 102 yards vs. Minnesota); Iowa sophomore quarterback Drew Tate (26-for-39 passing for 331 yards and three TDs vs. Ohio State); Wisconsin senior cornerback Scott Starks (nine tackles, including eight solo, a fumble return for a TD and an interception vs. Purdue); Michigan State senior placekicker Dave Rayner of Oxford (three field goals and six extra points). Mid-American Conference East -- Miami (Ohio) junior Josh Betts (25-for-36 passing for 306 yards and two TDs vs. Buffalo); Akron junior defensive tackle Kiki Gonzalez (two forced fumbles and two sacks vs. Central Florida); Buffalo freshman cornerback James Evans (eight tackles, including two sacks, and an interception vs. Miami, Ohio). Great Lakes Conference -- Michigan Tech sophomore running back Lee Marana of Ishpeming Westwood (44 carries for 269 yards and six TDs vs. Northwood); Saginaw Valley State junior linebacker John DiGiorgio of Utica Eisenhower (13 tackles, including five solo and two for loss, and a forced fumble vs. Grand Valley State). Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Association -- Olivet freshman fullback Drew Nielsen of Belding (35 carries for 251 yards and three TDs vs. Adrian); Adrian sophomore middle linebacker Taz Wallace of Adrian Madison (32 tackles, including 27 solo and three for loss).

Contact JOHN ELIGON at 313-222-2503 or eligon@freepress.com
Huskies' tough loss at USD not the end of the world

Mick Hatten, Staff

Ladies and gentlemen, boys and girls, remain calm.

I know you bought your first tickets to a St. Cloud State football game this fall, got excited by the 7-0 start, little Joey was all set to be a Huskies player for Halloween and you were even trying to figure out how to come up with the money to finish off Husky Stadium's locker rooms.

Then you saw that the Huskies got beat 37-21 on Sunday at South Dakota. Suddenly you're calling your cousin Irv and asking him if he wants your tickets for this week's game against Nebraska-Omaha. Joey's been in tears for the last two days and you're realizing that paying your electric bill may have priority in your life.

Again, I urge you, remain calm. The Huskies did not play well against the Coyotes, but they still have a shot at home field advantage for the playoffs and they can still win the North Central Conference title.

For Huskies fans, Saturday may have seemed a tough day, but St. Cloud State got some help in the region.

Grand Valley State, the defending NCAA Division II champion, went into Saturday ranked No. 1 in the Northwest Region. The Lakers (7-1) got beat 31-20 at ninth-ranked Saginaw Valley State (5-2).

Third-ranked Northwood (Mich.) got pounded 54-7 at sixth-ranked Michigan Tech (7-0).

Look for Michigan Tech, the last unbeaten team in the region, to make a big leap this week.

Get the calculators and a bunch of calculus formulas out to figure out who will be ranked where this week, but the top six teams in the region at the end of the season will make the playoffs.

There are a few other things helping St. Cloud State. The Huskies, Northwood (7-1) and Michigan Tech are the three teams with seven wins in the region. Everyone else has six or fewer. Wins in the region have a greater bearing in the rankings.

There's a points system and while the Coyotes will move up in the region, it's not likely to be in the top four. South Dakota (7-1) went into last weekend ranked No. 11 because it has a win over a Division III team (Wisconsin-LaCrosse) and a win over an NAIA school (Peru State) and those wins are worth almost nothing in the points system.

So with three weeks left in the regular season, the Huskies still have a shot at getting one of the top two spots in the region, which will get them at least one home game.

A huge step toward achieving that would be a win over Nebraska-Omaha. The Mavericks are 3-0 in the NCC, 6-1 in the region and 6-2 overall.

Nebraska-Omaha has not played well in St. Cloud in the series, going 2-8. The Mavericks have a loss to Western Washington (4-3), a team that St. Cloud State beat.

The Mavericks also do not have the schedule in their favor. After playing the Huskies, they play host to North Dakota (2-1, 6-1) and then finish at Minnesota State-Mankato (1-2, 4-4).

The Huskies have a week off after playing Nebraska-Omaha and then finish at Minnesota-Duluth (0-3, 3-5).

South Dakota's remaining NCC games are against Minnesota-Duluth and then the Coyotes finish at North Dakota.

Things are better than they may have appeared to the Huskies or their fans early Saturday night. A big step back into the thick of everything would be beating Nebraska-Omaha.

First place in the NCC is on the line. Tell your cousin to go pheasant hunting. It's a big game.

This column is the opinion of Times sports writer Mick Hatten. He can be reached by phone at 255-8741 or by e-mail at mhatten@stcloudtimes.com
Minnesota Duluth 6, Michigan Tech 3

HOUGHTON, Mich.

Minnesota Duluth scored five straight goals to erase a 3-1 deficit in the final 16 minutes and beat Michigan Tech 6-3 Saturday night.

The sweep of the weekend series gave the Bulldogs (3-0-1, 2-0-0 WCHA) their best start since a school-record 8-0-0 15 years ago.

Captain Evan Schwabe, the reigning NCAA assist leader, collected a pair of goals and set up two others after scoring twice in Friday's 4-3 win at Michigan Tech.

Tech had taken a 3-1 lead 2:22 into the third on goals by Marek Dora, Colin Murphy and Brandon Schwartz before Duluth began its comeback.

Ryan Geris and Brett Hammond scored :49 apart two minutes after Schwartz's goal to even the game. And then Mike Curry, Tim Stapleton and Schwabe scored to finish off the home team. Marco Peluso and Blair LeFebvre had two assists apiece in Duluth's fourth straight victory against Tech.

The Bulldogs outshot the Huskies 39-37 on the night and 21-8 in the third period.

Isaac Reichmuth made 34 saves for Duluth, while Bryce Luker had 33 for Tech.

The Bulldogs made good on three of their eight power plays opportunities while limiting Michigan Tech to just two goals in 11 chances with the extra man.
UMD sweeps Tech
MEN: The Bulldogs rally to score four goals in the third period to stay undefeated

BY KEVIN PATES, NEWS TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER HOUGHTON, Mich.

Minnesota Duluth finds itself just where it had hoped after the first weekend of the Western Collegiate Hockey Association men's season.

The undefeated Bulldogs are alone in first place following a 6-3 victory over Michigan Tech on Saturday before 2,415 at MacInnes Student Ice Arena. That completed a sweep to give UMD four points to start its 40th year in the WCHA. Defending league champion North Dakota could gain only a maximum of three points after tying Friday at Minnesota State-Mankato.

No. 4-ranked UMD (3-0-1) needed an amazingly-explosive third period to put the Huskies away. Goals 49 seconds apart from Ryan Geris and Brett Hammond early in the period, then goals 76 seconds apart from Mike Curry and Tim Stapleton midway through. That was four goals in 6:19 that rocketed the Bulldogs back from a two-goal deficit. Evan Schwabe added his second goal of the game, and fourth of the series, in a 5-on-3 power play with 4:05 to play. Geris and Curry also scored on power plays as UMD had 21 shots on goal in the period.

UM"When we play like we can, goals can happen quickly," said Geris, who missed nearly all last season with a concussion. "We weren't working in the second period; we weren't initiating any hits."

"To change things it's not as easy as saying 'Let's crank it up.' But with the leadership we have, we can come back and start popping in some goals."

UMD is now 8-0-2 the past 10 WCHA road games the last two seasons and 12-2-3 the last 16 road games overall. The Bulldogs have won eight of the past 10 meetings with the Huskies.

Michigan Tech (0-2) led for much of Friday's opener before losing 5-4.

In the rematch, UMD outshot Michigan Tech 39-37 and scored quickly for a 1-0 lead as Schwabe connected during a split shift at 52 seconds. Freshman Blair LeFebvre's shot from the right circle was tipped by Schwabe at the crease through the legs of Michigan Tech goalie Bryce Luker. LeFebvre had come on in a line change for left winger Marco Peluso.

Much of the rest of the opening period was highlighted by goalsies Bryce Luker and Isaac Reichmuth of UMD.

Luker stopped UMD defenseman Neil Petruic on a power-play tip at 7:08 and center Matt McKnight with 2:45 left. Reichmuth turned away winger Jordan Foote on a power play with 8:52 to go and stopped Tyler Shelast at point-blank range on a power play with 7:28 remaining.

Michigan Tech was dominant in the second period, scoring twice for a 2-1 lead. The Huskies, aided by five power plays, outshot UMD 18-7 in the period and got goals from defensemen Marek Dora and center Colin Murphy, the 45th goal of his career and 102nd point.

Dora launched a power-play shot from high in the slot that got by Reichmuth with 8:47 left. On a delayed-penalty call, the Huskies hustled up ice and Chris Conner put on shot on net, the save was made and Murphy made sure on the rebound. Reichmuth kept UMD close with 16 stops in the period and 34 for the game.

"That period, and all the penalties we were taking, threw us off," UMD's Hammond said of the second period. "Our desperation finally kicked in and the first goal of the third period got us going. We've got a skilled team and with our offense, we're never out of a game. There was energy on the bench."

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However, the momentum continued to swing in Michigan Tech's favor 2:12 into the third period on another power play. Brandon Schwartz scored for a 3-1 lead.

Then UMD caught fire. With Luker down on a cross-ice pass, defenseman Geris had an open net goal at 4:47. Hammond followed from the slot on a pass from Matt McKnight at 5:36. Freshman Curry got his third goal of the season from the inside edge of the right circle on at 9:50 and Stapleton caught a pass in stride in the slot for his third goal of the season.

"We have to have a goalie who steps up and makes some saves," said Michigan Tech coach Jamie Russell. "We're a young rebuilding team and we also need to learn to play with confidence and learn how to win, especially with a two-goal lead in the third period at home."

The Huskies were obviously reeling and never regained composure, Schwabe’s second goal finished a string of five straight scores. He had four points in the game and six for the weekend.

It wasn't a miracle comeback, yet it was a long way back for the Bulldogs.

"We're not going to do it too many times in this league," said UMD coach Scott Sandelin. "Our first period was good, the second wasn't good and then we played about 10 or 12 minutes of the third."

"I just wanted us to get some more shots, get them to the net, and see what happens. We got a good bounce to start things on Geris’ goal and that gave us a spark."

UMD opens the home season this Friday and Saturday against Minnesota State-Mankato.

Minnesota Duluth 1-0-5-6 Michigan Tech 0-2-1-3

First period -- 1. UMD, Evan Schwabe 3 (Blair LeFebvre, Todd Smith), :52. Penalties -- Lars Helminen, Michigan Tech (holding), 6:05; LeFebvre, UMD (too many men on ice), 10:33; Helminen, Michigan Tech (slashing), 15:05; Nick Anderson, UMD (slashing), 18:09.


Third period -- 4. Michigan Tech, Brandon Schwartz 1 (Nick Anderson, Helminen), 2:12 (pp); 5. UMD, Ryan Geris 1 (Marco Peluso, Schwabe), 4:47 (pp); 6. UMD, Ryan Geris 1 (Matt McKnight), 5:36; 7. UMD, Mike Curry 3 (Peluso, Schwabe), 9:40 (pp); 8. UMD, Tim Stapleton 3 (Justin Williams, LeFebvre), 11:06; 9. UMD, Schwabe (Tim Hambly, Curry), 15:55 (5x3 pp). Penalties -- Petruic, UMD (hooking), :53; Murphy, Michigan Tech (holding), 3:22; Saitakari, Michigan Tech (holding), 5:12; Petruic, UMD (hooking), 7:38; Murphy, Michigan Tech (interference), 14:31; Murphy, Michigan Tech (holding), 15:00; Williams, UMD (holding), 17:48.

Defenseman Neil Petruic scored the tiebreaking goal 4:24 into the third period as Minnesota Duluth beat Michigan Tech 5-4 on Friday night.

Evan Schwabe scored at the end of the first period and with less than a minute remaining in the second to help spark the Bulldogs (2-0-1).

Schwabe's first goal gave Duluth a 2-1 lead at the first intermission while his second knotted the game at 4-4 through two periods.

Michigan Tech (0-1-0) scored just 24 seconds into the game when Colin Murphy scored on the Huskies' first shot.

Justin Williams answered for the Bulldogs a little less than two minutes later on the power-play with his first goal of the year.

Michigan Tech's Tyler Shelast and Duluth's Steve Czech traded goals at 1:55 and 8:38, respectively, of the second period, but the Huskies, in their regular season opener, took a 4-3 lead on goals by Tyler Skworchinski and Malcolm Gwilliam.

Josh Johnson finished with 33 saves for Duluth, while Bryce Luker had 26 stops for Michigan Tech.
Lee Marana rushed for 269 yards and a Michigan Tech record-tying six touchdowns in the Huskies' 54-7 romp over Northwood on Saturday.

The victory, coupled with Grand Valley State's loss to Saginaw Valley State, gave Tech sole possession of the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference lead at 7-0. The nation's 13th-ranked Division II team also is 7-0 overall.

Marana had four touchdowns by the time the No.7 Timberwolves (7-1 overall, 6-1 GLIAC) scored on Antoine Ivy's 15-yard TD run midway through the second quarter.

The Huskies, scoring 50-plus points for the fourth time this season, rolled up 414 offensive yards and yielded just 197. Tech ran the ball 57 times without a fumble in the sleet and 35-degree temperatures.

Northwood committed eight fumbles and lost three of them, and finished with a net 151 yards on the ground after its rushers combined to lose 79 yards.
Bulldogs have hands full, but dump Tech

UMD MEN: The Bulldogs remain unbeaten by registering a third-period goal and some timely saves in a road victory

BY KEVIN PATES, NEWS TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER HOUGHTON, Mich.

Beat the Clock proved an effective strategy Friday night as preseason favorite Minnesota Duluth opened its Western Collegiate Hockey Association men's schedule.

The No. 4-ranked Bulldogs scored late in the first two periods, including a first-period buzzer-beater, to defeat Michigan Tech 5-4 before 2,677 at MacInnes Student Ice Arena.

Senior center Evan Schwabe was the catalyst with two goals and center Tim Stapleton added two critical assists. Senior defenseman Neil Petruic earned the winning goal 4:24 into the final period to keep UMD unbeaten at 2-0-1. Freshman center Matt McKnight also had two assists.

Michigan Tech (0-1) finished last in the WCHA in 2003-04 and was picked ninth among 10 teams this season. But the Huskies debuted by giving UMD everything it could handle, leading in shots on goal 37-31.

"We were lucky to get a few key goals that made the difference. Michigan Tech has some quick forwards and work hard, and we struggled breaking the puck out of our zone," Petruic said. "When the puck is in your zone half the night, it's hard to play good defense."

After going 2-for-20 on power plays in a season-opening series at Notre Dame last week, the Bulldogs went 2-for-4 starting with a Justin Williams goal 2:50 into the game for a 1-1 tie.

Then Schwabe's first goal of the season, on a power play from the right edge of the net, came as time expired in the first period.

"When I first looked up there was 9 seconds left and I didn't think there was enough time to score," Schwabe said. "Then (Stapleton) slid the puck over and I just beat the clock. I thought it was in."

So did referee Todd Anderson, who received high grades from both teams. He said he saw the puck in the net behind goalie Bryce Luker before hearing the period-ending buzzer. That should've given UMD some momentum, but the second period belonged to Michigan Tech.

The Huskies outshot UMD 18-13 and outscored the Bulldogs 3-2 for a 4-4 tie after 40 minutes. UMD was fortunate to be even.

Power-play goals by freshmen Tyler Shelast and Malcolm Gwilliam sparked the Huskies. And there was another contested goal. Gwilliam's shot from the slot with 3:47 left hit high just under the crossbar or hit the crossbar and bounced back into play. Anderson consulted with the goal-judge and awarded the goal.

Schwabe rescued the period by taking a Todd Smith pass and scoring from the left circle with 53 seconds left. Schwabe said he planned to pass to linemate Marco Peluso, but the defenders kept backing off and left him a shooting opportunity. It was the 34th goal in 125 career games for Schwabe, who led NCAA Division I in assists last season.

"The second period was awful. We didn't play well defensively, we got outplayed badly, but Schwabe's goal got us back to zero-zero," said UMD coach Scott Sandelin.

"I've said that Michigan Tech could end up being the most improved team in the league. They gave us a battle."

The Huskies, with 11 freshmen and sophomores, were coming off a 6-2 exhibition home loss to the U.S. National Under-18 Team. Second-year
coach Jamie Russell said he got his team's attention with some extra work at practice Monday, and Michigan Tech pushed UMD to the finish, yet lost for the seventh time in the last nine meetings.

The winning goal came as Petruic was left unguarded on the left side and he sped to the net. Stapleton passed cross-ice from deep in the Michigan Tech zone and Petruic knocked the puck in for the only goal of the final period.

Bulldogs goalie Josh Johnson, who shut out Michigan Tech here last season, was at his best with 11 third-period saves. He kept Huskies star winger Chris Conner off the scoresheet with the help of a blocker save with 2:50 to play. Center Colin Murphy put a close-range shot off Johnson's mask with 1:30 left. Michigan Tech then skated the final 1:26 with an extra man after pulling Luker.

"Our guys were aggressive and maybe wore UMD's defensemen down," Russell said. "But we gave up two heartbreaking goals, which is tough for a young team. We battled and competed, but coming close isn't good enough."

After 26 penalties for 55 minutes against Notre Dame, as an NCAA crackdown on obstruction began, UMD had nine minor penalties Friday. Michigan Tech had seven.

Minnesota Duluth 2-2-1--5 Michigan Tech 1-3-0--4

First period -- 1. Michigan Tech, Colin Murphy 1, (Matt McKnight, T.J. Caig), 2:40 (pp); 2. UMD, Justin Williams 1 (Matt McKnight, T.J. Caig), 2:40 (pp); 3. UMD, Evan Schwabe 1 (Tim Stapleton, Marco Peluso), 19:59 (pp). Penalties -- Malcolm Gwilliam, Michigan Tech (hooking), :32; Gwilliam, Michigan Tech (tripping), 4:27; Jay Rosehill, UMD (interference), 11:28; Steve Czech, UMD (holding), 14:14; Brett Hammond, UMD (cross-checking), 17:03; Murphy, Michigan Tech (holding), 18:29.


Mankato, North Dakota tie

From news services

Freshman wing Ryan Carter swept in a rebound with 4 minutes, 49 seconds to play in the third period to lift Minnesota State (Mankato) to a 2-2 tie with North Dakota on Friday night in a Western Collegiate Hockey Association opener at Mankato.

Carter's goal came less than four minutes after freshman Rastislav Spirko had given the Sioux a 2-1 lead, whipping a wrist shot past Mavericks goalie Kyle Nixon (19 saves) at 11:57 for his sixth point in three games.

Minnesota-Duluth 5, Michigan Tech 4: Evan Schwabe scored two goals as the No. 4-ranked Bulldogs beat Michigan Tech at Houghton, Mich.

Defenseman Neil Petruic scored the winning goal 4:24 into the final period to keep UMD unbeaten at 2-0-1.

Wisconsin 3, Mercyhurst 2: Robbie Earl scored on a goalmouth scramble in the third period to break a 2-2 tie and lift the Badgers to a nonconference home victory.

Matt Auffrey and Jake Dowell also scored for the Badgers, who rallied from a 2-0 deficit.

St. Cloud State 2, Northern Michigan 1: Andrew Gordon and Matt Gens scored in the second period, and the Huskies went on to win a nonconference game at home.

St. Cloud State goalie Tim Boron made 18 saves. Northern Michigan's Tuomas Tarkki had 32.

WOMEN

Minnesota-Duluth 8, North Dakota 1: Sophomore winger Noemie Marin had a hat trick as the Bulldogs beat North Dakota in a WCHA opener at Duluth.

Sophomore forward Jessica Koizumi had two goals and an assist, and Caroline Ouellette had five assists.
MINNESOTA DULUTH (1-0-1) at MICHIGAN TECH (0-0)

The series at a glance

What: Season-opening WCHA games
When: 7:05 p.m. today and Saturday
Where: MacInnes Student Ice Arena (4,200), Houghton, Mich.

Ranking: UMD is No. 4 in U.S. College Hockey Online poll; Michigan Tech is un-ranked

Radio-TV: KDAL, 610 AM; WDIO Chs. 10&13, Saturday only

Series: Michigan Tech leads 110-63-13, though UMD has won six of last eight meetings

Coaches

Jamie Russell is 8-25-5 in his second season at Michigan Tech

Scott Sandelin is 71-80-17 in his fifth season at UMD

Huskies update

This is the season-opening series for Michigan Tech, which had two exhibition games last weekend -- a 4-1 win over Lakehead University and a 6-2 loss to the USA National Development Under-18 team. Top returning scorer Chris Conner sat out against Lakehead as coach Jamie Russell looked at 11 new players. Huskies were 0-for-7 on power play against Under-18 team. Michigan Tech was lowest-scoring team in WCHA last season with 2.36 goals per game. "We'll see what we're made of right away," Russell said.

Bulldogs update

It wasn't easy for coach Scott Sandelin to judge last week's tie and win at Notre Dame because little of the series was skated 5-on-5. There was a combined 48 penalties for 110 minutes between the teams as an NCAA obstruction mandate was enforced. Sandelin said he liked UMD's special teams, especially the penalty kill, goaltending and the contributions of five freshmen. Two of Notre Dame's goals came on 5-on-3 power plays and the third was 4-on-4. A split in goal is likely to continue with sophomore Josh Johnson to start today.

PROBABLE LINES

Marco Peluso-Evan Schwabe-Mike Curry
Blair LeFebvre-Tim Stapleton-Justin Williams
Brett Hammond-Matt McKnight-Josh Miskovich

DEFENSIVE PAIRS

Neil Petruic-Travis Gawryletz
Jay Rosehill-Steve Czech
Tim Hambly-Todd Smith

GOALIES

Isaac Reichmuth, Josh Johnson

KEVIN PATES, NEWS TRIBUNE
WCHA is tops again
UMD MEN: The Bulldogs were part of league's most dominant season in 2003-04

BY KEVIN PATES, NEWS TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

If you don't mind the Western Collegiate Hockey Association bragging a little, the league had no peers among Division I men last season.

The WCHA made the cleanest sweep imaginable in 2004.

NCAA champion: Denver.

NCAA coach of the year: Scott Sandelin of Minnesota Duluth.

NCAA West All-Americans: all six first-team positions.

Hobey Baker Memorial Award winner: Junior Lessard of UMD.

As the WCHA's 53rd season opens today, including preseason favorite UMD at Michigan Tech, fans may wonder if there's any chance to repeat such a performance.

Don't bet against it.

After going 60-20-9 in non-conference games in 2003-04, the WCHA is 5-1-2 after one weekend.

"The perception is that the league is down because so many players left for professional hockey. But I don't think that's the case at all," Sandelin said. "I tell recruits that they've got a chance to play in the best league in college hockey because I believe it."

North Dakota may have lost the most since last season, yet made the biggest impression last week. The Fighting Sioux traveled to face last season's runner-up Maine and won 4-3 in overtime and 3-1, and are ranked No. 1 in the U.S. College Hockey Online poll.

That was accomplished without scoring stars Zach Parise and Brandon Bochenski and coach Dean Blais, who all moved on to the NHL.

Five other WCHA teams are in the Division I top 15 -- No. 4 UMD, No. 5 Minnesota, No. 9 Wisconsin, No. 11 Denver and No. 13 Colorado College.

There's also a few impressive individuals. Inside College Hockey ranks four WCHA players as preseason All-Americans:

Forwards Chris Conner of Michigan Tech, Brady Murray of North Dakota and Evan Schwabe of UMD, and defenseman Mark Stuart of Colorado College.

Coach Troy Jutting of Minnesota State-Mankato calls Conner, "Probably the most exciting player in college hockey."

Michigan Tech coach Jamie Russell hopes Conner can help pull the Huskies up from last place in the WCHA. It was a challenging first season in 2003-04 for Russell, who hadn't been in the league since playing for Michigan Tech in 1987-89.

Russell had seen two other leagues, the Eastern College Athletic Conference and Central Collegiate Hockey Association, as an assistant at Cornell and Ferris State.

"I was amazed at the quality of play in the WCHA," he said.

Denver emphatically proved the point. After tying for fourth in the league, the Pioneers beat first-place North Dakota, second-place UMD and top-ranked Maine on the way to the NCAA title.

If you're counting, the WCHA has had the last three NCAA champions and last three Hobey Baker winners.

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
WCHA capsules

In order of 2004 regular-season finish:

NORTH DAKOTA
Coach: Dave Hakstol (first year)
Last season: 30-8-3
Finish: NCAA quarterfinals
This season: 2-0
Division I rank: No. 1

Good: A new coach appears to have the same winning style and not many weak spots. Strong G with Jake Brandt and Jordan Parise. Tough D with Matt Greene and Matt Jones. Decent scoring with F Brady Murray and Drew Stafford. Freshmen F Travis Zajac (Winnipeg) and Ratislav Spirko (Slovakia) will help.

Not so good: Top scorers Brandon Bochenski and Zach Parise signed professional contracts with eligibility remaining.

MINNESOTA DULUTH
Coach: Scott Sandelin (71-79-17 in fifth year)
Last season: 28-13-4
Finish: NCAA semifinals
This season: 1-0-1
Division I rank: No. 4

Good: Twelve seniors says it best. The Bulldogs have excellent depth and experience. Team defense will lead and offense could match last season's breakthrough performance. Rookies like F Mike Curry and D Jay Rosehill already have contributed.

Not so good: Dealing with high expectations with five of the first eight series on the road.

WISCONSIN
Coach: Mike Eaves (35-36-12 in third year)
Last season: 22-13-8
Finish: NCAA quarterfinals
This season: 0-0
Division I rank: No. 9

Good: Preseason league MVP senior G Bernd Bruckler nearly got the Badgers to the 2004 Frozen Four and provides a good start. F Robbie Earl and Ryan MacMurchy can score. Roster has WCHA-high 12 NHL draft picks.

Not so good: D Ryan Suter left early for pro hockey. MacMurchy is suspended one game because of an off-campus fight.

MINNESOTA
Coach: Don Lucia (400-227-57 in 18th year, 6 at Minnesota)
Last season: 27-14-3
Finish: NCAA quarterfinals
This season: 1-0
Division I rank: No. 5

Good: Sophomore F Ryan Potulny could follow in brother Grant's footsteps as team leader. He had three goals in season opener. Veterans include F Gino Guyer and D Chris Harrington. G Kellen Briggs is back.

Not so good: Underclassmen losses to the pros were F Thomas Vanek, and D Keith Ballard and Jake Taylor.

DENVER
Coach: George Gwozdecky (372-276-52 in 19th year, 11 at Denver)
Last season: 27-12-5
Finish: NCAA champion
This season: 0-1
Division I rank: No. 11

Good: Defending Division I champions have depth at F led by Gabe Gauthier and Jeff Drummond. D stars are Matt Carle and Brett Skinner. Sophomore G Glenn Fisher...
played in 9 games last season.

Not so good: Gone is team MVP G Adam Berkhoel, who was the key in 1-0 NCAA wins over North Dakota and Maine.

ST. CLOUD STATE

Coach: Craig Dahl (394-378-55 in 24th year, 18 at St. Cloud State)

Last season: 18-16-4

Finish: WCHA playoffs first round

This season: 1-0-1

Division I rank: Unranked

Good: Last season's string of on and off-ice difficulties is over. The Tigers are picked as a league dark horse favorite with F Marty Sertich and Aaron Slattengren, D Mark Stuart and G Curtis McElhinney and Matt Zaba.

ALASKA ANCHORAGE

Coach: John Hill (27-70-15 in fourth year)

Last season: 14-23-3

Finish: WCHA Final Five third-place game

This season: 0-0

Division I rank: Unranked

Good: Getting to the WCHA Final Five for the first time last season by beating Wisconsin and then Colorado College in the play-in game were a big boost.


COLORADO COLLEGE

Coach: Scott Owens (122-67-15 in sixth year)

Last season: 20-16-3

Finish: WCHA Final Five preliminary game

This season: 0-0

Division I rank: No. 13

MINN. STATE-MANKATO

Coach: Troy Jutting (65-73-18 in fifth year)

Last season: 10-24-5

Finish: WCHA playoffs first round

This season: 0-0

Division I rank: Unranked

Good: F David Backes, who had a great freshman season with 37 points, heads nine of top 10 returning scorers along with Kyle Peto, Travis Morin and Brock Becker.

MICHIGAN TECH

Coach: Jamie Russell (8-25-5 in second year)

Last season: 8-25-5

Finish: WCHA playoffs first round

This season: 0-0

Division I rank: Unranked

Good: There's F Chris Conner, Colin Murphy and Taggart Desmet on offense. Conner led Division I with eight short-handed goals last season and had 25 goals in 38 games. G Cam Ellsworth is reliable.

Not so good: After the top three scorers, the Huskies drop off quite a bit.

KEVIN PATES,
NEWS TRIBUNE
UND at MSU-Mankato

UND at MSU-Mankato: At the Midwest Wireless Center, the Sioux go wire-to-wire and build on their shocking sweep of Maine. Sioux 6-2, 5-1.

Minn. Duluth at Michigan Tech: The Bulldogs may take a while to regroup without "Hobey" Lessard, but it won't matter against the young Huskies. Duluth 4-1, 4-0.

Denver at Boston College: In another matchup for Denver between teams with recent NCAA titles, the Pioneers come up losers again, just like at Minnesota, and by the identical score. Boston College 5-2.

Denver at Northeastern: Northeastern upset mighty Michigan last weekend, but this isn't a CCHA team the Huskies are playing. Denver 4-3.

Mercyhurst at Wisconsin: Here's hoping the Badgers show some mercy to Mercyhurst in Madison. Wisconsin 8-1, 7-0.

Northern Michigan at St. Cloud State: Neither team will be a title contender in their leagues, so a split is likely. We'll go Northern Michigan 4-3 on Friday, St. Cloud 4-1 on Saturday.

Union at Colorado College: The Union Dutchmen haven't had a winning season since 1996-97, and this isn't the weekend for that to change. CC 6-0, 6-1.

Minnesota vs. UMass: The Minutemen from Hockey East were a rising team, reaching the conference championship game last season. But two top players turned professional. In the Nye Frontier Classic in Anchorage, it's the Gophers, 5-2.

Canisius vs. Anchorage: In the other opening game of the Nye Classic, could there be a more boring matchup? Somebody has to win, so we'll give it to Anchorage on home ice, 1-0 in OT.

Record last week: 3-1-1.

Season record: 3-1-1.
Other

Anchorage: Two freshmen had multipoint games as the Seawolves opened the season with a 5-1 exhibition game victory over Canadian College Grant MacEwan. Chris Tarkir had two goals and Merit Waldrop had three assists. Of the 28 players on Anchorage’s roster, 18 are freshmen or sophomores. The Seawolves will be shooting for just their third title ever in the Nye Frontier Classic being played in Anchorage. Other teams competing are the Canisius Golden Griffins, Minnesota and UMass-Amherst.

Colorado College: Junior Marty Sertich had a pair of goals as the Tigers beat the University of Windsor 6-1 last Friday. The Tigers are unbeaten in all eight exhibition games played in the World Arena since the building opened. Junior wing Brandon Roberts won the fastest skater contest and Mark Stuart won the hardest shot (95 mph) contest during a team skills competition.

Denver: Prior to Denver’s Hall of Fame game against Minnesota last weekend, DU coach George Gwozdecky had longtime friend Bill Goldthorpe address the Pioneer hockey team. Goldthorpe was the inspiration behind the 1977 Slap Shot movie character Oggie Ogletorpe. Senior Jon Foster had both of Denver’s goals in the 5-2 loss to Minnesota at the Xcel Energy Center. It was Denver’s first loss on an NHL rink in five games. The Pioneers beat Colorado College and Minnesota in the 2002 WCHA Final Five at the Xcel Energy Center and beat Minnesota Duluth and Maine at the FleetCenter in Boston in April to win the NCAA title.

Michigan Tech: The Huskies were beaten 6-2 by the U.S. National Development team last Saturday after the Huskies converted 4-of-9 power-play tries to down Lakehead University 4-1 last Friday. Michigan Tech has installed speakers on the outside of its arena so fans entering or leaving the MacInnes Ice Arena can hear extended radio coverage of the game.

Minnesota: When Grand Forks native Ryan Potulny scored three goals in Minnesota’s 5-2 win over Denver in the Hall of Fame game last weekend, it marked his first college hat trick. He also had his first career shorthanded goal and second game-winning goal. The Gophers are 12-4 overall in Hall of Fame games. Minnesota has won its last 14 games played in the Twin Cities. Minnesota is 16-0-1 in one-plus seasons when Fargo native Danny Irmen scores a point.

Minnesota Duluth: Junior forward Tim Stapleton is just the fourth Bulldog ever to log 40 or more points in both his freshman and sophomore seasons. He had the game-tying goal in a 2-2 deadlock with Notre Dame last Thursday and the winning goal in a 4-1 Bulldog victory last Friday in Duluth’s first games at Notre Dame in 25 years. Senior wing Tyler Broz missed the series at Notre Dame while recovering from shoulder surgery last month.

MS-Mankato: In team skills competition, winners were Brad Thompson (stickhandling), Ryan Carter (shooting accuracy), Adam Gerlach (fastest skater) and Chis Clark (goal tending). Minnesota State’s top three all-time crowds came against this weekend’s opponent, UND. The Sioux helped draw crowds to the Midwest Wireless Center of 5,182 and 5,112 in 2000-03 and 5,144 in 1999-00. Three Mavericks are related to former NHL players. They are Kurtis Kissio’s father (Kelly), Kyle Nixon’s uncle (Glenn ‘Chico’ Resch) and Mark Hinz, who is the nephew of former UND and NHL player Rick Wilson.

St. Cloud State: Officially, the Huskies played to a 1-1 tie with St. Lawrence in the IceBreaker Tournament in Durham, N.H., last weekend. But to decide which team advanced to the championship game, the contest went to a shootout. All five St. Cloud players failed on their shots while St. Lawrence scored.
once. There were 19 power plays in the game, but neither team scored on one.

UND: The sweep over Maine in Orono, Maine, last weekend was the first time the Black Bears have been swept at home by a nonconference opponent since 1985, when Denver did it . . . . Dave Hakstol became the first Sioux head coach to win his first college game since Gino Gasparini in 1978 . . . . Drew Stafford’s penalty shot (and game-winning goal) Friday marked just the third time a Sioux player has attempted a penalty shot in the last 25 years - and the only one to convert on it.

Wisconsin: The Badger roster this season includes just two seniors (Bernd Bruckler and Peter Talafous) and 13 players who come from the state of Wisconsin . . . . A total of 12 Badgers have been drafted by NHL teams, the previous high being 10 in the 1994-95 season . . . . UW has added a new scoreboard with video capability and a ring beam ringing the facade of the second level at the Kohl Center in Madison.