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UWSP hockey team heats up, torches UW-Stout

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A cold Friday night in Stevens Point was not going to cool down the hot style of play the Pointers had on the ice. The impending conference matchup heightened the intensity of the competition between Stevens Point and their opponent. A sea of purple and gold flooded the bleachers, filling them to the brim. The atmosphere in the arena was loud, like an airplane taking off. However, it was just the Pointers fans and pep band making ears ring.

Fourth ranked UWSP scored three goals in both the first and third periods despite hitting a rest stop in the second period, cruising to a 6-1 victory over WIAC foe UW-Stout at the KB Willett Arena on Friday. The Pointers were able to capitalize on good offensive opportunities from the neutral zone, almost as if their players were at an all-you-can-eat buffet.

UW-Stevens Point improves to 15-4-3 (4-1 WIAC) on the season while Stout falls to 10-11-2 (2-4 WIAC) with three games left to play in the regular season.

The win was the result of a coordinated team effort by the Pointers, but veteran leadership on both sides of the puck led the way. Senior forward Lawrence Cornellier took control of the offense with two goals and an assist while junior goaltender Max Milosek was a brick wall in the goal, only giving up one goal and finishing the night with a 0.956 save percentage. Junior forward Willem Nong-Lambert also contributed to the effort, with one goal and 2 assists of his own.

In the first period, both teams came out and played side by side with each other. Each team had some good looks at the net, but no one able to drive anything home. At 7:03 into the period, the dry spell ended with a UWSP goal scored by senior forward Kyle Sharkey, after

getting a setup from Cornellier and sophomore Ryan Bittner from center ice. A little over halfway in the period, with the Pointers down a man on a penalty kill, Nong-Lambert picked up an unattended puck in the neutral zone and raced toward Stout goalie Spencer Viele like a speedy ostrich running in the desert. Viele was no match for the agile UWSP forward, as the puck whizzed right past him into the back of the netting, giving the Pointers a shorthanded goal and a 2-0 lead at 13:49. Later, the senior trio of forwards Joey Haydock, Sharkey, and Cornellier connected with each other by sending some nice passes up into the offensive zone. Cornellier whipped the puck into the Stout net, increasing the lead to three goals with two minutes left in the first period.

UW-Stout would not let themselves go into intermission scoreless, as sophomore defenseman Mathias Atman caught Milosek off guard on a Stout power play. Atman tucked in a sneaky little dribble shot in front of the goal, which put the Blue Devils on the board with just 12 seconds left in the first. The late goal made it a two-goal game going into the second period, leaving the game up for grabs now for either team.

The last second first period Stout goal had an impact on the Pointers. The team looked like they hit a road bump and popped one of their tires, then had to pull over and try to change it for the second period. They accumulated three penalties within the first ten minutes of the period, frustrating themselves and their fans. The offense did get some chances to make up for it, but played very sloppy and unorganized. However, their defense worked a lot harder to stop the Blue Devils' offensive

attacks. A scoreless second period between the two teams still kept the game at 3-1.

The third period was a renewed attitude of game control. UWSP, with their new tire on the car, went back to work on racing past the Blue Devils. Three minutes into the period, a beautiful slap shot by Cornellier off passes from forwards Logan Fredericks and Nong-Lambert found its way into the Stout goal frame. The early period goal got the Pointers and the fans back into the game. From there, they never looked back. Stevens Point played better paced hockey, never letting the Blue Devils run them down on the defensive side. They would add two more unanswered goals in the period to put the game out of reach. Sophomore forward Tanner Karty whipped in a nicely executed wrist shot from the blue line at 12:10 and freshman Austin Kelly added the assurance goal, shooting the puck like a laser in on a late power play opportunity with just over two and a half minutes left in the game. With the final nail on the coffin of a UW-Stout comeback, the Pointers left the ice tired, but content with the conference victory.

UWSP head coach Chris Brooks, coaching in his sixth season with the team, was satisfied with the victory, but not with the overall play of his team.

“We lost a little bit of momentum, but got a little better there in the third period”

Brooks said. With the victory, Brooks improved his coaching record to 13-2-0 against UW-Stout since taking the head coach position in 2011.

The Pointers outshot the Blue Devils 44-23 and won 48 out of 81 face-offs, but also received eight penalties, adding up to almost 16 minutes of players spending time in the penalty box. In comparison, the Blue Devils only accounted for five penalties, with 10 minutes of total penalty minutes. The amount of penalty time given to the Pointers frustrated Brooks, but he knew that the team would work out of it. “We need to become a little bit more consistent, other guys do it a little better than us” he said.

UWSP hopes to be more consistent as three games remain in the regular season, all against WIAC opponents. The Pointers will host UW-Superior tonight at the KB Willett Arena, then head to the western part of the state next week for a rematch against UW-Stout, then finishing the regular season off in Eau Claire against the Blugolds. With UWEC and UWSP tied in conference standings, the WIAC conference title may come down to the wire. Coach Brooks knows that every game the rest of the way is like a playoff game in the run to the national tournament.

“Our focus is to win every game. We figure we’re going to give ourselves a chance to play more game in New York in the national title game” he said.