



WESTERN COLLEGIATE CLUB HOCKEY ASSOCIATION

2011 WCCHA Tournament Preview

Schwan Super Rink, Blaine, MN

February 11-12, 2011

This season's WCCHA Tournament may prove to be the most competitive to date, with three teams tied by record at the top of the regular season standings and four teams ranked in the top 15 in the region. By virtue of their superior head-to-head goal differential, the Minnesota Golden Gophers take the top seed at the tournament followed closely by the Wisconsin Badgers at number two. St. Cloud State earned the three seed, falling to third due to an inferior head-to-head goal differential with one and two. Rounding out the field is St. Thomas (the only other team to beat every other team in the conference) at number four, WCCHA newcomer Minnesota-Duluth at five, and Minnesota State University at Mankato at #6. Here is a closer look at each team – and why they are all a threat to win it all.

Why they could win..... #6 Minnesota State University – Mankato

A perennial powerhouse, MSU-Mankato faced a rebuilding year this season, having to replace most of its roster with new blood. The growing pains were evident throughout the year, but the team showed recently it is capable of competing with the best the conference has to offer. In their last conference series against St. Thomas, the Mavericks earned their first conference tie of the season – and narrowly missed out on their first win, falling in dramatic fashion to a late St. Thomas comeback on Friday night. Sometimes, it's the unexpected teams that end up surprising everyone – one only has to look back one year to see how an unheralded team coming into the tournament, St. Cloud State, can put together a weekend worth remembering. Given the pedigree of the MSU-Mankato program, opponents should beware.

Why they could win..... #5 University of Minnesota-Duluth

In their first year back after a three year absence, it was expected that UMD would have to adjust to life in the WCCHA. While they slot in at #5, UMD showed strong flashes during the course of the season, which included a sweep of MSU-Mankato and wins over St. Thomas and Michigan Tech. Led by their Team President Levi Goeden, the Bulldogs are capable of quickly putting goals on the Board and are a threat to strike at any time. Coming off a weekend split against Michigan Tech, Duluth can be expected to put their best foot forward in their return to the WCCHA Tournament. With a quarterfinal matchup against St. Thomas, Duluth could repeat the 2010 feat of capturing the Carla Berg Trophy as the #5 seed.



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Why they could win.... #4 University of St. Thomas

St. Thomas is perhaps the best example of “Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.” Over the course of the season, the same story has played out time and time again – lose Friday night, win on Saturday. On their day, St. Thomas can skate with anyone – wins against #3 DePaul and #7 Southern Illinois-Edwardsville (not to mention everyone else in conference) prove this. Entering the tournament slightly under the radar, however, may prove to be the biggest advantage the Tommies have this season. Considered the front runner the past few seasons, the Tommies now get to chance to play spoiler in their quest for their first conference championship. 2010 First Team All-Conference defenseman Collin Quinn and 2010 Second Team All-Conference forward Jonathon Meyers lead the squad into this pivotal weekend. Sitting at #12 in the region, just outside regional qualification, should provide extra motivation for this year’s team.

Why they could win... #3 St. Cloud State University

As of the fourth ranking period, the Huskies sit in the coveted #10 spot in the Central Region – and if rankings ended today – they would be invited to the Regional Tournament as the lone WCCHA representative. Boasting impressive wins over ACHA DI Iowa State and North Dakota State (x3), St. Cloud has not lost a “bad” game all season. Led by the offensive trio of Calvin Richardson, Mark Papko, and Mike Gabbert (all averaging about 2 points a game), SCSU has no problem scoring on any and all competition. Perhaps most importantly, this team has done it before – winning the 2010 WCCHA Tournament last season the hard way, going through three higher seeded teams on their way to the Carla Berg Trophy. A WCCHA crown would ensure the Huskies their first ever trip to Regionals. The Huskies are sure to come out flying Friday night as they look to retain the championship in 2011.

Why they could win... #2 University of Wisconsin

As a debutant in 2010, Wisconsin weathered through two early season sweeps to claim the third seed at the 2010 WCCHA Tournament. Proving a handful, the team made it to the finals only to be stopped by the bulldozer that was SCSU. This season, the team has been active in the rankings, making the top 15 each of the first four ranking periods, peaking at #13. In what is a common theme in the WCCHA, Wisconsin has no problem scoring – six players average over a point a game, led by Senior Cole Holmes who leads all players in the conference with 52 points in 26 games. Playing arguably the toughest non-conference schedule of all the WCCHA teams, the Badgers should be battle tested coming into the tournament. With regional qualification potentially on the line, the team will look to build on their near miss from 2010 and take their first Conference championship this season.



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Why they could win... #1 University of Minnesota-Twin Cities

It should never be tough to make a case for the top seed, and this year's Gophers are no different. Boasting a mix of speed, power, and skill, the University of Minnesota took the top spot at this year's tournament by superior head-to-head goal differential with both Wisconsin and St. Cloud State. The goaltending tandem of Asa Burton and Nik Job allowed the fewest goals in the conference, and the potent attack includes 2010 ACHA Central Region 3rd Team forward Bho Olson and 2010 WCCHA First Team All-Conference defenseman Adam Wagner. Minnesota leads all WCCHA teams with three conference crowns, although they'll be hungry for their first since 2007-2008. Sitting at #13 in the region, capturing the conference crown could mean a first-ever bid to the Regional Tournament. Playing near their home in Minneapolis should only serve to solidify their role as favorites in the tournament.

Can't make it to Blaine but want live, in game updates?

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2011 WCCHA TOURNAMENT BRACKET

The 2011 WCCHA Tournament will take place February 11-12, 2011 and will feature a six team, seeded bracket. The quarterfinal round will be contested Friday night, with the winning teams advancing to the semifinal round on Saturday morning. Saturday night will once again feature a 3rd place game (which returns to the WCCHA Tournament for the first time since 2008), with the Championship immediately following to crown the winner of the Carla Berg Memorial Trophy. All games will be completed by the deadline for rankings consideration. The tournament will once again be held at the Schwan Super Rink in Blaine, Minnesota.

