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Weekend Preview

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UMASS PRIMED TO HOST UNH *Record crowd expected for tonight's game at the Mullins Center*

Just two seasons removed from their second consecutive last place finish in Hockey East, the UMass Minutemen find themselves challenging for first place. Tonight, they go head-to-head with two-time defending champ UNH, the only Hockey East foe that was able to sweep the Minutemen in their breakout season of 2002-03.

The Wildcats capped the sweep with a 5-4 win in the Hockey East semifinals, the last time these two squads met. UMass earned its ticket to the FleetCenter by virtue of a two-game sweep at Maine, and the team hasn't looked back since, running its record to 9-3-2 (5-2-1 in league play). The Minutemen are currently ranked 8th in the nation, while UNH has maintained its hold on a Top Five spot all season long.

Crowds are expected to swell at the Mullins Center tonight for this headline bout. UNH always has a strong following, even on the road, and UMass has continually set progressively higher standards in home attendance as the program has gotten on its feet. Of the top 10 single game attendance records at UMass, three have come this season. The all-time record was broken when Boston College visited on Nov. 14 – a total of 7,113 fans were in attendance.

The Minutemen will have little time to recover after this game as they travel to Harvard for a 5:00 p.m. faceoff on Saturday. The Crimson was narrowly defeated (3-2) at Boston College last night despite being badly outshot (38-18). BC's Tony Voce netted two more goals, lifting his season total to 14, and the first line amassed eight points. BC heads into the Christmas break in first place, but UNH would pass the Eagles with a pair of league wins this weekend. After tonight's game at UMass, UNH hosts Merrimack on Saturday. The Wildcats have dominated that series recently, winning nine straight.

It will be an unusual Friday night off for Hockey East teams before a relatively busy Saturday night. UNH-Merrimack will wrap up the pre-Christmas league schedule, with four non-conference games on the slate, three hosted by Hockey East.

Fresh off Win No. 1 of the season, Northeastern will host Princeton. After a starting 0-4, the Tigers are 4-4 in their last eight, including a 4-2 win at Harvard. An even more intriguing battle will take place at Maine, where the third-ranked Black Bears will host 12th-ranked Dartmouth. The Big Green has just one loss this season, at Boston College.

Niagara University skates in for two games vs. Hockey East, Saturday at Boston University and Sunday at UMass Lowell. Sunday's game features an interesting subplot as the Purple Eagles take on their former coach. Blaise MacDonald has steered the River Hawks to back-to-back wins against his former charges, 7-3 in his 2001-02 Lowell debut and 4-3 last season.

IN THE POLLS

Team	AHCA Poll	USCHO Poll
Boston College	2	2
Maine	3	3
New Hampshire	5	5
Massachusetts	8	8

SCHEDULE UPDATE

The following games were postponed last weekend due to inclement weather and have been rescheduled as listed below:
 Maine at Merrimack Tue., Jan. 6
 UMass at Boston U. Wed. Jan. 7
 BC at Providence Tue., Jan. 20

WORLD JUNIOR CHAMPIONSHIPS

Four current Hockey East players will be competing for Team USA at the World Junior Championships, which start Dec. 26 in Finland. They are Patrick Eaves of Boston College, Stephen Werner of UMass, and Jimmy Howard and Greg Moore of Maine.

ON THE RADIO

The New England Hockey Journal Radio Show will have Hockey East Commissioner Joe Bertagna as its guest this Saturday from 11:20 to 11:50 a.m. Listeners can catch the show at 1510 AM (or online at 1510thezone.com) and can call in to talk to Bertagna on the air at (866) 337-9663.

RESULTS / SCHEDULE

Wednesday, December 10
 at Boston College 3, Harvard 2

Thursday, December 11
 New Hampshire at Massachusetts *

Saturday, December 13
 Merrimack at New Hampshire (NHPTV) *
 Massachusetts at Harvard (5pm)
 Princeton at Northeastern
 Dartmouth at Maine (WABI)
 Niagara at Boston University

Sunday, December 14
 Niagara at UMass Lowell (4pm)

* Hockey East game
 Games start at 7pm unless indicated
 All times Eastern

2003-04 STANDINGS

Team	GP	W	L	T	Pts	Overall	HE Offense	HE Defense
Boston College	8	6	0	2	14	11-2-3	4.12 GPG	2.00 GAPG
Maine	9	6	2	1	13	11-2-1	3.11 GPG	2.11 GAPG
Massachusetts	8	5	2	1	11	9-3-2	2.62 GPG	2.50 GAPG
New Hampshire	8	5	2	1	11	10-4-1	4.00 GPG	2.75 GAPG
UMass Lowell	8	4	3	1	9	7-6-3	3.00 GPG	2.88 GAPG
Boston University	8	2	4	2	6	4-5-4	2.62 GPG	3.00 GAPG
Providence	9	2	5	2	6	6-5-3	3.22 GPG	3.44 GAPG
Merrimack	10	1	6	3	5	4-10-3	1.70 GPG	3.30 GAPG
Northeastern	8	0	7	1	1	1-9-2	2.00 GPG	4.12 GAPG