



Weekend Preview

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PLAYOFF FEVER HITS AS MAINE VISITS UNH *Feisty Lowell still looking to make a move for home ice*

With only a month left to play in the regular season, the Hockey East playoff picture is slowly coming into focus. And while it is far away from reaching full resolution, there are enough shapes and shadows to get a reasonable idea of who will be at home and who will be on the road once the tournament begins.

A four-team pack at the top of the standings seems relatively comfortable with an eight-point advantage over the rest of the field. But UMass Lowell's midseason surge and two games-in-hand means the River Hawks still have a good chance to challenge. Even if they are on the road in the Hockey East quarterfinals, this is definitely the one team that none of the four at the top want to face right now. UNH found that out the hard way last week, surrendering 7-0 in

the first game of a weekend set before salvaging a split with an 8-3 win the following night.

This weekend, the River Hawks will storm Agganis Arena to take on the Terriers, who will be without injured goaltender John Curry. If UML wins that one, and is also able to defeat visiting Providence on Saturday, the River Hawks will be almost within striking distance of BU, and perhaps Maine as well as the Black Bears face a tough two-game test at UNH.

Maine brings to the table an 11-game undefeated streak in league play, a run led by the heroics of Jimmy Howard. Last year's record-setting stopper turned into his old self in the month of January, posting a 1.24 goals-against-average and .924 save percentage en route to a 4-0-3 record. The immovable object looks to stop the irresistible force in a classic clash this weekend as Howard is pitted against a UNH offense that has poured in eight goals in three of the last six games, and six goals in one other. The shutout loss at Lowell Friday was quite an anomaly, and the nation's top-ranked power play got right back on track Saturday, converting six times to tie a Hockey East record. Both games of this weekend's series will be televised – Friday on CSTV and Saturday on NHPTV.

NESN's Friday Night Ice broadcast brings viewers to Providence, where the Friars will put their best foot forward to fight off the first-place BC Eagles. Of PC's seven points in league play this season, two have come vs. Boston College, a 2-2 tie on Nov. 19 and a 1-1 tie on Dec. 4. The latter was particularly frustrating for the

host Eagles, who opened a shooting gallery with 61 shots on PC netminder David Cacciola, only to see him calmly turned aside all but one to preserve another point for Providence.

The Minutemen are looking at a good opportunity to rebound from a winless January this weekend, but will have to do so on the road, at Northeastern and Merrimack. But the feisty Huskies have no intention of rolling over for UMass, nor does Merrimack, who is nearing the critical mark in the race for the playoffs.

RANKINGS

TEAM	PWR	USAT	USCHO
Boston College	1	1	1
New Hampshire	9	7	7
UMass Lowell	9	12	12
Boston University	12	13	14
Maine	17	15	15
Northeastern	22	-	-

WEEKEND SCHEDULE

Thursday, February 3

Massachusetts at Northeastern *

Friday, February 4

Boston College at Providence (NESN) *

UMass Lowell at Boston University *

Maine at New Hampshire (8pm - CSTV) *

Saturday, February 5

Massachusetts at Merrimack *

Providence at UMass Lowell *

Maine at New Hampshire (NHPTV) *

* Hockey East game

Games start at 7pm unless indicated.

All times Eastern



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HOCKEY EAST STANDINGS

Team	GP	W	L	T	Pts	Overall	HE Offense	HE Defense
Boston College	16	11	1	4	26	17-3-4	3.25 GPG	1.56 GAPG
Boston University	16	11	4	1	23	15-10-1	3.31 GPG	2.31 GAPG
New Hampshire	14	10	2	2	22	17-6-3	3.64 GPG	2.50 GAPG
Maine	16	9	3	4	22	14-8-6	3.19 GPG	1.88 GAPG
UMass Lowell	14	6	6	2	14	15-6-3	3.43 GPG	3.14 GAPG
Northeastern	16	5	8	3	13	9-13-4	2.62 GPG	2.56 GAPG
Massachusetts	16	4	10	2	10	10-15-2	2.25 GPG	4.06 GAPG
Providence	15	2	10	3	7	7-15-3	2.13 GPG	3.27 GAPG
Merrimack	17	1	15	1	3	8-19-2	1.82 GPG	4.12 GAPG

COMMISSIONERS' CUP SERIES

HOCKEY COMMISSIONERS' ASSOCIATION

For immediate release:

Thursday, February 3, 2005

FIRST COMMISSIONERS' CUP SERIES COMES TO AN END WCHA and CCHA Claim Final Wins in Inaugural Event

The final two games of the first ever Commissioners' Cup Series went to the WCHA and CCHA, respectively, but the bragging rights for the competition still belong to the ECAC Hockey League, who clinched the inaugural title back on January 12. The Commissioners' Cup will be unveiled and presented to the ECACHL during their championship tournament in Albany next month.

"We are very happy with the interest this series has drawn right from the start," said Hockey East Commissioner Joe Bertagna, who put together the inaugural 21-game schedule. "Hopefully, we can come back in Year Two with a more ambitious slate of games."

Here is a look at the final two games of the series:

January 21: Wisconsin 2, Notre Dame 0, at Notre Dame: The Badgers got goals at 5:30 of both the second and third periods from Robbie Earl and Ryan MacMurchy, respectively, and rode the 19-save shutout goaltending of Brian Elliott to put this road win away. Wisconsin outshot its hosts 10-3 in the final period to thwart any comeback hopes for the Irish.

January 29: Nebraska-Omaha 4, Wayne State 2, at UNO: The home crowd of 7,116 couldn't relax until Alex Nikiforuk's empty-net goal at 19:59 ended all suspense. Four different players scored for UNO who tested Wayne State's Matt Kelly all night. Kelly, who finished with 35 saves, was particularly sharp in the first period when UNO outshot WSU by 15-8.

FINAL COMMISSIONERS' CUP STANDINGS

Conference	Games Played	Won	Lost	Tied	Points
ECAC Hockey League	7	6	1	0	12
CCHA	7	3	2	2	8
Hockey East	7	4	3	0	8
WCHA	7	2	3	2	7
College Hockey America	7	3	4	0	6
Atlantic Hockey	7	1	6	0	2

Series Results

Saturday, October 23: Ferris State 7, at Bemidji State 2; Rensselaer 5, at Army 1; Northeastern 4, at Colgate 3 OT; at Merrimack 5, Wayne State 4; **Friday, October 29:** at Boston College 5, North Dakota 3; at St. Lawrence 6, Miami 4; **Thursday, November 4:** Northern Michigan 6, at Michigan Tech 6 - OT; **Friday, November 12:** at Ferris State 5, UConn 3; Saturday, November 20: Brown 2, at Minnesota-Duluth 1; **Friday, November 26:** Air Force 3, Sacred Heart 2 (at RPI); **Saturday, November 27:** at Denver 6, Massachusetts 1; **Saturday, December 11:** at Harvard 4, Maine 1; Robert Morris 5, at Quinnipiac 2; **Monday, January 3:** Boston University 2, Minnesota 1; **Saturday, January 8:** Canisius 5, at Niagara, 2; **Wednesday, January 12:** Dartmouth 9, New Hampshire 8 at Manchester, NH; **Friday, January 21:** Wisconsin 2, at Notre Dame 0; **Saturday, January 29:** at Nebraska-Omaha 4, Wayne State 2.

Superlatives:

GOALS: Nathan Oystriick, NMU, 3 v. MTU, 11/4, 6-6 T-OT; Jarrett Sampson, Dartmouth, 3 v. UNH, 1/12, 9-8 W
ASSISTS: Colin Murphy, MTU, 5 v. NMU, 11/4, 6-6 T-OT; Matt Byrnes, Merrimack, 4 v. Wayne State, 10/23, 5-4 W
SAVES: Adam D'Alba, Brown, 44 at Minnesota-Duluth (1 GA), 11/20, 1-0 W

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