



Weekend Preview

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: JANUARY 12, 2006

SPOTLIGHT FOCUSES ON MAINE AT BU

Stakes getting higher as league schedule passes midway point

Nearing the midway point of the new 27-game league schedule, it's gut-check time for many Hockey East teams, figuring out where they're most likely to fit into (or out of) the Hockey East postseason. Preseason favorite Boston College seems on the right track to proving prognosticators correct. Head-to-head against Providence last Saturday with first place on the line, the Eagles scored a 4-1 win.

Merrimack College is headed in the opposite direction, but still making progress from a very frustrating 2004-05 season. A 1-0 triumph over UNH on Nov. 29 broke the Warriors out of a year-long slump, and they subsequently tacked on back-to-back ties vs. Northeastern to make it a three-game run in league play. They'll have their hands full with two games vs. BC this weekend, especially Friday at Conte Forum, where the Eagles are unbeaten in their last 15 games vs. the Warriors and have won five straight games overall.

Merrimack's win vs. UNH was just one of three Hockey East losses suffered by the Wild-

cats this season, who are threatening first place despite an uncharacteristic 2-4-1 non-league record headed into this week. The Wildcats made it 3-4-1 with a 45-save showing by Jeff Pietrasiak last night at Yale and hope to even it up Saturday vs. Dartmouth. Both that game and the Northeastern-Vermont game will proceed with scheduled 7:00 p.m. face-offs, but the other two Saturday night games have switched to 5:00 p.m. face-offs to allow fans to also enjoy the Patriots' playoff game.

Much of this weekend's attention will be focused on the marquee Maine at Boston University series. Both games will be televised by NESN. Earlier this season, BU forced a grinding halt to a seven-game win streak by the Black Bears, nipping Maine 2-1 at Alford Arena on Nov. 6. Last year, it was a dead-even split (1-1-1) with Maine outscoring BU just 6-5 over the three-game set. The all-time series has taken some wild twists and turns, however, as evidenced by a recent seven-game span during which two games featured just one goal scored while two other games featured 10 or more goals scored. Undoubtedly, this is always one of the most anticipated series of the year.

The same can be said for the UMass vs. UMass Lowell series, considering the clout of their natural state school rivalry. On Friday, they'll meet for the first time this season, and there's plenty riding on it. Both are expected

to have to fight for a playoff spot. One team that won't have to fight this year is Providence, hosting Lowell on Sunday. The surprise team of 2005-06 has a strong 9-3-1 record in league play and could easily challenge for the league title. In just its first year in Hockey East, the University of Vermont could do that as well with a hot streak to end the season. The Catamounts have been relatively tame in league play but a 13-5-2 overall record and a No. 6 overall ranking suggest they are legitimate contenders. A home sweep against Northeastern could secure that suggestion as fact, but the never-say-die Huskies will hardly be an easy mark for their new Hockey East sibling.

The weekly alumni news section takes us to New Jersey, where former Boston College great Brian Gionta is leading the NHL's Devils with 23 goals and 44 points in 43 games, on pace to rank among the best NHL seasons ever recorded by a Hockey East alum.

RANKINGS

Team	USAT	USCHO
Boston College	4	4
Vermont	6	6
Maine	7	9
New Hampshire	11	12
Providence	12	11
Boston University	ORV	ORV

ORV – others receiving votes

RESULTS / SCHEDULE

Wednesday, January 11
 New Hampshire 5, at Yale 1

Friday, January 13
 Maine at Boston University (NESN) *
 Merrimack at Boston College *
 Massachusetts at UMass Lowell *
 Northeastern at Vermont *

Saturday, January 14
 Maine at Boston University (5pm - NESN) *
 Boston College at Merrimack (5pm - CN8) *
 Northeastern at Vermont (Adelphia) *
 UNH vs. Dartmouth (at Manchester, NH)

Sunday, January 15
 UMass Lowell at Providence *

* Hockey East game
 Games start at 7pm EST unless indicated.

HOCKEY EAST STANDINGS

Team	GP	W	L	T	Pts	Overall	HE Offense	HE Defense
Boston College	13	10	2	1	21	12-4-2	3.15 GPG	1.77 GAPG
Providence	13	9	3	1	19	12-7-1	3.15 GPG	1.92 GAPG
New Hampshire	14	8	3	3	19	11-7-4	3.00 GPG	2.21 GAPG
Maine	11	7	4	0	14	14-6-0	3.55 GPG	1.82 GAPG
Boston University	13	6	6	1	13	8-8-2	2.77 GPG	2.69 GAPG
Vermont	11	5	4	2	12	13-5-2	2.82 GPG	2.09 GAPG
Massachusetts	12	5	7	0	10	9-11-0	2.08 GPG	2.83 GAPG
UMass Lowell	12	3	9	0	6	6-13-0	2.17 GPG	4.08 GAPG
Northeastern	13	1	8	4	6	1-13-4	2.23 GPG	3.46 GAPG
Merrimack	12	1	9	2	4	4-13-2	1.33 GPG	3.42 GAPG