



Weekend Preview

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FOUR TEAMS GO HEAD-TO-HEAD FOR HOME ICE *Hot BC and BU squads eye Beanpot on horizon*

The expanded 27-game league schedule means there's even more hockey to be played down the stretch, but already the playoff berths are starting to take shape.

Last Friday's 4-3 BU win at first place Boston College suddenly challenged the Eagles' regular season title hopes. With seven straight victories, all in league play, Boston University has turned up the heat. Both teams are on the road Friday (BC at UMass and BU at Lowell) and then have two days off before the Beanpot. BU's first-round match against Harvard is particularly compelling as it could dramatically affect the NCAA tournament selections in mid-March.

But Boston University can scarcely be called comfortable in second place. Providence is just two points back with two games in hand along with two wins and a tie vs. the Terriers this season. The Friars host Vermont twice this weekend, pitting two teams that have enjoyed different fortunes. Providence raced out to a 9-2-1 start in league play this season

(with one of those losses coming at Vermont) but lost their first four non-league games. Conversely, Vermont exploded out of the gate with six straight non-conference wins, but has fought to maintain a .500 record against its new Hockey East brethren. UVM's victory over Providence (6-2 on Nov. 11) can be counted as one of its biggest of the season.

Separated by just five points, PC and UVM represent the bookends of a group of four teams that will likely battle for home ice advantage in the Hockey East playoffs down the stretch. Maine and UNH are the other two teams, and also go head-to-head Friday and Saturday, making this a marquee weekend in terms of Hockey East seedings and NCAA tournament at-large berths. All four teams have played exactly 17 league games so far.

The UNH-Maine set revitalizes one of the top two rivalries in the league (BC-BU being the other). If last Friday's BC-BU game is any indication of what to expect this weekend from Maine and UNH, the price of admission would be a paltry sum to pay for such entertainment. Unfortunately, Friday's game will feature a short-staffed UNH squad, as seven regular players have been suspended for one game for violation of team rules. (Balancing the bar, however, is the fact that a few of Maine's regulars are still absent due to injury.) All seven of the suspended Wildcats are expected back in uniform for Saturday's rematch.

Originally slated to be a title contender this year, UMass Lowell has had to settle for an up-and-down season that has just started to gain momentum. The River Hawks recently put together a five-game undefeated streak in league play and narrowly missed a win over first-place Boston College last Saturday, so there's no doubt they can compete. They'll look to end BU's run on Friday and then host state rival UMass on Saturday. They split the first two games played vs. BU this year and have won both meetings vs. UMass.

Like its Beanpot brethren, Northeastern will have just one game this weekend, visiting Merrimack. Both teams still have an outside chance at qualifying for the Hockey East post-season, but it's looking as though each will be without a chair when the music stops in March.

On the alumni front, the Boston Bruins have done it again, suiting up former Black Bear Ben Guite for his NHL debut last Monday. The Bruins have now dressed alumni of seven of the 10 Hockey East squads this season.

RANKINGS

TEAM	USAT	USCHO	PWR
Boston College	3	4	4
Maine	8	12	21
Providence	9	9	8
Boston University	10	8	4
Vermont	11	13	24
New Hampshire	15	16	19

WEEKEND SCHEDULE

Friday, February 3

Boston College at Massachusetts (NESN) *
 Boston University at UMass Lowell *
 Northeastern at Merrimack *
 Vermont at Providence *
 New Hampshire at Maine (CSTV - 8pm) *

Saturday, February 4

New Hampshire at Maine (WABI / WPFO) *
 Massachusetts at UMass Lowell *
 Vermont at Providence *

Monday, February 6

Beanpot Tournament at Boston, MA (NESN)
 Northeastern vs. Boston College (5pm)
 Harvard vs. Boston University (8pm)

* 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	19	15	3	1	31	17-5-2	3.16 GPG	1.63 GAPG
Boston University	19	12	6	1	25	14-8-2	3.21 GPG	2.53 GAPG
Providence	17	11	5	1	23	14-9-1	3.12 GPG	2.06 GAPG
New Hampshire	17	9	5	3	21	13-9-4	2.88 GPG	2.29 GAPG
Maine	17	10	7	0	20	17-9-0	3.41 GPG	2.24 GAPG
Vermont	17	8	7	2	18	16-8-2	2.53 GPG	2.06 GAPG
UMass Lowell	18	7	10	1	15	10-14-1	2.56 GPG	3.56 GAPG
Massachusetts	17	6	11	0	12	9-15-0	2.06 GPG	3.06 GAPG
Northeastern	19	1	13	5	7	1-18-5	1.89 GPG	3.32 GAPG
Merrimack	18	2	14	2	6	5-18-2	1.50 GPG	3.56 GAPG