



Sports

Mavericks, Badgers on similar path

Two of nation's hottest teams
battle for fourth in WCHA

By Shane Frederick
Free Press Staff Writer



MSU goalie Mike Zacharias stopped 58 of 60 shots during the Mavericks' first series against Wisconsin.

If the Minnesota State men's hockey team looks in the mirror, it just might see red.

As in Wisconsin.

This weekend, the 13th-ranked Mavericks are virtually seeing their own reflection as they take on the No. 10 Badgers at the Kohl Center in Madison, Wis.

Two of the hottest teams in the country, MSU and Wisconsin are tied for fourth place in the Western Collegiate Hockey Association standings with identical league records. Each team has scored 54 goals in conference play, while Minnesota State has allowed 59 and Wisconsin has given up 51. Overall, the Badgers and Mavericks sit fifth and sixth, respectively, in the WCHA in both goals-for and goals-against.

Then there are the all-important Pairwise rank-

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MSU: Badgers have one loss in last nine games

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ings, where Minnesota State is in a three-way tie for eighth, while Wisconsin is in a three-way tie for 11th.

"We're very similar teams," MSU coach Troy Jutting, said. "That's why I say it's going to come down to whoever gets the bounces, whoever buries the opportunities they get ... because I don't think there are going to be a lot of them."

Mavericks goaltender Mike Zacharias agreed, saying there wasn't much that

separated the teams two months ago in Mankato when he got a 3-1 win and a 1-1 tie.

"We play similar styles," Zacharias said. "We're both defensive teams."

Zacharias stopped 58 of 60 shots in that first meeting. He was bolstered by a pair of power-play goals in the win, then escaped with the tie after Kyle Turris, the Badgers' talented rookie, clanked the puck off the crossbar.

"That was on a breakaway, too," Zacharias said. "Some nights you get the bounces,

and, luckily for me that weekend, I got those bounces."

Zacharias has played in four games against Wisconsin in his career and is 2-1-1 with the Mavericks outscoring the Badgers 8-7.

"That seems to be the way it's been when we've played Wisconsin, ever since we started playing them," said Jutting, who has a 9-12-3 career mark against the Badgers, including a series split last season in Madison.

When the season began, few would have predicted this series would be so key in

the race for a home-ice position in the first round of the WCHA playoffs.

The Badgers were picked to finish fifth by the league's coaches and the Mavericks were picked ninth.

Wisconsin is 5-1-3 in its last nine games, but Minnesota State has the nation's longest current winning streak with six consecutive victories.

"We were definitely hoping for this," Zacharias said. "We wanted to give ourselves a chance. But I never expected a run like this."