

College hockey gameday



Jerad Stewart



Phil Cook

Minnesota State vs. RIT

The Mavericks (9-9-2) begin the new year by playing an old Division II-III rival, Rochester Institute of Technology. The Tigers (9-6-1), a member of the Atlantic Hockey conference are in their fifth season of Division I hockey. Back in their small-school days in the 1980s, they took three of four games from MSU. These will be the final nonconference games of the season for the Mavericks, who are 4-1-1 outside the WCHA.

The 5-hole

Five things to know about the series:

1. Second-half shakeup: Coming off its winter break, Minnesota State will kick off the second half of the season tonight. Coach Troy Jutting is mixing up his lines a bit as the Mavericks resolve to improve their goal scoring over the stretch run. The Mavericks are averaging 2.75 goals per game while allowing 2.70. Tonight's top line will include players who have accumulated 18 goals — seniors Geoff Irwin and Jerad Stewart and freshman Eriah Hayes. Stewart is MSU's top goal scorer with nine goals.

2. Cooking with Phil: One area Jutting's not changing around is goaltending. Once again, freshman Phil Cook will get the Friday-night start. He has a win and a tie in the Mavericks' last two Friday games and has allowed one goal in each with a .965 save percentage. Sophomore Austin Lee (.913, 2.63) has still seen the bulk of the action this season, going 7-6-0 in 13 games.

3. Fight club: Minnesota State will be without sophomore forward Tyler Thompson tonight after Thompson got a five-minute major penalty and a game disqualification for fighting during the Mavericks' last game at Nebraska-Omaha. Thompson has one goal and one assist in 16 games but had been playing on the Mavericks' No. 1 line for the last month. An injury may keep Thompson out of the lineup on Saturday.

4. Tech support: RIT is led by coach Wayne Wilson, who is in his 11th season with the program. He was in charge as the school transitioned from Division II-III to Division I four years ago. Two seasons ago, the Tigers scored one of their biggest victories, a 4-3 upset of Minnesota during the first round of the Gophers' holiday tournament. RIT currently has the 10th-best defense in the country (2.31 goals per game).

5. Scouting the Tigers: In its last game, on Dec. 12, RIT lost to Niagara 3-2, ending what had been a national-best 10-game unbeaten streak. That stretch included eight consecutive victories. Junior Andrew Favot (5-13—18) leads the Tigers in scoring, followed by senior defenseman Dan Ringwald (5-9—14) and sophomore Cameron Burt (5-9—14). Senior Jared DeMichiel (.916, 2.21) has seen most of the action in goal.

Around the rinks

MSU women: As if the WCHA schedule isn't tough enough, the Mavericks (4-8-4) have to play No. 1-ranked Mercyhurst on Saturday at St. Cloud State's Easton Holiday Showcase. Mercyhurst (15-1-1) is unbeaten in its last nine games and is averaging a national-best 4.59 goals per game. The Mavericks have had trouble scoring, netting just 2.12 goals per game. MSU will play Providence on Sunday.

This weekend's series

7:37 p.m. today and 7:07 p.m., Verizon Wireless Center
Radio: KTOE 1420 AM
TV: None
Live blog:
www.mankatofreepress.com/hockeyblog