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MTU'S KERO AND PIETILA, MSU'S PALMQUIST AND BSU'S BITZER NAMED WCHA PLAYERS OF THE WEEK FOR GAMES OF JAN. 30-31, 2015

EDINA, Minn. – Feb. 3, 2015 – Career milestones for veteran leaders and the continued stellar play of a freshman goaltender highlight the men's Western Collegiate Hockey Association (WCHA) Players of the Week for games of Jan. 30-31, 2015. The honorees are: Michigan Tech senior forwards **Tanner Kero** and **Blake Pietila** (Co-Offensive Players of the Week), Minnesota State senior defenseman **Zach Palmquist** (Defensive Player of the Week) and Bemidji State freshman goaltender **Michael Bitzer** (Rookie of the Week).

WCHA Co-Offensive Players of the Week

Tanner Kero, Sr., F (Hancock, Mich.) and Blake Pietila, Sr., F (Brighton, Mich.) – Michigan Tech

Michigan Tech senior co-captains Tanner Kero and Blake Pietila each had five points – while both also recorded their 100th collegiate point – to lead the Huskies in a WCHA series sweep of Alabama Huntsville. After recording an assist in Friday's win, Kero reached the career century mark with a third-period helper Saturday – part of a four-point game that included two goals and two assists. Pietila scored a goal and had an assist in Michigan Tech's 5-0 win Friday, and then tallied three helpers on Saturday, including a third-period assist for his 100th career point. Kero now ranks sixth in the country and leads the WCHA with 35 points (13 goals, 22 assists), while Pietila – a New Jersey Devils draft choice – has 24 points (11 goals, 13 assists) for the fifth-ranked Huskies.

Also nominated: Bryce Gervais, Jr., F, Minnesota State; Brendan Harms, So., F, Bemidji State; Sali Salminen, So., F, Northern Michigan; Kyle Schempp, So., F, Ferris State

WCHA Defensive Player of the Week

Zach Palmquist, Sr., D, Minnesota State (So. St. Paul, Minn.)

Palmquist excelled on both ends of the ice to lead top-ranked Minnesota State to a WCHA series sweep over visiting Ferris State. The senior from So. St. Paul, Minn. assisted on Matt Leitner's power-play goal and an even strength tally by Bryce Gervais during Friday's 5-1 win, before assisting on the game-winning, power-play strike from Gervais in a 5-1 triumph Saturday. Palmquist also helped anchor a Mavericks defense that held Ferris State to just 40 shots and two goals. Palmquist now ranks third among all defensemen in Minnesota State's D-I history with 89 career points (23 goals, 66 assists).

Also nominated: Jamie Phillips, Jr., G, Michigan Tech; Matt Prapavessis, Sr., D, Bemidji State

WCHA Rookie of the Week

Michael Bitzer, G, Bemidji State (Moorhead, Minn.)

Bitzer helped Bemidji State run its unbeaten streak to four games – all against top-10 opponents – and capture three of four points against Bowling Green in a WCHA series. The freshman from Moorhead, Minn. recorded 41 stops and a .911 save percentage, held the Falcons scoreless in seven power-play opportunities and posted a 1.93 goals against average on the weekend. Bitzer recorded 18 saves in Friday night's 5-2 victory, before logging 23 stops in 64:31 as Bemidji State rallied from a 2-0 deficit to earn a 2-2 tie Saturday.

Also nominated: Joel L'Esperance, F, Michigan Tech; Nolan Valleau, D, Bowling Green

About Western Collegiate Hockey Association (WCHA)

The Western Collegiate Hockey Association, among the most historic, tradition-rich and successful conferences in all of collegiate athletics, proudly marks its 63rd season of men's competition in 2014-15. Covering five time zones and more than 4,200 miles, the 10-team Division 1 conference consists of the University of Alabama in Huntsville (Chargers), the University of Alaska Anchorage (Seawolves), the University of Alaska (Nanooks), Bemidji State University (Beavers), Bowling Green State University (Falcons), Ferris State University (Bulldogs), Lake Superior State University (Lakers), Michigan Technological University (Huskies), Minnesota State University (Mavericks) and Northern Michigan University (Wildcats).

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