



PRESS RELEASE



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SIXTH-SEEDED NORTHERN MICHIGAN STUNS TOP SEED MINNESOTA STATE, 5-1, TO OPEN WCHA CHAMPIONSHIP

Four-goal second period outburst sends Wildcats to Saturday's championship game

MANKATO, Minn. – March 19, 2021 – WCHA Scoring Champion **André Ghanous** scored twice and freshman **Rico DiMatteo** stopped 28 shots to lead No. 6 seed Northern Michigan to a 5-1 win over top-seeded Minnesota State in the opening semifinal of the WCHA Championship on Friday at the Mayo Clinic Health System Event Center in Mankato, Minn.

Northern Michigan will meet the winner of Friday's second semifinal between No. 2 seed Lake Superior State and No. 4 seed Bemidji State in the WCHA Championship Game on Saturday. The title game appearance will be the first for the Wildcats since 2018 and their sixth all-time (1989, 1991, 1992, 1993, 2018). NMU will be playing for their fourth WCHA postseason championship (1989, 1991, 1992).

"Going into this weekend we knew we had a tall task ahead of us," Northern Michigan head coach **Grant Potulny** said following the game. "Playing one of the best teams in the country, if not the best, in their home building we knew we had to play a flawless game. I thought from the beginning of the game right to the end, starting with our leadership, we had discipline in our structure, we had discipline individually in staying out of the penalty box and I thought our goalie was outstanding. There were some moments when the game was still up for grabs, and even in the third when they had their big push, that's a team that can score in bunches, and I thought Rico did a really good job making some really timely saves."

Northern Michigan struck first as Ghanous pulled the puck out of a scramble in front of the Minnesota State net and fired his eighth goal of the season over the shoulder of WCHA Goaltending Champion **Dryden McKay** for 1-0 lead just 1:16 into the contest. The Wildcats nearly added a second goal in the final seconds of the frame on a point-blank shot from Nardi just to the left of the MSU net, but McKay was able to turn it away with a pad save as time ran out on the period.

The second period was a repeat of the first with NMU finding the back of the net early again as **Alex Frye** backhanded in a blocked shot from the slot just 24 seconds into the period to extend the Wildcat lead to 2-0. Northern upped the lead to 3-0 midway through the period when a Nardi wrist shot from just inside the blueline made it over McKay's shoulder at 8:53 of the period.

The lead grew to 4-0 a little over two minutes later when **AJ Vanderbeck** found the back of the net off of a feed from Frye on a 2-on-1 at 11:05. **Ryan Edquist** replaced McKay in net following the goal but the NMU onslaught continued as Ghanous fired his second goal of the game at 12:57 for a 5-0 lead.

Minnesota State got on the scoreboard early in the third period on a power-play goal from **Reggie Lutz** at 2:49 of the period following a slashing call on NMU's **David Keefer**.

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But the Mavericks were unable to close the gap further as DiMatteo turned away 28-of-29 MSU shots to earn the win.

Nardi (1g-2a/3pts) and Ghantous (2g-0a/2pts) were the scoring leaders for NMU on Friday, combining for five points on three goals and a pair of assists in the victory. Vanderbeck, Frye and **Brandon Schultz** each finished with a pair of points in the contest.

One of the nation's top shot-blocking teams, Northern Michigan blocked 26 shots, including a team-high seven by **Michael Van Unen** and three from **Ben Newhouse**, the nation's No. 2 and No. 1 blocks leaders, respectively.

2021 WCHA Postseason Tournament, presented by SPIRE Credit Union

The WCHA will crown a playoff champion at the WCHA Postseason Tournament, presented by [SPIRE Credit Union](#). The tournament winner will receive an automatic bid to the 2021 NCAA Division I Men's Ice Hockey Championship.

Jeff Sauer WCHA Championship Trophy, presented by Anderson's Pure Maple Syrup

The winner of the 2021 WCHA Postseason tournament will once again receive the Jeff Sauer WCHA Championship Trophy, presented by [Anderson's Pure Maple Syrup](#).

About the Western Collegiate Hockey Association Men's League

The Western Collegiate Hockey Association, among the most historic, tradition-rich and successful conferences in all of collegiate athletics, is marking its 69th season of men's competition in 2020-21. The 10-team NCAA Division I 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). For more information, visit wcha.com.

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