2001-02 PREVIEW

Ask Ferris State University head coach Bob Daniels about the prognosis for the 2001-02 Bulldog hockey team and the answer could likely be one of uncertainty. “I’m hesitant to put a label on this team or list expectations due to the fact that we have a large turnover in personnel,” said Daniels, who lost eight letterwinners from last season’s squad. “We’re just going to see how the guys fit in together before we start determining what our goals for the season will be.”

Ferris State will feature a mixture of experience and youth as 17 letterwinners return from last season’s 13-20-5 team, which placed eighth in the Central Collegiate Hockey Association (CCHA) standings with a 9-15-4 league record. Among the group are 12 upperclassmen who combined for 54.2% of the squad’s total points production in 2000-01. Moreover, six of the team’s top nine scoring leaders from a season ago are back in the fold.

With a talented group of veterans and newcomers on the offensive end, Ferris hopes to improve upon last season’s 2.39 goals per game average.

“We’re going to explore opportunities of creating more offense,” said Daniels, FSU’s all-time winningest coach. “However, at no time do I want us to veer from our philosophy of playing strong team defense.”

Defensively, the team’s strength lies on the blue-line where the Bulldogs have considerable depth with a number of capable defensemen on the roster. That’s vital to Ferris’ success this season considering the goaltending position presents numerous questions to be answered. The departure of Phil Osaer, FSU’s 2000-01 Most Valuable Player, is a loss which Daniels knows the Bulldogs will even-ually need to overcome. The question is how soon it will be before someone can step into the crease and play at a level on par with the CCHA’s top goal-tenders. A pair of freshmen are expected to contend for the starting duties and are among a nine-member group of first-year players.

“There’s a bit of an unknown from the standpoint we have the goaltending situation which needs to be answered,” stated Daniels. “I’m excited about the freshmen we have coming in and I believe they will have a positive impact throughout their four years.”

GOALTENDING

RETURNING: 1; LOST: 2; NEWCOMERS: 2

Following the 2000-01 season, Ferris State’s goaltending situation appeared to be in fine shape with the expected return of seniors-to-be and 2000-01 CCHA Second-Team goalie Phil Osaer, the school’s all-time leader in goals against average (2.18) and save percentage (.916). But those plans changed late this summer as a result of Osaer’s signing with the National Hockey League’s St. Louis Blue. Unfortunately, those duties now rest upon the shoulders of three netminders who haven’t played a minute in a collegiate contest. Daniels will now have to rely upon a pair of freshmen, Mike Brown and John DeCaro, to step in and shoulder the burden.

“Losing someone like Osaer hurts, but I’m pleased with the two freshmen we’ve brought in,” said Daniels. “Both have good size and athleticism, were successful at the junior level and possess the competitive personalities to excel. They also have an opportunity to step in and play immediately, which isn’t afforded to many first-year players.”

Brown compiled a 20-12-3 record to go with a .937 save percentage and a .894 save percentage in 35 appearances for the Crowsnest Pass Timberwolves last season. DeCaro was 16-19-4 while posting a 3.59 goals against average and a .888 save percentage in 43 contests a year ago as a member of the Langley Hornets.

Matt Swanson returns for his junior campaign and could challenge for the Ft. McMurray Oil Barons last winter, should strengthen the blueline.

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