

FERRIS STATE HOCKEY

2008-09 SEASON PREVIEW

Confidence breeds success.

The Ferris State University men's ice hockey team believes the statement above is intertwined as the Bulldogs lace their skates up for what could be an exciting and highly-successful 2008-09 season.

"Everyone in our program is approaching this season with a good deal of confidence," said FSU head coach Bob Daniels, who starts his 17th year at Ferris State this season. "The success we experienced in the second half of last season with victories over nationally-ranked teams only added to our level of confidence.

With the dawn of a new season, the prospects for a successful campaign in 2008-09 appear encouraging for the Ferris State University men's ice hockey team.

After all, the numbers bode well in the Bulldogs' favor as 19 letterwinners return from the program's most successful season since the historic 2002-03 campaign, when Ferris State not only won the Central Collegiate Hockey Association (CCHA) Regular-Season Championship but finished among the nation's top eight teams in its first-ever NCAA Division I Tournament appearance.

Indeed, Ferris State placed fifth in the final 2007-08 CCHA standings with a 12-12-4 league mark while compiling an 18-16-5 overall record.

Ferris State certainly has reasons to be optimistic as 14 of their 15 points leaders from a season ago are back. Furthermore, the Bulldogs return 88.9% (97-109) of their goal-scoring production and 80.6% (224-278) of the squad's total points output as well.

"We have a strong nucleus of returning players at forward, on defense, and in goal," said Daniels. "We, as a coaching staff, also have a high level of confidence in the direction which our captains and seniors are taking the program.

"The combination of experience and leadership has raised our expectations this season to have an increased measure of success both in the CCHA and on a national scale," added Daniels, the all-time winningest coach in the FSU program's history.

"The work ethic on this season's squad is tremendous," Daniels said. "The players turned in a great offseason in regards to conditioning, which shows their level of commitment.

"When you combine their experience, leadership, and commitment with a talented freshmen class, I believe we have an opportunity to do something special this season," added Daniels.

While the Bulldog skaters made strides in the offseason, the University demonstrated its commitment to the program by completing a 3.3 million dollar renovation project to the Ewingleben Ice Arena this summer. New ice sheets slabs along with dasher boards, seamless glass, and improved lighting were just some of the many improvements.

"We have a lot to be excited about and can't wait to get going," said Daniels.

FORWARDS

RETURNING: 13; LOST: 2; NEWCOMERS: 2

A primary reason for Ferris State's optimism is at the offensive end where nearly the entire forward unit remains intact from last season. For the past two seasons, the question entering each campaign was where the scoring was to come from. With 13 skaters in the fold, the only question is what individuals will secure a place on the four forward lines. Leading the way is junior right wing **Cody Chupp** (6-0, 196), who paced the Bulldogs in scoring last season with a career season-high 30 points (11-19=30) in 39 contests to with a +14 efficiency rating. A preseason honors candidate, Chupp generated a squad-leading seven multiple-point games and netted at least a point in 22 2007-08 outings. For his efforts, he was chosen as the recipient of FSU's Lloyd Earl Trophy as the team's top scorer and also received the Blue Line Competitive Award for being the Bulldogs' top competitor on a daily basis. An assistant captain a season ago, Chupp will have the honor of donning the captain's 'C' on his jersey this time around. Junior right wing **Blair Riley** (6-0, 218) displayed his offensive skills last season and enjoyed a banner season with career single-season highs in points (24), goals (14), assists (10), power-play goals (five), and plus/minus efficiency (+5). Riley, who mustered nine points (3-6=9) in 34 appearances during his freshman season (2006-07), chalked up a team third-best five multi-point game performances while notching at least a point in 16 contests. He also led Ferris with three multi-assist game efforts this past campaign. The assistant captain possesses the potential to be a 20-goal plus scorer from here on out. Senior center **Brendan Connolly** (5-8, 168) and sophomore center **Justin Menke** (5-10, 182) contributed to Ferris State's success last season as the pair finished fourth and fifth, respectively in the team's scoring race. Connolly posted his second consecutive 20-plus points season with a career-high 24 points (13-11=24) in 38 encounters while Menke's 21 points (8-13=21) was tops among FSU's freshmen scoring leaders. A 2006-07 CCHA All-Rookie Honorable Mention pick, Menke finished tied for 14th place in CCHA scoring among rookies with 15 points (6-9=15) in 28 regular-season league matchups. Seniors

Corey Couturier (6-0, 183), **Justin Lewandowski** (5-9, 175), and **J.T. Dahlinger** (6-1, 191) return for their final season with aspirations of making their mark on the Bulldogs' fortunes this season. Couturier recorded a team 11th-best 11 points (5-6=11) in 25 games while Lewandowski was a co-winner of FSU's Steve Banonis Memorial Most Improved Player Award after amassing a career-best and team seventh-most 16 points (11-5=16) in 34 contests. Lewandowski's 16 points total exceeded his combined nine points (3-6=9) in 42 games over his initial two collegiate seasons. Dahlinger compiled five points (3-2=5) in 24 outings a season ago and like Lewandowski, provides a lot of energy and quickness to the lineup. Center **Aaron Lewicki** (6-0, 192) and left wing **Casey Haines** (5-9, 186), a pair of juniors, are primed for an increase in their offensive production. Lewicki, one of the most improved conditioned players on the team, garnered 13 points (4-9=13) in 39 games to rank tied for ninth best in scoring while Haines netted a career season-best eight points (4-4=8) in 33 contests. An intelligent skater, Lewicki was tabbed the Bulldogs' 2007-08 CCHA Scholar-Athlete of the Year representative and also was presented with the program's Scholar-Athlete Award. Sophomore left wing **Mike Fillingner** (6-0, 169) was a pleasant surprise with squad ninth-place tying 13 points (9-4=13) in 31 games and is one of Ferris' fastest skaters. Left wing **Mike Embach** (5-10, 182), right wing **Todd Pockocke** (6-1, 196), and center **Nate Hennig** (6-0, 197), all sophomores, will battle for ice time. Embach was tops among the three with seven points (1-6=7) a season ago. Two freshmen centers, **Jordie Johnston** (5-11, 172) and **Derek Graham** (5-9, 152) have the skills to be standouts before their college careers conclude. In particular, Johnston brings a high level of offense and has the potential to be one of the CCHA's top freshman once his adjustment to the collegiate game is completed.

DEFENSEMEN

RETURNING: 4; LOST: 4; NEWCOMERS: 4

Ferris State will feature a mixture of experience and youth as four returnees will merge with a four-member freshmen group. The blue line will take on a different look this season from the past four years with the graduation of three-time team captain Adam Welch. Taking over the leadership reigns on the defense will be assistant captain **Zach Redmond** (6-1, 195) along with a pair of upperclassmen in senior **Evan Case** (6-0, 175) and junior **Matt Case** (6-0, 189). An exceptional gifted athlete, Redmond turned in a notable freshman season a year ago as he led all Bulldog defensemen in scoring with 19 points (6-13=19) in 37 games and was +14 for the season. He placed sixth in team scoring and totaled the second-highest points total among FSU's 2007-08 freshmen en route to receiving CCHA All-Rookie Honorable Mention plaudits and Bulldog Rookie of the Year honors last season. He was tabbed a seventh-round draft pick of the Atlanta Thrashers in the 2008 NHL Entry Draft. Evan Case returns for his final season and is one of the team's more reliable "defensive" defenseman. A regular in all 39 2007-08 outings, Case tallied a career season-high seven points (2-5=7). Like Evan, Matt Case is another solid blueliner who hopes to increase his offensive output of eight points (1-7=8) in 37 games last season. Sophomore **Scott Wietecha's** transition to the collegiate ranks was a smooth one as noted by his team eighth-most 15 points (4-11=15) in 36 outings. Wietecha, who boasts one of the hardest shots in the CCHA, garnered the team's Plus/Minus Award with a squad-best +16 efficiency rating. As a result of his consistent play, Wietecha is slated to skate a regular shift this campaign due to his unique ability to contribute at both ends. The defensive corps is bolstered by the addition of four freshmen with all "upside" potential. **Chad Billins** (5-9, 163) along with **Michael Trebish** (6-1, 190) and **Aaron Schmit** (6-3, 221) will vie for ice time. **Tommy Hill** (6-5, 214), a walk-on, adds depth to the talented blueline corps.

GOALTENDING

RETURNING: 2; LOST: 2; NEWCOMERS: 1

Ask any hockey coach about what area is deemed most critical to a team's success and more often than not goaltending is the key. Although Ferris State lacks a lot of experience, the Bulldogs do return one of their starting two netminders from last season. Sophomore **Pat Nagle** (6-2, 172), who split starting duties a season ago with Mitch O'Keefe, is back after turning in a productive campaign. Nagle registered an 8-7-0 mark between the posts to go with a 2.63 goals-against average and a .900 saves percentage as a 16-game starter. The 2007-08 CCHA All-Rookie Honorable Mention Team selection compiled at least 25 saves in a game on eight occasions last season. Nagle also posted the second-best numbers in goals-against average (2.86) and save percentage (.896) for CCHA rookie backstops in regular-season league action. Freshman **Taylor Nelson** (6-1, 171), a highly-touted recruit, should receive a considerable amount of playing time and will challenge Nagle for the starting job. Junior **Jordan Barber** (6-1, 207) will continue providing quality backstop depth.