

## 2002-03 PREVIEW

The topic of most preseason team meetings revolves around goals for the upcoming campaign and the Ferris State University hockey team has established a pair of well-defined objectives for the 2002-03 season – secure home ice for the opening round of the Central Collegiate Hockey Association (CCHA) Tournament and advance to the CCHA Super Six Championship.

For Ferris State, the expectations are high as the Bulldogs are more than ever focused on repeating a feat which has eluded the program since the 1992-93 season. In that campaign, FSU swept its league playoff series and advanced to the semifinal round before bowing out in overtime.

With a good nucleus of returning players, the 2002-03 Bulldogs will rely on their upperclassmen to mesh with a highly-talented group of underclassmen in attaining those team goals.

"I'm really excited about this upcoming season," said FSU head coach Bob Daniels. "I'm comfortable with the leadership our veterans provide and if the kids can come together, then we can be right in the hunt for home ice.

"We will continue to play an up-tempo game and be aggressive at both ends. This should be a fun team to watch because of the exciting brand of hockey we will be playing," added Daniels, who embarks on his 11th year at the FSU helm this season and is the Bulldogs' all-time winningest coach.

Ferris State returns 19 letterwinners while losing only four players off last season's team, which posted a 15-20-1 overall record and finished ninth in the CCHA standings with a 12-15-1 league mark. The Bulldogs, who welcome back 10 of their top 11 points leaders, return 85.5% of last season's goal-scoring production and 77.6% of the squad's total points output in 2001-02. As a result, offensive production should be the primary strength particularly at the forward position where offensive firepower should be prevalent due to an abundance of talent and experience.

"There's no question the strength of our team is going to be derived from our experience and depth at forward," said Daniels. "We have excellent team speed and a high-skill level at that particular position."

"Our overall success depends on how quickly our defense comes around and if our freshmen can step in and contribute right away," Daniels said. "We must be committed to playing good team defense on a consistent basis."

### GOALTENDING

**TROY MILAM**

**RETURNING: 3; LOST: 0; NEWCOMERS: 0**

A season ago, Ferris State's goaltending situation was filled with uncertainty as all three netminders on the team hadn't played a single minute in a collegiate contest. Fortunately, a pair of freshmen were able to make the adjustment from juniors and performed surprisingly well.

With a season's experience under their belts, sophomores **Mike Brown** and **John DeCaro** will be counted upon to continue improving although Daniels is more comfortable this time knowing what commodities are between the pipes. A 2001-02 CCHA All-Rookie Team pick, Brown started 22 contests a season ago and responded with a 10-13-0 overall record while compiling a 2.66 goals against average and a .911 saves percentage. The team's co-Rookie of the Year Award winner placed second among FSU's all-time single-season leaders in save percentage and fourth in goals against average. Brown ranked 23rd nationally in saves percentage and 24th in goals against average. He also registered 20 or more save single-game performances on 18 occasions. Challenging Brown will be John DeCaro, who was 5-7-1 with a 3.47 goals against average and an .878 saves percentage last season. DeCaro played well early last season but inconsistency victimized his overall productivity. Senior **Matt Swanson** appeared in one game last winter and will continue to provide leadership.

### FORWARDS

**RETURNING: 11; LOST: 2; NEWCOMERS: 4**

Ferris State has a significant number of experienced skaters returning although unfortunately last season's top points leader, Hobey Baker Award finalist and All-America Second-Team center Rob Collins isn't among the returnees. A graduation casualty, Collins garnered a team-leading 48 points while leading the CCHA in scoring. Despite the loss, there remains some familiar faces on the line chart who will thwart opposing netminders. The senior class has a pair of loaded big guns in left wingers **Chris Kunitz** (28-10-38) and **Phil Lewandowski** (13-8-21). Kunitz, who joined Collins on the CCHA First Team in 2001-02, recorded personal career bests in points and goals last season en route to capturing the CCHA goal-scoring champion title with 25 markers in 28 league outings. His 28 tallies tied him for the fourth highest single-season scoring output in the program's history and the two-time *Michigan College Hockey Online* (MiCHO) Breakaway Player of the Year honoree ranks 10th all-time at FSU in goals scored with 64 total. A bonafide pre-season All-America candidate, Kunitz placed fourth nationally in goal scoring

(0.80 avg.). The quick-skating Lewandowski returned back to form last winter with 10 more goals than in his previous season and is being counted upon to continue his productivity.

Junior right wing **Derrick McIver** (10-13-23) played his best hockey a season ago and placed fifth in team scoring with his personal career-high point total. McIver, FSU's best conditioned athlete, will join Kunitz as assistant captains and is the team's model for the dividends of hard work and dedication. Fellow junior right winger **Trevor Large** (6-7-13) stepped up his game during the second half of last season and was honored as the 2001-02 recipient of the team's Most Improved Player of the Year Award after garnering only three points in the prior campaign. A pair of sophomores – center **Jeff Legue** (6-19-25) and left wing **Derek Nesbitt** (9-12-21) both made a smooth transition from the junior ranks to college and were notable contributors. A dynamic offensive skater, Legue will continue to center one of the top three Bulldog lines while Nesbitt is one of the squad's top two-way forwards.

Also expected to contribute are junior center **Brett Smith** (4-1-5), a high-energy player and effective penalty-killer, along with sophomore center **Mike Kinnie** (5-4-9) and sophomore left wing **Carter Thomson** (1-4-5). Supporting the cast are a group of highly-touted newcomers which has Daniels excited about their offensive potential. The headliner is freshman center **Greg Rallo**, the 2001-02 USA Hockey Junior Player of the Year and a 2002 U.S. Junior Select Team participant. Rallo, who starred for the Springfield Jr. Blues, scored a team-high 40 goals and had 29 assists for a team-leading 69 points to earn North American Hockey League (NAHL) First-Team kudos after garnering NAHL Rookie of the Year laurels the previous season. Left wing **Jamie Dunlap** and center **Tim Vokey** also comprise the first-year member class and have impeccable credentials. Last season, Dunlap racked up 87 points on 50 goals and 37 assists to gain first-team Central Junior A Hockey League (CJHL) recognition as a member of the Nepean Raiders. His 50 goals represented the second highest goal-scoring output in the CJHL. Meanwhile, Vokey is reunited with former Cornwall Colts' teammate Jeff Legue and was the CJHL's top points leader last season with 122 total on league highs in goals (51) and assists (71). He was recognized as the CJHL's Most Valuable Player and was a CJHL All-Star First Teamer in 2001-02. Battling for playing time at the wings will be seniors **Nick Field** (1-3-4) and **Kevin Caudill** (1-2-3) along with red-shirt frosh **Nick Scheible**.

### DEFENSEMEN

**RETURNING: 5; LOST: 2; NEWCOMERS: 3**

Chad McIver, last season's captain, displayed a physical presence and could mix it up with the toughest of forwards. He anchored the Bulldogs' top defensive pairing and the penalty-killing unit. Kristian Schroder, a four-year member, will also be missed. With their departures, experience and overall depth is a question mark.

Assuming the primary leadership role will be senior **Troy Milam** (4-13-17), who served as an assistant captain a year ago. This season's team captain was a 1999-00 CCHA All-Rookie Honorable Mention Team selection and placed second in points among last year's blueliners. His experience and solid play will certainly benefit an inexperienced blueline crew. Joining him are sophomore **Matt York** (4-22-26) and junior **Simon Mangos** (5-5-10) to form a three-member nucleus which Daniels believes is as good as any in the CCHA. York held true to Daniels' assessment about being an exceptionally-gifted "offensive" defenseman as a result of placing third in team scoring to go along with a team-best +24 plus/minus efficiency rating and seven multi-point games. For his efforts, York was named to the CCHA's All-Rookie Team along with receiving the team's Plus/Minus Award and shared FSU Rookie of the Year honors with Mike Brown. Mangos turned in his most productive campaign ever and should continue to be a solid contributor. The trio is quite adept at both ends of the ice.

Also figuring in the mix are sophomore **Skip Renauld** and senior **Phil Meyer** (3-4-7). Renauld was hampered by injuries and first-year growing pains last winter, but should show improvement this season. Meyer, who played primarily at right wing last year, will likely move to defense on a full-time basis because of depth concerns. He has logged some previous time on the blueline during his career so the adjustment will be minimal.

Three freshmen to watch are **Jeremy Scherlinck**, **Andrew Winnik** and **Steve Later**. Scherlinck is a mobile defender with good all-around skills while Winnik is a big, physical defenseman who possesses a great shot from the blueline and passes the puck well. A late signee, Later put up solid numbers in the junior ranks and has the size which teams covet.

