

2003-04 SEASON PREVIEW

For the Ferris State University men's ice hockey program, expectations and goals for the 2003-04 season and future campaigns will never be the same. One can attribute the bar being raised by last season's team, which registered the most successful campaign in the program's 25-year NCAA Division I history with a 31-10-1 overall record. In the process, the nationally-ranked Bulldogs also claimed their first-ever Central Collegiate Hockey Association (CCHA) Regular-Season Championship title with a first-place 22-5-1 league mark and advanced to the CCHA Super Six Tournament Championship game for the first time since 1979-80. If that wasn't enough, FSU reached the championship game of the NCAA Championship Tournament's West Regional in its first-ever NCAA Tourney appearance.

Ferris State also earned the distinction of being the nation's first team in 2002-03 to reach the 30-win plateau as the Bulldogs recorded the third-highest winning percentage (.750) nationally. The national scene also showed FSU placing among the NCAA's top 10 in four other statistical categories – second in both scoring offense (4.48 avg.) and scoring margin (+2.10) and seventh in both scoring defense (2.38 avg.) and penalty-killing percentage (.853).

"It was certainly a noteworthy season not only for our program and fans but transpired into one of college hockey's biggest stories," said FSU head coach **Bob Daniels**, who will begin his 12th year at Ferris this season and is the Bulldogs' all-time winningest coach. "I was confident that we had a talented, experienced team and were better than what a lot of people were giving us credit for.

"However, what we achieved exceeded our own season expectations and I credit a great deal of our success to the tremendous amount of leadership we received from our seniors."

Headlining the six-member senior group were assistant captain Chris Kunitz and team captain Troy Milam. Kunitz, who inked a professional contract with the National Hockey League's Anaheim Mighty Ducks, was an unanimous first-team All-America selection and one of three finalists for the Hobey Baker Memorial Award as the nation's top collegiate player. The two-time All-CCHA First-Teamer also became the first skater in FSU history to be named the CCHA's Player of the Year.

As a result of last season's success, expectations are naturally high as the Bulldogs reload for another CCHA title run and a NCAA Tourney bid.

"We're enjoying the attention of being a nationally-recognized program," said Daniels, the 2002-03 American Hockey Coaches Association (AHCA) Division I and CCHA Coach of the Year. "But now it's time for us to get focused on building off of last season's success. I believe we have the confidence and ability to be among the league's upper echelon teams this season."

Ferris State returns 17 letterwinners from last season's record-breaking team, which includes nine of its top 12 points leaders. Furthermore, the Bulldogs welcome back 65.4% of last season's goal-scoring production and 64.2% of the squad's CCHA-leading total points output.

"A lot of how we start out this season will depend upon how quickly we can put last season behind us and focus on what lies ahead this year," said Daniels. "Being the league champions, every team in the CCHA will be gearing up to play us so it's imperative we come prepared to play each and every game."

"We'll continue playing a wide-open style of hockey with emphasis on speed and skill," Daniels stated. "We're deeper at the forward position than a season ago and we should be able to generate a significant amount of goal-scoring opportunities with the players we have returning."

GOALTENDING

RETURNING: 2; LOST: 0; NEWCOMERS: 1

With 2002-03 first-team All-America netminder **Mike Brown** returning for his junior campaign between the pipes, goaltending should remain one of the Bulldogs' strongest positions. Brown, who played an integral role in Ferris' success a season ago, is arguably one of the nation's best at his position. He achieved All-CCHA First-Team honors and was the CCHA's Perani Cup Three Star Champion last season as a result of a school-record 30-10-1 overall mark to go with a 2.35 goals against average and a school-best .925 save percentage in 41 appearances. In two seasons, Brown has made a mark in the program's record books by presently being tops among the Bulldogs' all-time leaders in save percentage (.920) while ranking second in both career victories (40) and goals against average (2.46). Brown, who was selected the CCHA's Defensive Player of the Week a league-record six times and was a two-time U.S. *College Hockey Online* Defensive Player of the Week pick, set FSU single-season bests for most saves (1,154) and tied a school record for shutouts (four) while his goal against average was second best in program history. He finished last campaign ranked third nationally in save percentage, fifth in winning percentage (.744) and 10th in goals against average. Backing up Brown will be fifth-year senior **Matt Swanson**, who notched a 1.48 goals against average and a .945 save percentage in five appearances last season. Swanson, the team's 2002-03 Most Improved Player of the Year Award recipient, won his only start last winter with a 33-save regular-season finale performance. Sophomore **Tom Mueller**, a Minnesota-Crookston

transfer, figures to be a future contributor.

FORWARDS

RETURNING: 10; LOST: 4; NEWCOMERS: 5

Despite the loss of All-American Chris Kunitz along with his league-leading goals (35), assists (44) and points (79), there remains some familiar faces that will continue thwarting opposing goaltenders. Juniors **Jeff Legue** (24-35-59) and **Derek Nesbitt** (20-33-53), linemates of Kunitz's, will lead the way after posting impressive career-high offensive numbers. A '02-03 CCHA Second-Team pick, Legue tied for the eighth-highest single-season scoring output in FSU history while Nesbitt, a honorable mention all-league selection, recorded a 15th-place tying point total among the Bulldogs' all-time season point producers. Legue, a center, was a +35 and his 19 multi-point games were second best on the squad. He also generated five multi-goal game efforts and placed 13th nationally in points (1.40 avg.). One of the league's top two-way forwards, Nesbitt more than doubled his points production from his freshman campaign and ranked third on the squad in multi-point games with 15 total. Nesbitt, who had a +38 plus/minus rating, scored a national-leading nine game-winning markers and was 23rd nationally in scoring (1.26 avg.). Senior right wing **Derrick McIver** (7-10-17), FSU's best conditioned athlete, will don the team captain's insignia this season and continues to be the model for the dividends of hard work and dedication. The dependable two-way skater was a CCHA All-Academic Team honoree in '02-03 and is a two-time team Scholar-Athlete Award winner. Also expected to contribute in their senior campaign are centers **Brett Smith** (8-9-17) and **Trevor Large** (7-6-13). An assistant captain, Smith is a high-energy player and an effective penalty-killer who established career highs in points, goals and assists last winter which doubled his combined output (6-5-11) in his initial two seasons. Large equalled his scoring total from the previous year in which he garnered team Most Improved Player recognition.

Junior center **Mike Kinnie** (15-15-30, +16) and sophomore right wing **Greg Rallo** (15-14-29, +13) both came into their own and showed why they're legitimate scoring threats. Each compiled seven multi-point game efforts and Rallo ranked sixth among the CCHA's top freshmen scorers en route to being chosen FSU's Rookie of the Year. Supporting the cast are senior left wing **Carter Thomson** (3-7-10), sophomore right wing **Nick Scheible** (1-3-4), sophomore left wing **Jamie Dunlap** (3-2-5) and sophomore center **Tim Vokey** (1-0-1). An outstanding recruiting class should allow the Bulldogs to continue their high-level play for seasons to come, especially with 2002-03 Canadian Junior A Player of the Year **Mark Bomersback** in the fold. The left winger paced the Alberta Junior Hockey League (AJHL) in scoring with 114 points on 46 goals and 68 assists a season ago and closed out his storied junior career as the AJHL's all-time leading scorer. Another proficient offensive player is sophomore left wing **Matt Rutkowski**, who had 77 points, including 24 goals, in juniors last season. Fellow recruits in left wingers **Matt Verdone** and **Eric Vesely** along with right wing **Zac Pearson** are all strong skaters with sound skill levels.

DEFENSEMEN

RETURNING: 5; LOST: 2; NEWCOMERS: 3

With the bulk of last season's unit returning, the Bulldogs will once again feature a talented group on the blueline. However, for the first time in four years, Ferris will be without one of its most underrated skaters in team history – Troy Milam (7-25-32), a graduation casualty. The 2002-03 second-team All-CCHA and third-team *Inside College Hockey* (INCH) All-American, not only led the defensemen in scoring last season but provided invaluable leadership. As a result of Milam's departure, senior **Simon Mangos** (11-11-22) along with junior **Matt York** (6-15-21) will step up into greater leadership roles this season. Mangos, a CCHA Second-Team and CCHA Super Six All-Tournament selection last winter, has emerged as a top two-way defenseman with steady improvement the last two seasons. The assistant captain ranked second among the CCHA's overall plus/minus leaders at a career-best +42 and was a finalist for the league's Best "Defensive" Defenseman Award. Flanking Mangos is York, who's also regarded as a gifted "offensive" defenseman. York turned in his second straight 20-plus point campaign with 21 points and a +35 efficiency rating. The twosome forms what Daniels believes is one of the nation's top tandems.

Sophomore **Jeremy Scherlinck** (1-17-18) is another defender whose stock is on the rise. The 6-3, 195-pounder is coming off a campaign which saw him earn CCHA All-Rookie Honorable Mention Team accolades. He finished the season as the Bulldogs' fourth-leading scoring defenseman and had a +13 rating in 42 contests. Another sophomore, **Andrew Winnik** (1-2-3) made significant gains in the second-half of last season and figures to log quality minutes. At 6-4, 222 pounds, Winnik provides a strong, physical presence in the defensive zone. Junior **Skip Renauld** (0-4-4) will vie for ice time but figures to receive stiff competition from a group of touted freshmen – **Giovanni Flamminio**, **Jim Jensen** and **Joe VanCulin**. Flamminio is a sound two-way skater who's expected to play right away after racking up 62 points in the junior ranks last season. Jensen is a defensive-oriented defender and supplies Ferris with another physical influence. A converted forward, VanCulin totaled 35 points a season ago.

