



Weekend Preview

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: MARCH 3, 2005

WILD RIDE FOR FOUR TEAMS ON FINAL WEEKEND Maine-BC and BU-UNH series to settle top seeds and regular season title

It may not end up being the closest finish in Hockey East history, but the standings this weekend represent the closest the top four teams have ever been entering the final weekend of the regular season. Just three points separate first-place UNH from fourth-place Maine, and those two, along with BC and BU, have the opportunity to clinch the No. 1 seed as well as at least a share of the regular season title. But all four could also finish as low as fourth. And in a dream scenario that has schedule-makers smiling broadly, each of the four teams will be facing off against one of the others in marquee two-game sets this weekend.

UNH holds the slightest of advantages over its fiercest opponents, and thus is the only team that truly controls its own destiny. A sweep of

BU would give the Wildcats the top seed and sole claim to the Hockey East regular season title. But even a small stumble could push the Wildcats to No. 2 as second-place Boston College owns the head-to-head tiebreaker advantage. A Boston University sweep would put plenty of pressure on BC to do the same, but there is still a possibility or two for BU to clinch No. 1 even with a tie vs. UNH. Maine's hopes for No. 1 require a sweep of BC and a three-point weekend for BU vs. UNH. The way the last few weeks of this season have gone, that wouldn't be surprising.

Nor would a road quarterfinal series win by either UMass Lowell or Northeastern. Both teams have proven they can outplay the top four seeds – Lowell swept BC just two weeks ago and Northeastern took three of four points from BU last week. Seeing either of these teams claiming the Hockey East title at tournament's end might be unexpected, but it would hardly be shocking. They'll play out their final two games for positioning this weekend, though that's not as vital as what plays out above them. Massachusetts and Providence will also play out for positioning and will face a serious challenge to emerge from the first round of the playoffs. But it was just two seasons ago that a Minuteman team marched into Maine as the No. 6 seed and calmly swept the host Black Bears.

The run for the league title is not the only hot race around Hockey East right now – there are also the races for leading scorer and lead-

ing goaltender. UNH's Jacob Micflikier leads the scorers with 29 points in 22 league games, but BC's Patrick Eaves and NU's Jason Guerriero are both just one point behind. Three others are in the mix as well. For the goaltenders, BC's Matti Kaltiainen (1.71 GAA) holds a small lead over teammate Cory Schneider (1.83) and Maine's Jimmy Howard (1.86). Schneider is out with an injury, but could claim the crown if the offenses come to life in the BC-Maine series.

RANKINGS

TEAM	PWR	USAT	USCHO
Boston College	3	5	5
New Hampshire	9	8	7
Boston University	9	10	10
UMass Lowell	13	13	13
Maine	15	12	12
Northeastern	21	-	-

WEEKEND SCHEDULE

Thursday, March 3

New Hampshire at Boston University *

UMass Lowell at Merrimack *

Friday, March 4

Maine at Boston College (NESN) *

Northeastern at Massachusetts *

Saturday, March 5

Maine at Boston College (CN8) *

Massachusetts at Northeastern *

Providence at UMass Lowell *

Boston University at UNH (NHPTV) *

* Hockey East game

Games start at 7pm unless indicated.

All times Eastern



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HOCKEY EAST STANDINGS

Team	GP	W	L	T	Pts	Overall	Remaining
New Hampshire ^	22	15	4	3	33	22-8-4	at BU, BU
Boston College ^	22	13	3	6	32	20-6-6	Maine (2)
Boston University ^	22	14	5	3	31	20-11-3	UNH, at UNH
Maine ^	22	13	5	4	30	18-10-6	at BC (2)
UMass Lowell *	22	10	9	3	23	19-9-4	at MC, PC
Northeastern *	22	9	9	4	22	14-15-5	at UMass, UMass
Providence *	23	5	14	4	14	10-19-4	at UML
Massachusetts *	22	5	15	2	12	12-20-2	NU, at NU
Merrimack	23	1	21	1	3	8-25-2	UML

* – clinched playoff berth ^ – clinched home ice advantage in the Hockey East quarterfinals