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Sports

MSU's wild win had shades of miracle comeback against Denver in '03



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The Free Press

There must be something about the third Saturday in December that turns the Midwest Wireless Civic Center from an ordinary hockey arena into theater of the absurd.

Some folks fall into holiday depression this time of year, but, it seems, not the Minnesota State men's hockey team, which hauls out the holly and come-from-behind victories.

On Saturday night, the

Mavericks overcame a 3-1 deficit, as well as the loss of two of their top defensemen, in a 6-3 win over Minnesota Duluth.

Along the way, Minnesota State: allowed just one 5-on-3 goal during a pair of major penalties; scored five unanswered goals, including three on what had been a struggling power play; saw its goalie, Mike Zacharias, stop a penalty shot; and saw a freshman get involved

in a fight.

"I don't know that in 17 years of coaching, if I've been prouder of a group of kids," Mavericks coach Troy Jutting said afterward.

Jutting did admit that it wasn't the wildest game his teams have been involved in, however.

That, of course, took place about three years earlier — Dec. 20, 2003, to be exact — when Minnesota State defeated

Denver 8-7 at the Civic Center.

That game, in which the Mavericks came back from a 7-1 deficit will still go down as the most unlikely win in Minnesota State history.

Two weekends ago at Denver, the game was still being talked about it. Matt Laatsch, whose checking-from-behind major led to three MSU power-play goals,

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is now a volunteer assistant with the Pioneers, and he was still bemoaning his team's collapse that night during a discussion in the Magness Arena press box.

It probably happens every time Laatsch hears the word Mankato.

Being down 3-1 to Duluth

and scoring five unanswered still doesn't compare to being down 7-1 to that year's national champions and scoring seven in a row to win. But it was hard not to be reminded of the Denver game Saturday.

Even some of the same players were involved.

Travis Morin, who had a goal and assist against the Bulldogs, started the come-

back against Denver with the first power-play goal during Laatsch's penalty. And Lucas Fransen, who scored the game's first goal Saturday, assisted on two goals, including the game-winner, three years earlier.

Chris Clark was again the No. 3 goalie Saturday, although he didn't get in the game and get the win like he

did against Denver.

That night, Clark developed somewhat of a cult following among Mankato hockey fans. Perhaps the same thing will happen to freshman Zach Harrison, who tussled with Duluth goalie Alex Stalock and then forward Nick Kemp before he and Kemp were tossed from the game with fighting penalties.

"The kind of night that those kids had is the reason you go into coaching," Jutting said Saturday.

And it's the reason everyone else goes to the rink to watch.

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