

Sports

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Weekend costly on two fronts for IceHawks

Team loses key games, key players in three-day span

By **STEVE LeBLANC**

The Champion

The losses quickly piled up for the Milton IceHawks this past weekend. And two home-ice defeats were just the half of it.

The most significant loss of their three-games-in-three-days weekend came midway through the second period Sunday, when goalie Doug Groenestege landed on the back of his head after being tripped by Oakville's Brad McKenzie. He remained in the game, but left at intermission with a suspected concussion.

Jason Dopaco was sidelined with a concussion the night before in Brampton, while native Miltonian Matt Price suffered a knee injury against Burlington Friday.

Factor in on-the-mend centre Brett Robinson, in-limbo newcomer Chris Bain and energetic winger Stefan Legein — currently up with the IceDogs — and the IceHawks have nearly two full forward lines missing from what they expect to go into the playoffs with in February.

"We're not talking about run-of-the-mill players here, either," said head coach/general manager George Dupont, following Sunday afternoon's 6-2 loss to Oakville at Memorial Arena.

From a performance standpoint this past weekend, there wasn't too much positive to say about the IceHawks — who sputtered offensively and needed a flawless game from Groenestege Saturday to pull out their one and only victory.

Here's a quick recap of the hectic schedule.

Friday: 5-1 loss to Burlington

Delivering by far their most fundamentally-flawed effort of the season, the IceHawks suffered through a rash of botched breakouts and positional pitfalls.

An 0-for-6 powerplay whitewash didn't help matters either.

Mike DeMarchi scored the lone goal on a shorthanded giveaway just 23 seconds into the middle stanza. Burlington would then sink four unanswered goals to hand Milton its first bonafide humbling of the year and move the Cougars within four points of the IceHawks for third in the West Conference standings.

Groenestege was hardly up to par, but his defensive unit was just as much to blame — leaving him to fend for himself on numerous occasions.

Friday's game marked only the second time this year that the IceHawks lost to a team below them in the standings.

With Parker Van Buskirk leaving the team earlier in the week and no Toronto Marlies call-up available, Milton used defenceman Casey



Photo by GRAHAM PAINE

Oakville Blades defenceman Brian Hamm (44) cocks his fist for another swing at Milton IceHawks opponent Jesse Jenish as linesmen intervene during Sunday's Provincial Junior A Hockey League contest at Memorial Arena. The Blades downed Milton 6-2, the IceHawks' second home-ice loss of the weekend.

Gilholm as its back-up goalie.

Saturday: 2-0 win in Brampton

Groenestege turned back 23 shots for his first shutout as an IceHawk, barely outdueling new Capitals cager Jonathan Keating — who allowed just one goal on 37 shots before Adam Pileggi's last-second empty netter sealed the deal.

Shandor Alphonso sank the game winner 11:24 into the second, winning a face-off in Brampton's end and using a picturesque spin move to beat Keating.

Milton persevered through a rather rough second period and stepped up its defensive pressure as the game wore on, keeping quality scoring

chances to a minimum.

Fourteen-year-old Daniel Marchione of the bantam Marlies assumed back-up duties in Brampton, while the IceHawks earned their first goose egg since a 1-0 overtime triumph over Burlington September 26.

It was the second straight narrow decision in Brampton, following a 5-4 sudden death victory Oct. 23.

Sunday: 6-2 loss to Oakville

Down to what Dupont called his 'B' squad once Groenestege left and Jesse Jenish and Mike Gershon earned early ejections for fighting, Milton just couldn't get out of neutral against the

top-ranked Blades.

Former IceHawk Ryan Angelow delivered his second straight two-goal game against his former mates, highlighting his latest efforts with a back-breaking shorthanded tally midway through the second.

Jenish and Louis D'Avino scored for the IceHawks, each netting their first of the season. Drawing assists were DeMarchi, Jason Fortino and 14-year-old Marlie call-up John Tavares.

Marlie midget E.J. Smith worked the last period for Milton — stopping four of five shots — while highlighting the emotionally-charged clash was a heavyweight tilt between Jenish and Oakville's Brian Hamm.

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