

Canadiens trounce 73's once again in hard-hitting exhibition rematch

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

Boards shook, bodies crashed and fists flew as the Essex 73's treated the crowd at their first exhibition home game to a physical showdown against the Belle River Canadiens Sept. 5.

In the finesse side of the game, the Canadiens outplayed the 73's, dominating the exhibition 8-4.

But Essex's young players, who made up the majority of the night's roster, proved they're not the type to shy away from the rougher side of the game.

Essex's Chris Barr put the home team ahead a minute-and-a-half into the game, knocking the puck into the net thanks to a well-timed pass by rookie player Mike Puempel.

Later in the game, Puempel, 17, was involved in one of three fights the two teams would instigate during the game. The tussle cost Puempel a five-minute

major penalty and a game misconduct.

"This league is a lot more physical and a lot faster," Puempel said of Junior "C" compared to the travel team he played for last season.

For the remainder of the first period, the Canadiens managed a series of two-on-ones, netting goal after goal.

A pair by Travis Brown and one by Justin Brown made it 3-1 for Belle River at the close of the period.

At the start of the second, Puempel landed his second assist with a set up to Tanner Gallant on the power play to bring the 73's back into the game.

The referees kept their whistles in hand as penalty after penalty sent players from both teams to the box.

The Canadiens quickly took advantage.

At 3:14, a Belle River wrist-shot from the top of the circle sailed over 73's goalie Ryan Barnett's glove.

Shortly after, Belle

River's Shawn Quigley sent a pass to Josh Battison in front of the goal, who easily tipped the puck into the top corner to make it 5-2.

With about eight minutes left, amidst a clutter of players in front of the Canadiens' goal, Essex's Evan Stibbard banged in a loose puck to give the 73's a third goal.

But hopes of a speedy comeback faded when a high-pressure Belle River power play extended the Canadiens' lead to 6-3.

Two minutes later, on another Canadiens' power play, Craig Rivait lobbed in a shot from the blue line that split through a crowd of Essex players in front of their screened goalie to put the visitors ahead by four goals near the end of the second period.

Three-and-a-half minutes into the third, Brad Quinlan netted a goal for the 73's with assists from Ryan Breault and Chris Warren.

As the final minutes dwin-

dled down, tensions ran high as Quinlan and Canadiens' Matt Meloche came to blows.

A final goal by Belle River ended the game with an 8-4 win for the visitors.

After the game, 73's head coach Tony Piroski said the game was "a good test for our guys."

"We've only had one practice as a team so far," he said. "Lots of practices, that's what we need."

Piroski said by the time the team hosts the Dresden Jr. Kings for their first regular season home game Sept. 19, the line-up will be "pretty close to being complete."

"We've still got about four to six cuts to make," he said.

Belle River head coach George Winter, whose team also beat the 73's in the first exhibition Aug. 29, said, "Anytime we strap on skates we want to win."

"It's still just an exhibition game but it's an important way to start a season - winning," he said.

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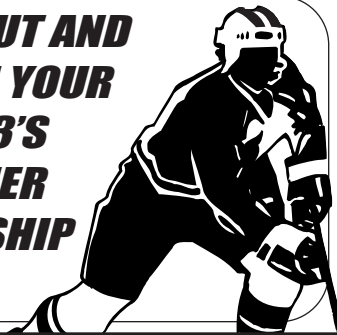
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