

Jr. Kings skate past 73's in first game of the season

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

The Ontario Hockey Association's pledge to move towards a stricter enforcement of the rules had players on both teams spending lots of time in the penalty box Sept. 19, as the Dresden Jr. Kings edged out the Essex 73's 5-3.

The 73's home opener drew nearly 330 fans to Essex Memorial Arena, and it was clear from the opening minutes that the referees wouldn't be looking the other way when it came to calling penalties.

Essex was soon on the power play, and a goal by Wes Tan with assists by Dan Croft and Evan Stibbard, put the 73's ahead four minutes into the game.

Less than two minutes later, R.J. Hotts, the 73's leading scorer last year, made it 2-0 for Essex.

The Kings answered back while on the power play,

with Chad Laroche scoring with the help of a well-timed pass from Breydon Belan.

At 13:20, Essex then scored the only goal of the game that didn't involve special teams. The Croft, Stibbard and Tan line produced again with a hard drive to the net, with the assistant captain Croft knocking in the puck.

Forty seconds into the second period, Dresden's Laroche nabbed his second goal of the night, with assists from Belan and Trevor Fortin.

Next, the Kings tied the game at 3-3 with Kevin Verburg sliding the puck past 73's goalie Eddie Wheeler.

Dresden took the lead for the first time in the game two minutes later, with Belan knocking in a power play goal with assists from Mitchell High and Fortin.

Five minutes into the third period, the Kings

extended their lead to two goals with Belan clinching his fourth point of the night, with assists by Fortin and Laroche.

For the remainder of the game, Dresden managed to kill off any attack by the 73's and ended the game with a final score of 5-3.

Dresden goaltender Chris McKichan faced 28 shots during the game, while Wheeler stopped 21.

During the many times Essex played shorthanded, Wheeler's sweeping blocker deflected more than a few shots off to his right side.

The 73's also showed a considerable degree of control on the power play, and they found each other's passes quite naturally. Still, they weren't able to get off enough shots on goal to put past McKichan.

"It's always hard to lose at home," Essex head coach Tony Piroski said after the game. "On our special

teams, we've got a lot of work to do. We're going to get a lot better. My goal is to win."

Dresden's assistant coach Bruce Clark said his team is still adjusting to the OHA's new rules about enforcing penalties.

He said because referees are now encouraged to call defencemen for clutching a stick or using one arm to block the body, his players are at a disadvantage.

"It's impeding progress," Clark said. "Now it's up to the coaching staff to teach the game all over again."

The 73's will travel to Mooretown for Saturday night's game against the Flags and will return to host the Alvinston Flyers on Tuesday, Oct. 3.

For this week only, see Kevin Neels' story on the 73's home opener on our website at <http://essexfree.press.reinvented.net>

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The game Sunday night against Belle River started off well, with a quick goal in the third minute of the game by Spencer Woltz, assists to Kyle McCamon and Tyler Campbell. Then the new rules came into play and the penalty box filled up.

The first period saw mostly Essex shorthanded, sometimes by two players. The boys did well holding off a strong Belle River team until the final minutes of the first period when Belle River put one past goaltender Sean Bear and into the net.

The second period was a little more even in the penalty box with Belle River visiting it more than us. The referee ruled off what looked like a goal but by the end of the period Belle River was up 4 to 1.

The final period started off with Belle River in the penalty box and the boys did everything they could except put the puck into the net. It was exciting when midway through the third period Brad Quinlan had a good opportunity with a penalty shot. He had some great moves and had him beat, but at the last second the goalie raised his stick robbing Brad of the goal.

The final score was 6 to 1 for Belle River. Our team didn't give up. They played hard and Bear played a solid game in goal.

Now it's time to look ahead to our next game Saturday night at 9 in LaSalle.

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