

# ESSEX 73's HOCKEY HIGHLIGHTS

## Big week vaults Essex into first place

By Kevin E. Neels

The 73's continued their winning ways this past week and have vaulted past the Southpoint Sharks and Belle River Canadiens to move into first place in the South Division of the Great Lakes Junior Hockey League. It is still early in the season, but Essex, for the most part, is playing some very good hockey and continues to improve.

The Mooretown Flags were in Essex on Tuesday,

Oct. 10 and it turned out to be no contest. The special teams for Essex stepped up and played exceptional hockey and were the Flags undoing. The 73's tallied three times while holding the man advantage, and another three times while playing a man short.

Mooretown started off on the wrong skate and never recovered. The visitors were served with a delay of game minor before the game even started, and Essex made them pay with a Dan Croft marker. At exactly the two-minute

mark Croft added goal number two, and the club was off to the races.

Chris Barr ripped a low point shot past Flags goaltender Jeff Steadman midway through the period before Jeremy Venables blocked a shot while killing a two-man disadvantage, skated in alone on Steadman, and deposited the disc to increase the lead to 4-0 after the first period.

The middle frame was more hectic for Essex as the Flags were awarded numerous power play opportunities, much to the dislike of head coach Tony Piroski, who was ejected for arguing. The home team weathered the storm, however, as each team managed a goal apiece. Mooretown scored early in the period while Essex added a late goal, coming off the stick of Ryan Breault.

Essex put the game to rest in period three with another onslaught, adding three more goals—Cory Hamilton with one and R.J. Hotts adding a pair—for an 8-1 final.

"We gave them very few

in-close chances," Croft said. "We kept the skaters to the outside. I felt we played a complete game tonight, a full 60 minutes."

Going into Friday's game against Belle River the club felt this was going to be a big test, as Belle River is considered to be one of the teams to beat this year. But Eddie Wheeler and the boys were up to the task. Wheeler posted his first shutout of the season in blanking the home town Canadiens 2-0 in a less than exciting game.

Neither team played their best, but it was Wheeler who outplayed his counterpart, Dustin Reeves. There was no scoring in the opening period, but both teams had some chances with the number of penalties called. The penalty killing was exceptional for both sides.

Period two was more to the 73's liking as they took it to the Canadiens for the most part, outshooting Belle River 14-3. Reeves played very well in holding the score down, but a weak shot from Ryan Breault slipped through the armour, and Essex had the only goal they would need.

Referee Pat Scarlett put away his whistle for most of the third period and let the teams play. The only goal

was a power play marker into an empty Canadiens net coming off the stick of Tanner Gallant.

"We heard that Belle River was speedy, but that was about it," said second-year player Chris Barr. But once you start banging them around they back off, they don't like being hit. Our defense is getting better, and we are starting to jell, but we still have a ways to go before we get to where we want to be."

Kingsville was the location for Saturday night's tilt. The Comets have struggled so far this season and Essex had to be aware of that heading into the game. They did not want to take the Comets lightly.

Period one was sloppy as neither team looked prepared. It took a long time but someone finally found the back of the net. Kingsville Captain Steve Walter beat Wheeler with a low shot, with Kingsville holding the man advantage. Essex wasted no time evening things up, as AJay Sweet flipped the puck over a sprawling Rob Cupit with just over a minute remaining in the opening period.

The Comets were lucky to be in the game after period two, as Essex dominated in a

big way but only held a slim margin. R.J. Hotts and Ryan Breault tallied power play markers early in the period, but could not find the net after that, hitting a couple of posts and missing on a few empty net chances. This allowed Kingsville to stay in the game, and they made it a one-goal game with one of their few chances in the period at the midway point. Neither team could beat the goaltenders the rest of the period.

Period three was a white wash as well. Final score: 3-2 Essex.

"We had a bit of an off night," said Ryan Breault. "We had a tough game last night but we will take the win."

Not known for his goal scoring, Breault has scored in the past three games. "I'm getting my shots off quicker," he said.

Breault is also back playing defense this season after his first year as a forward.

"Forward, defense, it doesn't matter. I feel comfortable in either position now."

The 73's have a pair of games in the coming week. Another big test will come Monday when the club will be in Southpoint. Tuesday the team will return home for a tilt with the Blenheim Blades.

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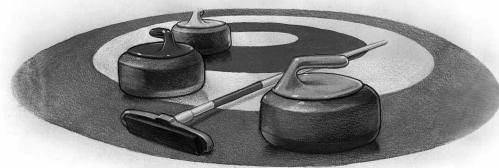
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Our boys went to Riverside Oct. 7 to face the three-time OMHA champions on their home ice minus two players who were serv-

ing suspensions. Riverside came out hard and fast and Essex had a hard time getting up to speed, allowing a couple of early goals despite

hard work by our defense-men. Cody Spitse played a great physical game, forechecking fearlessly against the big Riverside defensemen. Josh Davison spent the game digging for the puck and protecting his goalie, Dustin Ridley, who faced over 50 shots in the game. The boys improved throughout the game and put pressure on the Riverside goalie but came up short thanks to some posts and crossbars. We face this Riverside team one more time this year, and we look forward to another competitive game with the steady improvement that our boys are showing.

On Oct. 8 we welcomed Southpoint, and the boys came out hungry, trying to avenge the loss from the night before. They struggled

through some penalties and were unable to get on the scoreboard in the first. In the second, while on the powerplay, good pressure gave the boys their first goal on a shot from Josh Davison. Essex outshot Southpoint throughout this period, but the teams exchanged goals.

Early in the third, great passing and hard skating gave the line of Chase Rossini, Brandon Flood and Luca Acchione a shot at netting the puck, but once again Southpoint got the breaks they needed. Southpoint took home the victory despite our hard work.

Last weekend the boys met with LaSalle on our home ice Friday night. The first period started out strong with the boys working hard to make some opportunities. The second period left us shorthanded but on the defensive and working hard to keep LaSalle out of our end. The third period left us out of steam, spending a lot of time in our own end.

On Saturday night we were at South Windsor Arena. The boys came out ready to play but the score did not reflect their solid effort. Chase Rossini scored the only goal with an assist by Evan Bechard. Both of our goalies were peppered by pucks but they held their own. Great job guys!

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