

The ESSEX FREE PRESS SPORTS



HOCKEY HIGHLIGHTS

Essex offense enjoys string of victories

BY KEVIN E. NEELS

The Essex offense erupted in a big way this past week lighting up the red lamp 21 times. At the same time the defense has continued to shine, not allowing much in return.

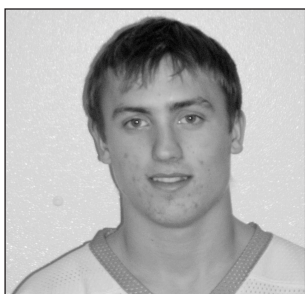
The game everyone was waiting for took place last Monday evening in Wheatley, as the Sharks hosted the 73's in what was expected to be a barnburner. The game did not turn out exactly as some expected, however.

Southpoint was hoping to put in a good effort and thrill the large Sharktank crowd with a big win over the much despised 73's. Essex on the other hand was hoping to show Southpoint that they were still the team to beat this season. This game did not turn out to be one of the better ones for either starting goaltender, as they both looked a bit shaky at times.

Essex started off quickly in this affair with a pair of goals just over two minutes apart, with Chris Barr and

Tanner Gallant doing the scoring. The two-goal margin evaporated just as quickly, however, as the Sharks scored a pair of their own just over a minute apart before the halfway point of period one. Neither team could muster up anything more in the first.

Southpoint took their first lead of the game early in period two before Essex tallied three straight unanswered goals before period end – Barr with his second of the night, Mike Lepelaars with his first of the season, and Cory Hamilton doing all the damage.



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- Tyler Gallant

The clubs swapped goals in the final period giving Essex a 6-4 win. Evan Stibbard rounded out the 73's scoring.

"This game was about as expected," said Vince Santia. "This was the first meeting between us this season, and we were feeling each other out. Having some of the veterans return to the club will definitely help us out."

Chad Slade was one of those returning veterans playing in his first game. "It feels good to be back," he said. "The team is looking real good right now. It is hard to judge how good Southpoint is from one game. Let's wait until play-offs to see."

Tuesday the Blenheim Blades were in town, and Essex embarrassed the visitors by blanking them 11-0. It has been a long time since the 73's had a score this lopsided.

Things started off slowly, however, as the game was still scoreless as late as the 13-minute mark of the opening period. Then the

roof caved in on the visitors. Essex exploded for five goals in the remaining seven minutes. Mike Roach, who was the game's first star, notched his first of the night to start the onslaught. R.J. Hotts, while two men down, Roach, with his second, Dan Croft, with his first of the night, and Chad Slade were the other marksmen.

The first half of period two went scoreless as well before the 73's put the score out of reach. Chris Warren, with his first of two, Evan Stibbard, Warren again, and Croft made it a 9-0 game.

Essex put the finishing touches on with two more in the final period, with Tyler Gallant and Matt Fuerth doing the damage.

"We have a quick, skilled team here this year, good chemistry, and a good blend of veterans and rookies," said Gallant. "I think this game showed how versatile we are as Coach (Piroski) uses everybody in every situation, and that is why we are so successful."

Mike Roach had this to say: "Tonight we worked

hard for the full 60 minutes, our powerplay and stick handling efforts were outstanding, and right now we are getting the breaks."

Friday, the cold and rainy weather did not dampen the spirit of the boys on the way to Alvinston, as they were ready to rock and get another win under their belts.

Rock they did. They came out strong early in this one and built up a 3-0 lead just past the midway point of the opening period. Scoring were R.J. Hotts, Rob Shepley and Tanner Gallant.

Despite out-shooting the Flyers 17-5 in period two, neither team could beat the goaltenders.

Fatigue started to set in for Essex in period three as Alvinston managed to get some life and play the 73's fairly evenly for the most part. The home club finally hit the scoreboard late in the period on a pretty set up, but this was all they could muster. Essex put the nail in the coffin with a shorthanded empty net goal by Cory Hamilton with six ticks left on the clock.

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start. We came into the game shorthanded, and lost three players during the game, so by period three we were getting worn down, but we kept our cool," Chris Warren said.

"We were definitely tired by period three, especially after the way we came out in the opening period," said Gallant. "Overall it was a good game; we found a way to win."

Essex will have a couple of slow weeks now after a busy October. Only one game next week – Essex will have the Blenheim Blades back in town Tuesday.



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The Ravens had a very busy schedule this week, three games and a practice.

On Wednesday we faced Southpoint at home for an exciting game. Only 23 seconds into the first period Zack Prentice passed the puck back to Colton Kitchen who took a hard shot and scored his first goal as a Raven. Tyler St. Pierre showed his talents by deking the goalie popping two goals into the net, one

assisted by Carder Sherk, the other by Zack and Carder. Kane Gagnon played his best game of the season as our goalie. Despite our best efforts Southpoint came out ahead.

Friday night Belle River Rink Rats came to our barn for our first run in with them of the weekend. Belle River played a great game with awesome passes but we showed them we have a lot of skill and talent too. Zack accepted a great pass

from Clay and took the puck end to end and deked the goalie out scoring the first goal of the game. Luke Tremblay played a great defensive game with some awesome checks. Danielle Dent is on top of her game with her defensive skills like always. The scoreboard did not reflect our game.

Sunday we headed to Belle River for another tough meeting. As much as our three pairs of defense, Luke and Clay, Danielle and Colton and Matthew and Alec worked hard to keep the puck out of our zone, Belle River managed

to find the back of the net. Although all of our offensive players are working their tails off, Tyler, Busko and Anthony shone at this game. It wasn't until the third period that our Ravens were able to get a goal. That

is when Aidan took the puck and demanded to get past Belle River's defence and put us on the board. Emily and Kane both made some nice saves in this game. Although it can be frustrating to see our

Ravens being beat, they are working hard and sticking together as a team.

Wednesday night we will travel to Tecumseh and Riverside at home Sunday afternoon.

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