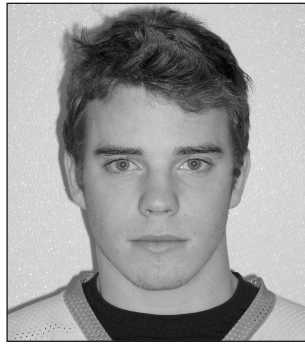


# ESSEX 73's HOCKEY HIGHLIGHTS

## Wheeler back between the pipes as Essex downs Flyers

By KEVIN E. NEELS



Eddie Wheeler

Eddie Wheeler was back between the pipes for the Essex 73's Jan. 9 after a long spell of sitting in the stands due to a lower body injury.

"This was the first time I have been on the ice in over a month," Wheeler said. "I haven't even been able to practice."

He turned aside all but one shot in his return, backstopping the club to a 5-1 win over the Alvinston Flyers.

The visitors managed to get on the scoreboard first with a shot that Wheeler got a piece of but could not stop completely. The door was shut for the visitors the rest of the way.

Dan Croft got the equalizer with his first of two unusual goals on the night. Sliding on his stomach, Croft managed to poke the puck past Flyers goaltender Mike Pearson. Essex took the lead for good a few minutes later as Tanner Gallant kept the puck on a two-on-one and made no mistake.

Essex increased their lead to 4-1 in period two on a pair of pretty goals. A hard wrist shot from Chris Warren into the top of the net, and a slap shot from the point off the stick of Jeremy Venables did the damage.

The 73's added one more in period three for good measure. From his knees, Dan Croft added his second of the night with a beautiful deke.

Wheeler complimented his counterpart, Ryan Barnett, in his absence. "I think that Barny did a great job while I was out, the team continued to roll along, and we kept our goals against the lowest in the league."

With the stretch run now

starting Wheeler added, "Every shift out we try our hardest, and we have told the rookies on this team from the get-go that we don't accept losing."

Commenting on the game, Chris Barr said, "It took us a period to get loosened up, but we were fine after that. On the last day of our trip we were already talking about getting back to what was important. Our mind set was definitely on hockey."

In the second game, the 73's seemed to struggle through the first two periods before putting the Blenheim Blades to rest in the final period.

Essex took an early 2-0 edge in the first ten minutes of play on goals by Jeremy Venables and Vince Santia.

The Blades played Essex fairly evenly in period two, thanks mostly to some undisciplined penalties. Blenheim finally got on the board with a power play marker at the 16:48 mark. The back breaker for the home team came with just

seven ticks left on the clock in the second, when AJay Sweet slid a perfect feed from R.J. Hotts past the Blades goaltender to boost the lead back to two goals.

Essex put this game out of reach with three unanswered goals in period three, two coming less than two minutes apart – Hotts with a power play marker and Wes Tan with the early goals before Ryan Breault added the insurance with two and a half minutes left.

"I think they got frustrated in period three," said Tan, "The game turned into a chippy affair."

Chad Slade added, "I thought we were very sloppy in the first period, but our (penalty killing) was very strong in period two. The time to start getting our game in check is right now, as the playoffs are just around the corner."

Asked if there was any particular team that would be more difficult than another, Slade's response was, "No difference in teams, we just need to come to the rink and play our game and we will be fine, although, as we already know, all teams will be much tougher come play-off time."

In another rather shocking turn of events the team has been informed that they will have to do without the services of Head Coach Tony Pirofski and Assistant Coach Lee Jones for the remainder of the season and the start of next season due to their run in with referee Ryan Renaud back in November. Both have been suspended for a period of one year, but an appeal has been filed and it is now a game of wait and see. Stay tuned.

Essex will play a pair of games this coming week. Saturday they will travel to Mooretown, then return home to host the Belle River Canadiens next Tuesday.

## Butler leads Essex past Villanova

By JAY FAWLER  
SPECIAL TO THE FREE PRESS

Essex senior forward Jeremy Butler is known for his amazing post game and is rebounding his way into one of the county's elite forwards in basketball. Thursday night was no different as he helped Essex defeat a bitter rival in the Villanova Wildcats.

Butler scored 17 points, all of which came in the first half, and Kevin Ellsworth added 10 to power the Red Raiders past the Villanova Wildcats 50-39. Butler also led the Raiders in rebounds with 10.

Essex jumped out to an early lead thanks in part to eight Wildcat turnovers in the first 10 minutes of the

game. Butler scored 10 of the Raiders' 18 points in the first quarter and Essex guard Jeff Reed had three steals in the opening frame as Essex took the lead 18-10 heading into the second quarter.

The Raiders never let up, forcing Villanova to commit 23 turnovers in the game. Reed's stellar defensive play earned him an astonishing eight steals and senior guard Dane Robinson continued his tremendous bench play with four steals of his own. Red Raiders Kevin Ellsworth, Mark Plante, Andrew Taba, Matt Balkwill and Kyle Flood all contributed in the steals category with two each. Flood also leads the Raiders with two blocked shots.



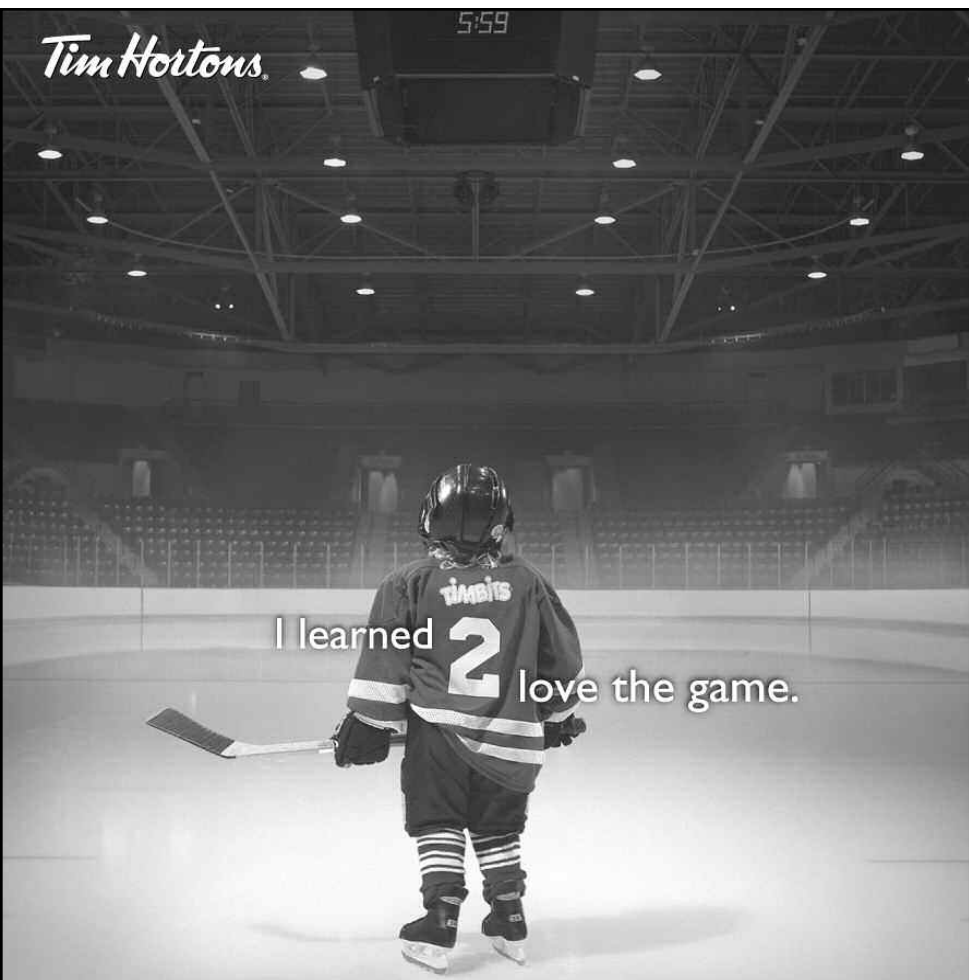
### Atom A Forest Machine

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17  
It looked like Essex might make the scoreboard when Dalton Langlois made a strong solo rush from the blue line midway through the third, but his shot was blocked. Essex pulled their goalie in the dying minutes of the third, but to no avail. The Ravens fought until the end, but Southpoint picked up an empty net goal and claimed the win 4-0.

Saturday the Ravens nailed the first goal minutes into the first, as Jonah Fuerth nailed one in off a set up from Dillon Jarvis and Mitchell "Huddy" Hudvagner. LaSalle fought to tie it up, but strong defensive play from David Stafford and Derek Morris drove the action back into the Sabres' zone. Less than

two minutes into the second period, LaSalle scored to tie it up. The Sabres attacked our net for the next three minutes, forcing goalie Kyle Hill to make some awesome saves. Finally, Brett Rickeard intercepted a pass and took it down to force the play into the LaSalle zone. Hard shots from Dillon Jarvis, William Wuerch and Huddy Hudvagner just missed their mark, leading to a scramble in front of the Sabres net. It was end-to-end play, until LaSalle caught a second and then a third goal midway through the second to take the lead. LaSalle penalties led to two Essex power play opportunities, and the Ravens claimed their second goal when Jordan Hooker caught a pass from A.J. Market and deked his way to the net to put one top shelf. Assists went to A.J. Market and William Wuerch. With a minute left in the second, LaSalle responded by nabbing a goal when Essex was a man shy.

All the action was in our end early in the third, with Essex down two men. Excellent penalty killing by Adam Zanier, Sean Santarossa, and Jeffrey Miller held the Sabres at bay until the very end, when LaSalle slipped one in. Trailing 5-2, Essex gave it their all. With only 27 seconds left in play, Jonah Fuerth fired one in to give Essex their third goal. The assists went to A.J. Market and Dillon Jarvis. A great game to the very end.



In Timbits Hockey, a love for the game starts with having a great time on the ice. It's a way for kids to learn basic skills, make new friends and most importantly, have fun. That's why Tim Hortons is proud to support all the girls and boys who play Timbits hockey in the Essex community.



The first goal is having fun.

**ESSEX MINOR BASEBALL ASSOCIATION**

**NOW ACCEPTING TRAVEL COACH APPLICATIONS FOR THE 2007 SEASON: Deadline: February 3, 2007**

• ROOKIE	(Born 2000-1998)
• MOSQUITO	(Born 1997-1996)
• PEE WEE	(Born 1995-1994)
• BANTAM	(Born 1993-1992)
• MIDGET	(Born 1991-1989)
• JUNIOR	(Born 1988-1987)

Applications for interested parties are available at the **Essex Source for Sports**

Or Contact for further information

**Dale Myer** – EMBA Travel Convenor  
519-776-5327 • dalemyer@sympatico.ca  
**Joe Grondin** – President  
519-776-8111 • joseph.grondin@watsonwyatt.com