



HOCKEY HIGHLIGHTS

Sharks and Lakers hold 73's to a point

BY KEVIN E. NEELS

You can tell the playoffs are just around the corner as the games are getting tougher each time out. Just ask the Essex 73's. After an incredible 31-1-0-2 record in their first 34 games, the club's record for the past three outings is 0-2-1-0. Mind you, the team has had a difficult time finding a reason to play with being so far ahead of everyone else in the standings, but many will say that this is not a good time to be hitting the skids; you don't want to give other clubs a mental edge. Did the team peak too early? If you ask the players, they'll tell you that's not the case.

Last Monday in Wheatley the team was shut down for the second consecutive game, losing 3-0. The game was a very chippy affair with referee Jonathan Forbes keeping his whistle working overtime. In some instances it looked like Forbes was going to lose control of the game. Although Essex out-shot Wheatley, they seemed to be gripping the sticks a bit too tight once again. The Sharks held a 1-



Anthony Iaquina

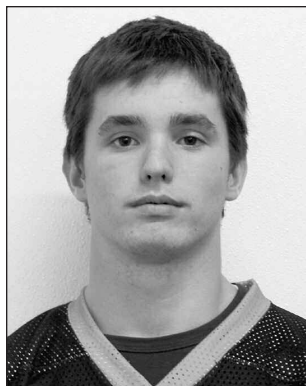
0 lead after one, scoring on the power play.

Period two was scoreless, but the home team put this one out of reach with a pair of third period markers, one coming while shorthanded.

"Hopefully this is out of our system, and we can quit talking about it," said Vince Santia.

Asked if the suspensions of the coaching staff in any way has affected the team's play, Santia said, "It is in the back of our minds, but it's not a big factor. In fact, I think other teams are trying to use this to their advantage."

"I agree with Vinnie," Evan Stibbard added. "The suspensions are not a huge distraction. We're just a bit frustrated right now, and



Vince Santia

we need to work a bit harder."

Tuesday, the 73's hosted the Wallaceburg Lakers, and in the early going it looked like the team was headed for a third straight defeat. Essex held a wide edge in shots during period one but trailed 2-0, giving up one goal while holding a power play, and a last minute goal.

After seven straight periods of not scoring Essex came to life in the second, outscoring the visitors 3-1 to knot the score at 3-3. Cory Hamilton broke out of his scoring slump with the equalizer, and R.J. Hotts added a pair.

Neither team could break the deadlock the rest of the way, including the overtime.

Anthony Iaquina was back in the lineup after recovering from an injury and said, "It is tough sitting on the sidelines and not being able to help. Our injuries have hurt us somewhat, but we can't dwell on it. All teams go through this at some point during a season. We need to maintain our focus, and bear down more."

"We have been a bit anxious around the net the past few games," said Wes Tan. "It was a relief when the puck finally went in, that was a big goal. We need to start fresh and not look back."

Essex will play the final two games of the regular season this weekend on the road. Saturday the team will be in Kingsville, then finish the season in Blenheim on Sunday evening.

The playoffs will begin sometime during the next week. Essex will have home ice throughout the league playoffs and will host one of the North division teams in the first round. The first round opponent will be Alvinston, Mooretown or Blenheim.

ty on both teams.

St. Thomas scored two goals in the second period giving them the lead, 2-1.

Essex had to come back in full force for the third period but instead St. Thomas scored three more goals in the top of the period. Essex bounced back by scoring two more goals. Spencer Woltz's snipe was

assisted by Brad (Chop) Quinlan and Brit Garon. Nick Fournier's goal was assisted by Spencer Woltz and Dan Bacon. The game ended with a score of 5-3 for St. Thomas.

After playing in St. Thomas on Mon. Feb. 5 the boys will be back in Essex on Wednesday at 7 p.m.



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Game two in the Essex Raven Bantam AE vs. Tecumseh Rangers series began with Tecumseh coming out hard. Essex fought them off with great defence and Alex Rawlins having perhaps his best game of the season so far.

Awstin Petit put the Ravens on the board early in the first with the assistance of Bobby McGowan and Matt McGuire. Not long into the second period Tecumseh responded with a quick goal to tie it up.

Essex was facing a five-on-three penalty kill. With great teamwork, Andrew Wellwood, Luke McCarthy and Awstin Petit kept the Rangers scoreless.

Later in the second,

Awstin showed up with another goal, assisted by Matt McGuire and Chris Laliberte.

In the start of the third, Tecumseh tried coming out hard again only to be scoreless again. Essex kept fighting and came up with a third and final goal of the game when Matt Conley made a pass to Bobby McGowan who unloaded a shot from the point and Josh Clemente tipped it in.

The team celebrated the 3-1 victory, shaking off the 6-3 loss in the first game of the series in Tecumseh last week.

The Ravens travel to Chatham on Friday for the first of that series.



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To begin the six point series of the playdowns the Ravens played against the Belle River Rink Rats on Friday and Saturday this week.

Friday night at home the Rink Rats put a goal in the Ravens net early in the game only to be answered back by the Ravens. Tyler St. Pierre assisted by Zack Prentice. Belle River came back and scored twice before the Ravens were able to score again when Zack scored assisted by Tyler and Danielle Dent. Starting the third period with 3-2 lead for Belle River the Ravens gave all they could to score again, but were unable to find the back of the net. Belle River shut down any breakaways and if there was a scoring opportunity, the

crossbar was hit. With two players out and too many penalty minutes, Belle River won the game 4-2.

Saturday afternoon in Belle River didn't work out much better for the Ravens. The first period was scoreless which showed our players were working hard. The defense stepped up their game as well as the offense. In the second period Zack intercepted a Rink Rats pass and put the puck in the net top shelf. Belle River scored three times ending the game 3-1 and the six point series in Belle Rivers favour.

The Ravens will play at home on Friday night at 8 p.m. and hopefully back to Belle River on Saturday at 3:30 and Sunday at home at 3:10.



Midget Major CAW Club 200

The boys played their first game of the second round of playdowns against St. Thomas on Sunday, Feb. 4.

The boys came our playing hard and fast in the first

period and the first goal of the game was scored by Nick Fournier assisted by Dan Bacon and Tyler Campbell. The referee slowed the game down by calling penalty after penal-

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