



Photos: Andy Comber

SOLID PERFORMANCE – Essex 73's goalie Eddie Wheeler scoops up the puck offering no rebound to the Wallaceburg Lakers in Great Lakes Junior "C" hockey action in Essex, March 13. Essex won the game 7-3 to clinch the semi-final series 4 games to 1.

73's HOCKEY HIGHLIGHTS

Top two clubs hook up in Great Lakes finals

BY KEVIN E. NEELS

The top two regular season clubs will meet in this year's Great Lakes Junior "C" final. The Essex 73's will have home ice advantage over the Belle River Canadiens when the teams meet beginning Tuesday in Essex.

Essex held a 4-1 record against the Canadiens during the regular season, but all that means nothing at this

time of the year. It should be a dandy final. Stay tuned.

Essex reached the final once again with a decisive 7-3 victory in game five over the Wallaceburg Lakers last Tuesday in Essex. The first star for the second consecutive game was Vince Santia, scoring the hat trick.

The locals came out strong in the opening frame and barely allowed the visiting Lakers to touch the puck in building up a 3-0 lead.

Anthony Iaquina started things off early, followed by Wes Tan and Santia markers.

The visitors did not fare much better in the middle period, falling behind 6-1, with Santia, Brit Ouellette and Evan Stibbard tallying for Essex.

Wallaceburg managed to outscore the 73's in the third by a 2-1 margin, but it was a case of much too little and way too late. Santia capped off his hat trick for the final Essex goal.

"It makes no difference to us who we meet in the final," said Assistant Coach Jamie McDermott. "We play the same style against all our opponents and it seems to be successful so far."

Confident 73's enter championships

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

The Essex 73's will try to clinch their fifth Great Lakes Junior 'C' Hockey League title in six years as they enter the finals against the Belle River Canadiens this week.

But the team, which swept the Mooretown Flags 4-0 in the first round and trounced the Wallaceburg Lakers 4-1 in round two, will have to stay out of the penalty box if they want to win, said assistant coach Jamie McDermott.

McDermott said the 73's took too many undisciplined penalties in the Wallaceburg series and that he'll be focusing on keeping players out of the box.

"Once a couple guys do it, it kind of snowballs and more of our players are getting penalties," McDermott

said. "If we can stay disciplined, we should do all right."

Fewer penalties or not, McDermott said the team's veteran players are still going into the series feeling confident.

Such players as R.J. Hotts, last season's leading scorer, and right-winger Dan Croft helped lead the 73's past the Wheatley Sharks in six games last year to win the Great Lakes title.

Their enthusiasm is also charging up the rookie players, McDermott said.

But one primary member of the 73's won't be behind the bench for the series – head coach Tony Piroski.

In January, Piroski was handed a year-long suspension after an altercation with a referee.

Since then, McDermott and Piroski's son Jordy have

taken on responsibilities behind the bench during games.

But that doesn't mean Piroski's influence has disappeared, said assistant general manager Mark Barnett.

"They've listened to Tony and maintain the same kind of coaching style," Barnett said. "They've been with him for years and it kind of rubs off on them."

Barnett also said that compared to last season's accomplished squad, this year's team is even stronger on offence.

"They're high powered, faster and a tad younger," he said. "Tony has always focused on offence."

Barnett is also counting on Essex fans to continue to fill Memorial Arena and show their support for the 73's.

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Essex 73's Chad Wolters, Ajay Sweet and Wes Tan join in celebrating a first period goal against the Wallaceburg Lakers March 13.

Essex 73's vs. Belle River Canadiens

- Tues. March 20 Belle River at Essex
- Fri. March 23 Essex at Belle River
- Sun. March 25 Belle River at Essex
Time: TBA
- Wed. March 28 Essex at Belle River
- Fri. March 30 Belle River at Essex

- Sun. April 1 Essex at Belle River
- Tues. April 3 Belle River at Essex

Regular game time: 7:30 p.m.

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