

Dec. 22 Ice Hockey



Billy Kriegner had the Northstars goal in tonight's morale-boosting effort against WW-P South (Photo by Dennis Symons Jr./purchase photos at www.dennissymons.com).

Nottingham has best outing of the season in loss to WW-P South

**By Tony Piscotta
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Dec. 22: Don't try telling the Nottingham hockey team that there are no such things as moral victories or losses that are learning experiences.

Both in their effort on the ice – even after the outcome was no longer in doubt – and in the atmosphere in the locker after the game, you would have a hard time believing the team had just lost

it's eighth straight game.

"They're pumped up. They played their best hockey. That was our best game of the whole season," said first-year coach Alex Chis-Luca, whose team fell to traditional power West Windsor-Plainsboro South (2-3-1) by the score of 6-1.

Despite the fact that the Northstars (0-8-0) were out-shot, 38-16 and did not score until senior Bill Kriegner ripped a shot past Pirates' freshman goalie Patrick Tso with just over seven minutes left in the game, making the game 6-1 at the time, the Northstars were looking at things from a positive perspective.

"We played well as a team. We did lose but we played well," said junior defenseman Rich Brihn, who had several big hits and played a solid positional game. "(West Windsor-Plainsboro South) is a good team and we didn't get 10-goaled like we could've been. We're playing better."

Another bright spot was the play of junior goalie Kyle O'Byrne, who played his angles well to minimize opportunities and controlled any rebounds in his crease area.

After stopping several point blank attempts in the first period, O'Byrne finally surrendered a goal with just over two minutes left in the period when the Pirates' Bryan Tso skated across the front of the net unimpeded and then slid the puck back to the opposite side. The Pirates stretched the lead to 2-0 with four seconds left in the period when Mike Morabito tipped in a shot from the side of the net.

When the Pirates scored a third goal less than two minutes into the second period it looked like the Northstars might be headed down the same old road but the team responded with arguably its best period of the year - and took the game into the locker room break down just three goals.

"We played a complete game. Offensively, defensively, in the neutral zone," said Chis-Luca. "Every shift was intense. They (his players) were hungry the entire game."

One reason for the sustained effort, according to Chis-Luca, is the play of senior captain John Terry. Terry assisted on Kriegner's goal and was competitive on both ends of the ice.

"He's been there from the beginning. He knows what it takes and he knows there's not a whole lot to work with but he does what he can," said Chis-Luca, when asked how his captain keeps from getting frustrated by the results. "You encourage them to be the best you can and work with what we've got."

And while the Northstars are not yet ready to compete with the higher end teams of the CVC, Chis-Luca and Company are confident that efforts like this game can be a spring board for better things. Particularly with the Hamilton Holiday Tournament just around the corner.

"Hopefully something like this will help us (in the tournament)," said Brihn, who feels the Northstars are better prepared to face some of the Patriot Division rivals they will see for the second time in the tournament.

"This is something you can build off," said Chis-Luca. "Everything we're doing right now is a stepping stone. It's not easy when you have a lot of players who started playing as freshmen."

While the lack of experience and technical skill is the most obvious factor in Nottingham's struggles to this point, the Northstars are going to have to learn to be more disciplined and to control their emotions if they are going to be more successful.

While the team's willingness to compete is admirable, Nottingham commits way too many infractions at inopportune times.

"The intensity gets the best of them sometimes and the events get the best of them sometimes," said Chis-Luca, when asked about the excessive number of penalties. "They get their hands up when they try and protect themselves and get a penalty or they'll take a retaliation penalty because they feel frustrated at times. That's something we're trying to work on and we try to re-

enforce that they have to stay away from those penalties."

Against the Pirates, the Northstars took six penalties but could have easily had a dozen or so more. While only one of the West Windsor-Plainsboro South goals were scored on the power play, the seemingly endless parade to the box took away any type of momentum for the Northstars and allowed the Pirates to control the puck in the offensive zone for long stretches.

For Brihn, it is a tough line at times.

"You try and make a clean hit and try to hit him only if they have the puck," he said when asked about the penalty issue (In fact, Brihn was mistakenly given a two minute minor when Terry tackled a Pirates player in front of the Northstars' net).

While a 6-1 defeat might be just a loss to most people, it is another learning experience for the Northstars. Maybe there is such a thing as a moral victory.