

Dec. 26 Ice Hockey

Hamilton tops Lawrence as Rogers show how far he has progressed

By Tony Piscotta

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Dec. 26: Since taking over at Hamilton West, one of the things that co-coach Matt Hamilton has liked about the Hornet Holiday Classic is the chance it gives some of his more inexperienced players to see ice time they may not get during the team's tough Colonial Valley Conference schedule.

One example of how the tournament has paid off is senior Kyle Rogers.

"He's come a long way since his freshman year," said Hamilton. "He doesn't talk a lot but he's tough to get off the puck and he gets to the front and keeps putting the puck into the net."

Rogers, once one of the inexperienced players for the Hornets, is now one of the team's leading scorers and scored the fourth goal as the Hornets (2-4) cruised to a 4-1 win over Lawrence in the tournament's opening game.

"It gives us more confidence and gives more players a chance to play more," said Rogers of the tournament. Rogers scored on a deflection, re-directing a shot from the point by sophomore defenseman Gerry Gomez, one of two assists for Gomez.

With two of the top goalies in the CVC, Hamilton's Evan Morris and Lawrence's Alex Finan going head-to-head, the contest figured to be a low-scoring affair. But the Hornets, using an old formula of getting pucks and bodies to the net, preferably at the same time, were able to score once in the opening period and three more times in the second stanza.

"That's the way we usually play," said Rogers. "We're in a better division (the Valley) this season and our coaches tell us to shoot the puck low and to chase rebounds."

That formula led to the Hornets first two goals. Senior Sean Tohill started things midway through the first period. After Finan stopped Hamilton's Thomas Tramontana from point blank range - one of 13 saves Finan made in the opening period - Tohill found the puck in a goal mouth scramble and put the puck in the net.

Tohill put the Hornets' up 2-0 with 8:19 left in the second, once again taking advantage of a second chance opportunity. After a sharp pass from defenseman Dave Osnato caught the Cardinals trying to leave the defensive zone too quickly, Tohill grabbed his own rebound after an outstanding toe save by Finan and lifted the puck over the sprawled goalie.

"That's what we tell them we have to do," said Hamilton. "Let's try and get the puck to the net, set some screens, get some redirections and we'll have opportunities down low. A couple of times we didn't hit the net but we try to get shots from the point and get deflections."

Both of Gomez' assists came from the point.

On the Hornets third goal, Finan made a kick save on Gomez but directed the puck into the middle of the zone where junior Jared Romanski was able to capture the puck before two Cardinals defenders could contain him and then snapped the puck past Finan before the goaltender could make the stop.

The Cardinals cut the deficit to 3-1, with just over two minutes left in the second when defenseman Chaz Nagy finished a rush from his own net by flipping his own rebound past Morris.

Rogers scored the game's final goal with 29.3 seconds left in the second period with the Hornets enjoying a 5 on 3 power play.

Morris stopped 25 of 26 shots to get the win, raising his record to 2-5 with the win, while the Hornets peppered Finan with 34 shots.

While the Hornets took their lumps recently against some quality teams, Hamilton is confident that his team is headed in the right direction.

"We opened up with a couple of tough teams," said Hamilton when asked about the team's sub-.500 record, "but these guys know what they can do. These are the same players that played in our county tournament win over Steinert (last season). That's the team that is back this year."

With the win the Hornets picked up 3 1/2 of a possible four points in the tournament standings (a team receives one point for a win and one point for each period it wins with a half-point being awarded for a tie or a tied period).

Hamilton will face Nottingham, a team it defeated 8-3 on December 20, in its second tournament game at 4 p.m. Tuesday. Lawrence (2-6), which has lost six straight since defeating Nottingham and Hightstown in back-to-back Patriot Division contests to open the season, earned a half point by tying the third period and will face Hightstown in the 8 p.m. game Tuesday.

St. Rose, which defeated Hightstown 10-0 and currently leads the tournament with four points, faces Steinert, an 8-2 winner over Nottingham, in the 6 p.m. game. All games in the Hamilton Holiday Classic are being played at the Lawrenceville School.