

Dec. 1-2 Ice Hockey: Spartans give new coach a win



Steinert goalie PJ Alexiadis drops to his knees to make one of his 21 saves today in the Spartans 5-2 victory over Hightstown. The win provided a successful debut for new coach Ryan DeClerico (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing www.jbsportsphoto@aol.com).

Spartans overcome jitters to overtake Hightstown in DeClerico's debut

By Rich Fisher

Fish4Scores.com

Dec. 2: It's around this time of year little kids start staying awake a little longer due the impending arrival of Mr. Claus and his posse.

Ryan DeClerico was a little kid all over again, but it had nothing to do with wanting a pair of skates for Christmas, and everything to do with how his skaters would perform.

And after a sluggish start, they performed quite well as Steinert rallied for a 5-2 victory over Hightstown in the season-opener for both teams at Mercer County Rink today.

It marked a successful coaching debut for DeClerico, the 2001 Spartan captain who replaced Bill James this year.

"A lot of sleepless nights coming into this game," DeClerico said with a grin. "I was very excited. It was good to get the first one under the belt.

"This feels good. We were a little shaky coming out. We had first-game jitters but we held it together and played pretty strong. We played a lot of things we worked on and we got the win."

"It was definitely good to come out and get through the first period and really take control of it at the end," said senior forward Sean Clinedinst, who scored two goals.

The Spartans started slow, unable to capitalize on a double major that provided them four consecutive minutes of power play time. Hightstown then took a 1-0 lead and the Spartans came up empty on a third power play.

But with just 1:55 remaining in the first period Steinert finally clicked on the power play as Clinedinst scored off a pass from Tanner Dow.

That lit a fire under Steinert as Andrew Dudich set up Joe Konrath to make it 2-1 with just 49.5 seconds left.

The Spartans carried the momentum into the second period, as Dow scored from the right wing and Clinedinst scored from the left wing off a feed from Carston Raab.

Alex Verdi set up Christian Clayton for the Spartans final goal in the third period, as Steinert finished with a 48-23 shot advantage. Spartan goalie PJ Alexiadis made 21 saves.

"They say a two-goal lead is the worst one possible, so we had to keep pushing to give ourselves a bigger cushion," Clinedinst said of the add-on goals. "But once you get up a few you can take little chances, especially with our goalie. PJ's been getting more experience in high school hockey and he's been improving over the last few seasons."



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Former Spartan captain Ryan DeClerico walks off the ice after winning his head coaching debut with Steinert today (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing www.jbsportphoto@aol.com).

DeClerico felt that after Steinert got over some first-game jitters, things got progressively better.

“We’re happy with how hard they worked,” he said. “We ran a lot of stuff we talked about in practice but we didn’t do everything to expertise level yet, which of course isn’t expected. But we’ll get back on the practice ice and we’ll keep on working toward somewhat perfection.

“We got some good senior leadership today. Some guys have really taken over and helped out. They’ve been a big help to me and coach (Pete) Rossi. The young guys are stepping up and carrying pretty big loads too. We’re excited to see what we have for the season.”

Obviously, there is a feeling out process between the players and the two new coaches, but Clinedinst feels it’s coming together.

“It’s been pretty smooth,” the assistant captain said. “It’s nice to relate to a younger coach, he’s a nice guy. He plays the game nice and simple so it’s an easy transition.”

One thing that made the transition a bit tougher was the fact each team got whistled for 10 minor penalties, leading to a bunch of power plays, or even situations with both teams down.

“I told the ref after the second period that’s the most penalties I’ve ever seen called in a game,” DeClerico said. “It was difficult to get our lines set up again because there were so many five-on-fours, four-on-fours, and a three-on-three at one point.

“It was tough getting in a flow just from a line standpoint. But the lines pulled through.”

And with that, DeClerico was ready to go home and get some well earned sleep.

Slow start and Zrinko doom Northstars in loss to Lawrence

Dec. 2: Nottingham was victimized by a condensed three-goal outburst and could never recover as Lawrence took an 8-2 win over the Northstars in Alex Chis-Luca’s debut as head coach.

The Cards broke it open with a three-goal outburst in a span of 2:41 in the first period. Nottingham tried to come back when Kyle Ballschneider scored with 34.1 seconds left in the period, but Cory Zrinko scored a natural hat trick in the second to give the Cardinals a 6-1 lead.

“They got behind quick and we had to settle them down just to make sure they didn’t let it spiral out of control,” said Chis-Luca, who was an assistant under Mike Bendorf last year. “They got back into it a little bit, they got one goal a little later in the period. But Lawrence came back and we let down a little more.

“We told them keep battling and the opportunities will come. It’s just positioning. They gotta straighten out their positioning, look for where they’re supposed to be.”

Matt MacNeal scored a third-period goal for the Northstars. Kevin Fuller, John Terry and Ballschneider had assists and goalie Kyle O’Byrne made 34 saves as Lawrence held a 42-31 shot advantage.

“Ballschneider and Terry stepped it up, they’ll be our leaders,” Chis-Luca said. “Matt MacNeal chipped in a goal. I saw a lot of good things from Billy Kriegner. Everybody else chipped in where they could and did what they could.”

Matt Hamilton has message for CVC: Notre Dame is back

Dec. 1: Hamilton West opened with the late game at Mercer Rink Thursday night, and was put to sleep by Notre Dame in a 10-0 loss that ended midway through the third period by the mercy rule.

“The difference in numbers and talent was readily apparent from the get-go,” coach Matt Hamilton said. “Notre Dame is back (as a power). The positive is we almost made it through three periods, we fought until the end.”

