

Feb. 3 Ice Hockey



Steinert's Tanner Dow tries to get a shot past Nottingham goalie Kyle O'Byrne during today's game at Mercer Rink (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing jbsportsphoto@aol.com).

Konrath's five help Steinert turn Klockner Klash into one-sided affair

**By Tony Piscotta
Fish4Scores.com**

Feb. 3: The names Nottingham and Steinert usually bring out the best in the two Klockner Road rivals.

The football and soccer contests this past fall were classics. And Saturday's wrestling match between the Colonial Valley Conference Valley Division champion Swamprats and the Colonial Division champion Spartans' powerful (12-3) club is an eagerly anticipated tilt that has been dubbed the Klockner Klash.

Unfortunately, in hockey that has not been the case. And in today's 10-0 Steinert rout at Mercer County Park, at least part of the blame may go to Hightstown.

After the Rams gave the Spartans (7-10-1, 6-71 CVC) fits in last week's contest before Steinert escaped with a 7-5 win, Steinert was not about to take another team lightly.

"We definitely got caught looking past Hightstown," said senior captain Andrew Dudich. "We didn't do that today and hopefully we won't do that against Lawrence (in the Spartans' final regular season game) and in the Mercer County Tournament. We need to really step up our game."

The Spartans, who clinched the CVC's Patriot Division title with their less-than-impressive win

against the Rams last Friday, did more than just step up their game.

Steinert came out flying from the first whistle and dominated the Stars (2-16, 0-12 CVC).

Steinert scored four times in the opening stanza and did not allow the Stars to get their first shot until over ten minutes had elapsed.

"(The Hightstown game) was absolutely a wake-up call," said Spartans coach Ryan DeClerico. "We came out of that game knowing we were lucky to win and really reamed them out about that. It's all about getting our feet moving.

"We had our feet moving against Hopewell Valley (a tight 2-1 loss) but didn't against Hightstown and it almost cost us. Today we had our feet moving."

Two of the quickest, and most effective Spartans, in addition to Dudich, were sophomore Joe Konrath and senior Sean Clinedinst.

Konrath, the Spartans' leading scorer, scored five goals, including the final goal that ended the game less than two minutes after the teams returned to the ice for the third period.

"We've been lackadaisical in these type of games and completely underestimated teams," said Dudich. "We were not going to do that today."

The Spartans peppered Northstar goalie Kyle O'Byrne with shots in the first period and finally broke through at 13:28 when Konrath converted a snap shot from the slot on a nice passing play from freshman Christian Clayton and sophomore Tanner Dow.

Dow made it 2-0 at 8:21 - taking a cross-ice feed from Clayton and snapping a shot into the net. Dudich had the first of his five assists on the play. Clayton got his third straight assist 48 seconds later - sending a pass to Konrath that the sophomore converted. Clinedinst scored the first of his three goals with 39 seconds left in the period.

The Stars played their best stretch of hockey in the first five minutes of the second period, keeping the Spartans off the board, before Steinert scored two goals 13 seconds apart to stretch the lead to 6-0.

Clinedinst scored off a feed from Dudich at 9:59 and then Konrath again found himself all alone in the slot and sent a laser into the Stars cage.

After back-to-back goals by Clinedinst and Konrath stretched the lead to 8-0 with just under seven minutes left in the second, the game took on a nasty tone - as several players were sent off the ice.

While the Stars were assessed the majority of the penalties - and gave up a 5-on-3 power play goal with one second remaining in the second - DeClerico was quick to point out that both teams could have conducted themselves better.

"There were some cheap shots by them but some of our guys were trash talking and instigating things," said DeClerico. "Nobody likes losing and we've been on the other side of that. We were definitely instigating a little and we had a talk about that. We should be better than that."

If the Spartans learn to behave better the same way they learned to not take teams lightly, they just may finish this season on an up note.

"We'd like to play well," said Dudich when asked how the Spartans are approaching their last few games. "We've never gotten farther than the second round of the county tournament and we'd like to go a little further this year."

After facing Lawrence in their final regular season game next Wednesday, the Spartans should find out about their first round opponent when the Mercer County Tournament begins the following week.

The Northstars face Hightstown, one of two teams they've defeated this season, in their final

CVC game and then travel to South Jersey next Friday to face St. Joseph-Hammonton in their final game.