

**Jan. 11 Ice Hockey**

## **Spartans play best game of the year in tight loss to talented Hopewell**

**By Tony Piscotta**

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**Jan. 11:** Maybe seeing really is believing.

During the Steinert hockey teams' recent struggles - the Spartans (5-10, 4-7 CVC) had won just once in their last 10 games after winning their first four - coaches Ryan DeClerico and Peter Rossi III have been trying to get the Spartans to play a more conservative, blue collar style of hockey.

After losing to Notre Dame 10-0 Monday night, the young team followed its coaches' instructions to a "T" against Hopewell Valley today, playing its best game of the season.

While the Spartans fell just short, losing 2-1 after a Spartans' shot clanked off the crossbar with just 21.5 seconds left in the game, DeClerico was certainly satisfied.

"We were a completely different team today. (Hopewell is) a quality team but that's the hockey we're capable of playing," the coach said.

While the Bulldogs controlled much of the play in the first period, out-shooting the Spartans 10-4, the Steinert defense did a nice job of keeping the play to the outside and when shots did get through junior goalie P.J. Alexiadis made sure he stopped the puck and prevented any rebound opportunities.

"The team was playing really well around me so I knew I had to play well," said Alexiadis, who started in net for the Spartans in the loss to Notre Dame but left the game after being hit in the head late in the second period. "I knew I had to come back and play well (after ND)."

Oddly enough, despite all the pressure they were putting on at even strength, the Bulldogs scored the game's first goal at 11:25 of the second period with Steinert on the power play.

With a delayed penalty called against Steinert, Hopewell's Randy Donovan forced a turnover and junior Max Daley unleashed a laser that Alexiadis got a glove on but could not stop as it fluttered into the net.

Hopewell made it 2-0 with a power play goal at 8:50 when Tyler Weidman deflected a point shot from Donovan into the net.

After struggling to generate much offense to that point, Steinert got on the board with 7:02 left in the period on a harmless looking play.

Sophomore Tanner Dow, who won several key face-offs during the game, particularly on the Spartans' power play, won an offensive zone draw and got the puck to Rob Mulcare. Mulcare passed to freshman Christian Clayton, who slid the puck past Hopewell goalie Ryan Dajack.

From that point on, Alexiadis came up with a couple of big saves to close out the second period and then Steinert dominated the final period - out-shooting Hopewell Valley, 10-2.

"(HoVal's early pressure) was because they were a good team," said DeClerico. "From the middle of the second period on we started to work hard and when you work hard you get some confidence.

"The whole momentum of the game changed and it's the first time in a long time that we went into the (second period intermission) feeling good about ourselves and with confidence."

Senior Sean Clinedinst and captain Andrew Dudich provided stability on the back line as the Spartans generated some very good scoring chances. Clinedinst felt it was Steinert's defensive play early in the game which led to the turnaround.

"We brought a much higher level of energy to this game," he said. "When you make big plays

down low and in the defensive zone it really gives guys the motivation to play harder.”

The Spartans had several scoring chances in the third period - particularly when the Bulldogs took a pair of third period penalties - but could not get the equalizer past Dajack.

Dow and Joe Konrath had a two-on-one opportunity with 1:38 left but defenseman Tyler Weidman made a nice sliding play to prevent the pass.

Dudich and Clinedinst then both had scoring chances with Alexiadis out for an extra attacker. Dajack made a stop on Dudich's point shot with 33.6 left and Clinedinst's wrist shot off a Bulldogs' turnover skirted off the left side of Dajack's chest protector but glanced off the crossbar and out of the rink.

DeClerico, while disappointed with the final result, was confident that the game would serve as a stepping stone going forward.

"Maybe that long stretch we went through was growing pains," said DeClerico. "Nobody likes to lose and when you lose as many games as we did everyone tries to do more individual things and it doesn't work.

"Everyone needs to work as a team. The key is working as a team and working as hard as you possibly can."