

## Jan. 4 Ice Hockey – Spartans, Hornets fall



*Hamilton will keep its fingers crossed when it comes to the health of junior forward Thomas Tramontana, who left the ice tonight with a possible separated shoulder (Photo by Dennis Symons Jr./purchase photos at [www.dennissymons.com](http://www.dennissymons.com)).*

### **Another case of the third-period blues haunt Spartans in loss to Princeton**

**By Tony Piscotta  
Fish4Scores.com**

**Jan. 4:** The Princeton High ice hockey team is defending Mercer County Tournament champion and has just one loss in Colonial Valley Conference play this season - to undefeated Notre Dame.

It would be easy to look at the final score of Wednesday night's 7-1 Steinert loss to the Little Tigers and figure that the Spartans, who are skating without several key players, were simply out-classed by a superior opponent.

That would be a mistake.

"It's our third period. We were hanging in there and we played really well," said Steinert coach Ryan DeClerico, whose team was tied 1-1 with the Little Tigers (6-2-2, 6-1-1 CVC) halfway through the second period before Princeton scored six unanswered goals.

"They were getting more shots than we were but they were coming from where we wanted them to. On the outside and high. At least two of the (first three) goals were deflections."

The key deflection was the Little Tigers' third goal, which came with just a minute left in the second when it appeared that the two teams would go into the ice cut intermission with the Little Tigers holding just a single-goal lead.

Princeton sophomore Mike Wasson attempted to make a pass to the Steinert slot but the puck inadvertently hit off a Spartan defender and caromed into the net, giving Princeton a 3-1 lead.

But as was the case in previous losses to Paul VI, St. Rose, Robbinsville and Lawrence, instead of using the extended break to re-energize and come out strong in the third period, the Spartans played their worst period after the break.

"I cannot put my finger on it," said DeClerico. "It's not fitness. They have the whole fifteen minutes to sit and rest and drink but for some reason we hit a wall. We give up a quick one and it deflates us."

That "quick one" came 33 seconds into the final period.

After being stopped moments earlier on a shot from the blue line by Steinert goalie P.J. Alexiadis, Princeton freshman forward John Reid found himself all alone on the doorstep and slid the puck past the prone Spartan netminder.

The Little Tigers' onslaught continued as they made it 5-1 on beautiful passing play with 12:19 remaining when freshman Connor McCormick finished off a lightning quick passing play from Bence Stipsicz and Matt DiTosto.

The Spartans best scoring chance of the period came when freshman Christian Clayton picked the pocket of a Princeton attacker and went in on a mini-breaker but was stopped on a dazzling glove save by goalie Josh Berger.

"The last two games he's completely picked it up," said DeClerico, of the freshman, who has seen added ice time due to the absence of forwards Rob Mulcare (illness) and Ryan Zujkowski (collar bone injury). "I called him out in front of the team after the last game (against Lawrence) to let the team know how good of a game he had, hustling, and trying hard."

Like the Spartan forwards, the defensive corps has been reduced to four healthy bodies after freshman Austin Durling was injured against Nottingham in the holiday tournament.

"That's why it's important that we back check because it helps us so much," DeClerico said. "We're playing four defensemen right now and it wears them down if they have to defend all the time."

Wasson opened the scoring for Princeton, scoring at 13:37 of the first off of assists by Stipsicz and DiTosto but Alexiadis and the Spartans defense kept the Little Tigers in check for the rest of the period. The junior goalie stopped 11 shots in the period while the defenders kept the puck from the dangerous areas.

Steinert tied the game with 10:11 remaining when junior Alex Verdi got the puck past Berger off a nice setup by Joe Kontrath and Sean Clinedinst.

Though Kontrath was able to get a few of his patented rushes during the game, Princeton's defenders did a nice job of keeping the Spartans' leading scorer in check.

Steinert returns to the ice on Friday, in a non-CVC game against Pennington School at Ice Land. The Red Raiders should be a big test for Steinert.

Pennington's misleading 2-4 record includes a 4-1 loss to prep power PDS and a 4-2 loss to unbeaten Notre Dame. The Red Raiders got their second win of the season earlier today, defeating cross-town rival Hopewell Valley, 6-4, as Tucker Hart and Alexander Thomas scored two goals each.

The Spartans (5-7, 4-4 CVC) have now lost seven of eight after a 4-0 start. They face traditional CVC powers Hopewell Valley and Notre Dame next week before finishing the regular season with Hamilton and their three Patriot Division rivals.

## **Hornets let Paul IV tactics get to them in disappointing setback**

**By Tony Piscotta  
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**Jan. 4:** After arguably the most successful five-game stretch in Hamilton West ice hockey history, the Hornets met the Colonial Valley Conference's newest member, Paul VI of Haddonfield on Wednesday afternoon at Mercer County Park.

If initial impressions are any indication, the experience was less than cordial.

While Hornets coach Matt Hamilton was far from happy with the 8-3 win by the Eagles, who compete in the Colonial Valley Conference's Colonial Division and are eligible to compete in the

Mercer County Tournament, he was more disappointed with both the chippy nature of the game and the way the Hornets reacted.

"It's easy enough (to know what type of team the Hornets have). We skate our tails off and our effort is unbelievable; we just have to get it," said Hamilton, who felt that several times the Eagles goaded Hamilton into taking penalties either with chatter or cheap shots.

"Our depth (is an issue). Any scouting report tells you we have three defensemen and a physical forward in (Sean) Tohill and you can get one of our defensemen off the ice or get under some of our guys' skins."

Ironically, it was a penalty to Paul VI's Rich Reustle eight seconds into the third period that allowed Hamilton to pull within one, 4-3, early in the period. Tohill won the ensuing face-off and passed the puck to senior Shawn Hrymack, who got a quick shot through Eagles' goalie Matt Besterman.

However, the Eagles (4-4-1, 4-3-1 CVC) scored the game's final four goals, three of which were scored on tic-tac-toe passing plays; preventing any opportunity for a Hornets' comeback.

"We played better against St. Rose," said Hamilton, referring to a 3-1 loss to St. Rose of Belmar in the Hornet Holiday Classic title game.

In fact, combined with the Hornets' 15-5 win over Hightstown on Monday, the three wins in four games at the Hornets Holiday Classic was the best five-game stretch in school history.

"They (St. Rose) were a good team but we were more disciplined against them. (Paul VI) had some good players, number 18 (Alec Weisensee) and number 12 (senior Jeff Hurley) were good and they had some skill but there were a lot of cheap shots and they ran their mouths. St. Rose was physical but that was just a clean, hard-hitting game."

Things started out well for Hamilton 5-6-0, 2-5-0 CVC); Tohill opened the scoring at the 11:10 mark when he wristed a shot past Besterman to give the Hornets a short-lived lead. Sophomore Gerry Garcia had the assist.

Weisensee scored the first of his two goals just 53 seconds later, off a neat pass from Michael Chester.

The Eagles scored the first of their three power play goals with 2:45 left in the first when Chester scored on a deflection off a point shot by Reustle and the period ended with the Eagles holding a 2-1 lead.

Hurley, who had a hat trick for the Eagles, scored his first goal of the game midway through the second period, wristing a shot top shelf from the right circle over Hornets' goalie Evan Morris' shoulder and stretching the lead to 3-1.

Hamilton's Joe Olszewski scored what looked like it would be a key goal, taking a pass from Tohill on the doorstep of the Eagles' goal and putting the puck past Besterman but that was when the Hornets' penalty troubles re-emerged.

Hamilton's Jared Romanski was whistled for roughing after a goal mouth skirmish at 5:15 of the second period and just nine seconds later Basileo scored for the Eagles, converting on a textbook passing play from Corey Giangrante and Chester.

The Hornets' task was made tougher when junior forward Thomas Tramontana left what was initially diagnosed as a separated shoulder towards the end of the second period.

"I was disappointed with all the cheap shots," said Hamilton afterwards. "There'd be a shove or a glove to the back of the head and we'd hit back and then we'd get the penalty. If you're going to let it go, let it go both ways or if you're going to call it, call it both ways."

West now goes from playing a new "friend", to an old one in Robbinsville (7-3-2), which it plays Friday at 5 p.m. at Mercer County Park.

"We've played eleven games and (Ravens' coach) Dan Bergan has been to nine of them," said Hamilton. "I think he was in camouflage in the rafters at Lawrenceville (during the Hornets Holiday Classic).

"Depth-wise they have us but we've always played close games." said Hamilton. "Their first year in the league I think they beat us for their first win and we got them a couple of years ago in the county tournament."

