

Coach Schafer's Notes for December 10, 2014

Cornell vs. Denver at Lynah Rink
December 5th and 6th

CORNELL 4, Denver 1
Denver 3, CORNELL 1

A number of people have remarked that Friday night's game was the best ever seen at Lynah Rink in recent years. And while I will somewhat agree with them, Saturday evening's performance was certainly the same attention to detail and the same passion that produced a great win on Friday.

We are one of the bigger hockey teams on the collegiate scene, and Denver is one of the smallest, but its "smaller" defensemen can really skate. We knew this, and prepared the players for this fact.

The visitors were ranked No. 10 in the country and coming off a bye week after a win over Wisconsin. They came out flying, but we stayed right with them. It was end-to-end skating by both teams. We took the early lead at 7:29 of the first period. Junior Christian Hilbrich, one of the biggest forwards if not the biggest in college hockey, took advantage of a Denver miscue, and broke in from the right circle on a two-on-one. Senior forward Cole Bardreau, breaking down the slot, drew the defense over, and Hilbrich fired a blazer that went into the net under the goaltender's blocker. Christian did a lot of good things on that goal. He was above the defender and kept his stick down on the ice. He did a lot of good things in order to score the goal. With 2:48 left in the first period, Denver tied the score, sending us into the first intermission at 1-1.

We found a lot of momentum in the second period, and took a 2-1 lead at 11:44 with Hilbrich notching his fourth goal of the season. We had just finished off killing a penalty. Sophomore forward Jake Weidner flew into the zone, and attempted to send the puck toward the net, but it deflected off a defender right to Hilbrich coming down the slot. The 6-7 forward burying his shot into the back of the net past the goalie's glove.

Forty seconds into the third period, we took a 3-1 lead on a goal by junior forward John Knisley, his third tally in the last two outings. Hilbrich set up the score, after taking a big hit, with a pass to sophomore defenseman Patrick McCarron in space at the right point. McCarron's shot was stopped by the Denver goalie, but Knisley flipped the rebound into the net. Late in the game, as we were killing a penalty and Denver had pulled its goaltender, Weidner won a faceoff back to junior defenseman Reece Wilcox. Wilcox sent a pass to streaking sophomore forward Eric Freschi who deposited the puck into the empty net with nine seconds remaining.

Sophomore goaltender Mitch Gillam was outstanding with a number of great saves. He had a total of 31, stopping 17 of 17 shots in the final 20 minutes. The Denver goalie made 17 saves. We were 0-for-3 on the power play, and the Pioneers were 0-for-2.

The victory was our fourth in a row, and we were looking forward to a sweep on Saturday evening. It didn't happen. For some reason, we didn't come out to play on Saturday. We didn't have that killer instinct. We were playing one of the best offensive teams in the NCAA, and held them to one goal on Friday evening. Why we didn't play better on Saturday night was a mystery, but one we are determined to solve.

After a scoreless first period that we were out-shot, 13-8, Denver scored twice in a span of less than 50 seconds, to take a 2-0 lead at 15:18 of the second stanza. Both were backdoor goals that certainly freshman goalie Hayden Stewart had no chance of stopping.

Two minutes later, we cut the deficit to one, as senior forward Joel Lowry tallied his fourth goal at 17:48. Patrick McCarron worked the puck to the middle of the ice to senior defenseman Joakim Ryan. Ryan whipped a shot on net from the slot that squeezed through the legs of the goaltender, but not across the goal line. Lowry rushed in and knocked it home. The goal gave Lowry points in six of his last seven games.

We trailed 2-1 going into the third period, but couldn't get any closer. With 1:30 left in the game, we pulled Stewart for an extra skater, and Denver scored into an empty net with 56 seconds left.

Stewart played very well in the net with 33 saves, as he saw a lot of action. Except for the two backdoor goals, he was up to the task on everything else. The Denver netminder was called upon for 22 saves. We were 0-for-2 on the power play, and Denver was 0-for-3.

We now take a 5-5-1 record into the break for final examinations. Our next competition will be at the Florida College Classic on Dec. 28-29 in Estero. On the first night, Miami (OH) plays Notre Dame, and we will tangle with Lake Superior State. We would like to see a good Cornell crowd in Florida.

On behalf of the Big Red hockey program, we want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for your generous support. Happy Holidays to you, with best wishes for a prosperous New Year.

GAME HIGHLIGHTS <http://cornellbigred.com/index.aspx?path=mhockey&>