

Coach Schafer's Notes for December 8, 2015

@CORNELL 2, St. Lawrence 1

@CORNELL 5, Clarkson 2

A successful four-point weekend has propelled us into second place in the ECAC hockey standings at 6-1-1 for 13 points. We trail Quinnipiac by one point. We are taking an 8-1-2 record into the semester break. This team deserves a lot of credit for success because of the many injuries incurred this early in the year. It has definitely been a team effort because when one player goes down, other steps up.

This was obvious on Friday night against a very good St. Lawrence team rated as one of the best transition and defensive teams in the league. Just 2:10 into the game, senior co-captain Teemu Tiitinen got his first goal this season off a nice team effort by sophomore forwards Trevor Yates and Alex Rauter. Teemu, who has been a tremendous leader for us on and off the ice, snapped off a shot from the bottom of the circle that went over the right pad of the goaltender.

Obviously, that's a great way to start, although we don't plan it that way. Our philosophy is to play consistent hockey for 60 minutes.

In the second period, Junior forward Jake Weidner doubled our lead at 15:32. Sophomore defenseman Dan Wedman got the play started, junior forward Matt Buckles passed the puck to Weidner, and Jake did the rest with a wrist shot that whizzed past the goaltender's blocker, hit the far post and fell into the net. A two-goal lead going into the final period is very nice but in this league nothing is a sure thing.

St. Lawrence got on the scoreboard just 2:12 into the third period and we had ourselves a hockey game. After that goal, we couldn't seem to win a faceoff and were fighting to retain the puck. About 9 minutes into the third period one of the assistants suggested we adjust our forecheck and the team did a good job the rest of the way. We blocked many shots, giving up the body for the benefit of the team.

We did have some excitement midway through the third period. St. Lawrence hurled a barrage of shots at us, and at one point, junior goalie Mitch Gillam was out of position, and a St. Lawrence player saw an empty net in front of him. But, hold on. Not so fast. Sophomore defenseman Ryan Bliss came to the rescue with a stop while on his knees. A video replay showed that while there was no goal, Bliss was ruled to have stopped the puck with his hand in the crease. This resulted in a St. Lawrence penalty shot, but Gillam stood tall, prompting the

Lynah Faithful into frenzy. With about 2 minutes left, another St. Lawrence shot was stopped by a pair of CU defensemen on the vacated side of the net.

Gillam made 26 saves and the St. Lawrence goaltender stopped 18 shots. We were 0-for-1 on the power play, and the visitors were 0-for-3.

Coming off a high of beating a very good St. Lawrence team, we knew we had to be prepared again on Saturday evening against a Clarkson team that had a very good record outside the league, but was so far winless in the ECAC. Clarkson is as banged up as we are.

Again, we scored early, even though our play in the first period was not especially good. Senior co-captain John Knisley, who played his first game the night before after missing eight with an injury, got us going with a goal at 6:14 of the opening period. It was the seventh time in seven home games this season that we have scored in the first seven minutes of the game. Four minutes later, Clarkson scored to make it 1-1. It was great to see Knisley back in the lineup because he is an offensive threat and gets much ice time on the penalty kill.

With 2:27 left in the period, senior co-captain Christian Hilbrich put us back on top, 2-1. The play was started by freshman defenseman Alec McCrea, his first of two assists on the night. McCrea set up behind the Clarkson net, and then passed out in front to Hilbrich, and the 6-7 forward jammed the puck inside the far post for his third goal of the season. I didn't think that we played great, especially early in the first period even though we entered the first intermission leading 2-1.

The second period was played at a much quicker pace than the first 20 minutes. We had to kill off two consecutive penalties in the final 5 minutes. We still had some offense left, when freshman forward Anthony Angello pounced on a loose puck and skated in on a breakaway. With time running out, Angello fired a shot below the goaltender's blocker, off the post and into the net as time expired. Video replay showed that the puck went across the goal line with only 0.4 seconds remaining in the second period!

That goal really sparked our team going into the third period and it led to another early goal. Alec McCrea scored his first collegiate goal through traffic and the goaltender's five-hole just 2:38 into the period to make it 4-1. Then freshman forward, Mitch Vanderlaan, made it 5-1 about 9 minutes later. This season, we have now tallied five goals (or more) in four games. McCrea got the assist to become the first Big Red player this season with three points in a game. Clarkson ended the scoring with a goal at 11:58 of the third period.

We weren't really sharp throughout the night, including the power play and a number of different things. But, at the same time we did a lot of things well, especially in the third period. With a limited number of chances in the final period, we scored a couple of goals because of good net presence and getting pucks down low and through traffic. These are the things we talk about before games.

Gillam made 20 saves, and the Clarkson goaltender stopped 10 shots. We were 0-for-3 on the power play, and the visitors were 0-for-4. We have now killed off 19 consecutive penalties.

Now we have a well-deserved break with a chance to heal the many injuries that have kept players off the ice and hampered the performances of others playing through injury.

We have three weeks to rest before traveling to the Florida College Classic. We open up the tournament at 4 p.m. on Monday, Dec. 28, against defending National Champion and top-ranked Providence College. Boston College and Ohio State are the other teams in Estero, FL. First-night losers will play one another the next day, followed by the championship game between the winners.

If you are in Florida, please come see us play! The team values your support and the level of college hockey at this tournament couldn't be better.

On behalf of the Cornell hockey program, we wish everyone a Merry Christmas and may 2016 be very, very good to us all.