

Coach Schafer's Game Notes for March 8, 2016

@CORNELL 1, Union 0

@CORNELL 2, Union 1 OT

The Lynah Faithful saw us play some of our best hockey of the season this past weekend and it took all of that to move on to the quarterfinals. ECAC Hockey is so strong from top to bottom this season that every game begins as a tossup.

The guys seemed a little nervous to start the game. Nine of Union's 14 shots on goal came in the first 5 minutes of the first period. Junior goaltender Mitch Gillam was equal to the task, as he was all weekend. We had to kill four successive minutes of penalties in that opening period. We had one great opportunity to score but couldn't get the puck in the back of the net. The guys settled in and played solid and with confidence.

We started the second period slowly but began taking over the play. We had 11 shots on goal to nine for Union; including a shot by freshman forward Mitch Vanderlaan that rang off the post. Gillam kept the game scoreless with a huge save on one of Union's top scorers with 1:25 left before the second intermission.

The momentum kept building into the third period and with 6:12 left in the game a numeral one was put up on our side of the scoreboard. It all began when junior forward Jeff Kubiak won a crucial face-off at the left of the Union goaltender. From the half-wall, Vanderlaan fired a pass to junior defenseman Holden Anderson right on his stick. Anderson's one-timer ripped past the goalie's blocker, off the far post and into the net. The Lynah Faithful roared approval. This was a tremendous goal for a guy like Holden who was rewarded for his hard work all year. When we had injuries before Christmas, Anderson stepped up to play forward, a position he had never played before. He has been in and out of the lineup but demonstrated what he's all about on Friday night with his third goal of the season.

The third period continued to be controlled by us but it also needed a gigantic performance from Gillam, who made two great saves in the last 3 minutes. Junior forward Jake Weidner then won two crucial faceoffs in our zone with less than 8 seconds to play to help capture this team victory.

Gillam made 27 saves and the Union goalie stopped 21 shots. We were 0-for-1 on the power play, and the visitors were 0-for-3.

This was our fourth 1-0 win this season to extend the program's record. Gillam's seventh shutout put him in a tie for second-most in the country and a tie for third-most in Big Red history for a single season, equaling Ben Scrivens '10 in both the 2000-08 and 2009-10 seasons. Obviously, it's so big to win the first game of a two-of-three series.

Saturday night's game seemed to have something for everyone. There were scoring controversies, end-to-end skating races, and great defense, including excellent play by both goaltenders.

We came out fast and equaled the determination and guts that had been so successful for us the night before. Once again, we tested the Union goaltender early on with a bevy of shots but he was equal to the task. In the seventh minute of the opening period, it looked like the visitors were going to be the first to score. After a scrum in front of Gillam, a Union player jammed in the puck. Mitch pointed out to the referee that there was goalie interference, and off they went to review the "goal". When they returned with their "no goal" report, the crowd really got into it. The officials determined that a Union player had banged the puck out of Gillam's glove and ruled no goal.

Later in the first period, we had to kill off a Union two-man advantage, but our penalty-killing threesome of junior forward Eric Freschi, junior defenseman Patrick McCarron and senior defenseman Reece Wilcox, along with Gillam was equal to the task.

Near the halfway mark (10:25) of the second period, we went on top 1-0. Freshman forward Anthony Angello fired the puck past the net that bounced off the back wall and on to the back of the net. Vanderlaan lifted the puck off the net, circled back up the left halfway, and sent a pass to sophomore defenseman Ryan Bliss at the top of the left circle. Bliss sent a rocket towards the Union net that deflected off a defender, hit the ice and bounced past the Union goaltender. It was the second goal of the season for Bliss. This goal was what I call "puck luck". Ryan's shot seemed to hit three or four players before it went in.

Ninety seconds later, Weidner's shot was blocked by the goalie and Jake pushed his rebound underneath the goaltender for an apparent goal but the officials ruled that the whistle had blown the play dead before the goal. We went into the locker room leading 1-0 and thinking that all we had to do was play more of the same sound defense for 20 minutes and then moving on. Wrong.

Forty-two seconds into a Union power play, the Dutchmen converted a rebound at 10:56 of the third period to make the score 1-1. There was no more scoring the rest of the way in regulation.

We did make life more interesting by getting a penalty with 39 seconds left in the third period. I had no problem with the officiating but we wouldn't have minded a call going our way once in awhile.

So, once again, our penalty killing crew had its work cut out. We killed off the penalty at 1:22 into the OT and 1:56 later, we were moving on to the quarterfinals. It all happened when senior forward Christian Hilbrich picked up the puck in the corner at the right of the goaltender. Buckles, in the meantime, started skating toward the goal on the left side of the ice. Hilbrich sent a perfect pass to Buckles who scooped the puck and sent a backhand into the back of the net for his sixth goal of the season at 3:18 of the extra session. This was just a great play by a player who for various reasons has been in and out of the lineup. Even without playing, he has always been upbeat in the locker room and ready to compete when called upon.

Gillam made 32 saves, including two in overtime. He stopped 64 of 65 shots on goal for the weekend. The Union goaltender stopped 26 shots. We were 0-for-1 on the power play and Union was 1-for-5.

The pair of victories sends us to No. 1 seed Quinnipiac on Friday night. Once again, it is a best two-out-of-three-game format with the winner going to Lake Placid. Obviously, we always enjoy your support and that will be the case this coming weekend.