

Coach Schafer's Notes for February 27, 2017

@CORNELL 2, Rensselaer 0

@CORNELL 3, Union 3 OT

Friday night was almost business-like. The team came out having to win and did enough to get the job done. The first period was scoreless, although we had 10 shots on goal.

It didn't take us long to score in the second period. Just 2:27 into the period on the power play, senior defenseman Patrick McCarron scored his fifth goal of the season. After a couple of our shots were blocked, McCarron had the puck at the top of the slot. He circled toward the point and fired a shot towards the net that found its way through traffic and hit the target. Sophomore forward Mitch Vanderlaan and senior forward Matt Buckles were credited with the assists.

Halfway through the second period, we made it 2-0. McCarron's forecheck behind the RPI net caused a turnover that was picked up by senior forward Jake Weidner who kept the pressure on with a pass to senior forward Eric Freschi. Freschi set up Vanderlaan for a one-timer from the top of the left circle. The visitors had 15 shots on goal in the second period but many were from long range.

Senior goaltender Mitch Gillam stopped all 31 shots and was especially effective in helping our penalty-kill unit go 100 percent on five occasions. It was Gillam's 11th shutout of his career, putting him fourth on the all-time school list for that category. The RPI netminder stopped 23 shots. We were 1-for-5 on the power play and as mentioned, they were 0-for-5.

Saturday night was like a playoff game. We knew we couldn't reach first or second place and we weren't going to drop to fourth. It was a big game for confidence and a great competitive contest against a real good hockey team. It was Senior Night and ended up being an evening of special teams. We scored two power-play goals and gave up three.

The fast pace of an outstanding hockey game began immediately as ECAC first-place leader Union pressured us early. We countered with a 2-on-1 break just 2 minutes into the night with freshman forward Jeff Malott getting off an excellent shot that was stopped by their goaltender. We fought off the first Dutchman power play, as Gillam made a save with his right arm on a shot from the middle of the slot. Junior forward Trevor Yates hit the crossbar with the first of two shots he clanged off the bar.

For the second time in two nights, we got on the scoreboard first. Senior forward Jeff Kubiak battled for a puck behind the Union net and sent it up the ice to Yates who in turn fired a pass to Weidner high in the slot. Weidner returned the pass to Yates who scored on a one-timer past the goalie screened by Kubiak. That 1-0 score remained until halfway through the second period, when Union's top scorer tallied his 26th goal of the season on the power play at 11:12. Only 12 seconds later, we grabbed back the lead to go up 2-1. Junior forward Alex Rauter fed the puck from deep in the left corner to sophomore defenseman Matt Nuttle at the point. His shot was turned away by the goaltender but Buckles converted the rebound. Again, we had the lead going into the locker room for the second intermission.

Union demonstrated why it is in first place in the ECAC and scored power-play goals at 2:04 and 11:33 of the third period to take a 3-2 lead. We weren't done fighting and I'm proud of the way the guys fought back. We tied the game at 3-all with 5:01 remaining. A pair of defensemen, Alec McCrea and Yanni Kaldis, started the scoring run on the power play. Vanderlaan, shooting from the top of the right circle, fired a puck through traffic that hit the goaltender and slide across the goal line. It was Vanderlaan's team-leading 14th goal of the season and it gave him goals in five straight outings. The last time we have had that happened was in 2007-08 when Michael Kennedy accomplished the feat.

That was the rest of the scoring for the night. Unfortunately, we lost sophomore defenseman Brendan Smith for the rest of the season with an injury. We played with only five defensemen earlier and we will have to do it again in the playoffs.

Gillam was outstanding again in his final regular-season game of his collegiate career. He had 32 saves to 29 for the Union goaltender. We were 2 for 5 on the power play and unfortunately, they converted three of five chances.

We've been resilient all year long and found ways with a depleted lineup because of injuries to win or tie games. We have made quite the surge to get in the top three in the highly competitive ECAC. The tie gives us an unbeaten streak of nine games (6-0-3).

We now get two weeks to heal some of the bumps and bruises but not Smith. We will be the host for an ECAC quarterfinal best-of-three games series vs. an opponent to be determined beginning on Friday night, March 10.

Come see us play at Lynah Rink (the support was great this past weekend) as we work our way towards the championships in Lake Placid.