

Coach Schafer's Notes for March 25, 2017

UMass Lowell 5, CORNELL 0

Let me preface the outcome of this game by saying how proud I am of our team this year. I can honestly say I don't know how much left they had to give. Lowell is a very good team and played very well together. We finished the season 21-9-5; our first 20-win season since 2010 and our first trip to the NCAA tournament since 2012.

Just 54 seconds into the game, we thought we had scored a goal. Senior forward Jake Weidner picked up a loose rebound in the slot and wristed a shot toward the goal. The shot was flipped down in mid-air by senior forward Eric Freschi at the top of the crease. Freschi fired a shot on goal that was stopped but sophomore forward Mitch Vanderlaan fired the rebound into the back of the net. Cornell 1, Lowell 0. WRONG! The goal was challenged and referees concluded that the puck was above the crossbar when Freschi first made contact in mid-air. The goal was waved off for a high-stick.

It would have been awesome if that first goal stood because it would have allowed us to play from ahead and put pressure on them. The team knows how good we play are once we get a lead.

Less than 5 minutes later, Lowell scored their first goal and took a 1-0 lead into the locker room at the end of the first stanza, a period that saw the shots on goal even at 8-all.

We threatened in the second period twice. Freshmen forwards Jeff Malott and Noah Bauld beat defenders and drove hard to the net only to be denied by the Lowell goaltender. At 6:09 of the second period, Lowell maintained pressure in our zone and drew a delayed penalty. Keeping possession, the River Hawks scored to make it 2-0. This was a very big goal. Ten minutes later, Lowell tallied its third goal to take a 3-0 lead into the final intermission. At this point, shots were 14-13 in the Hockey East champion's favor.

Lowell scored two power-play goals at 14:49 and 18:12 of the third period to capture the 5-0 victory, the first time this season we were shut out. It was a rare first-round loss in the NCAAs for us and was just the third in 10 opening games in the national tournament since it went to a regional format in 1992.

Senior goaltender Mitch Gillam made 16 saves and the Lowell netminder stopped 19 shots. We were 0-for-2 on the power play and they were 2-for-5.

The pace of the game was just what we wanted: low scoring chances. The number of shots was low and quality chances were at a premium on both sides. We just didn't capitalize on our

scoring chances and Lowell played very well as a team. There were things we didn't do but sometimes you just have to tip your cap to the other team.

Every year as a coach you wonder how your team will perform and respond during the season. Last summer, I knew it was going to be a tough start when I saw that 12 of our first 16 games were on the road. In the Fall, injuries cost us senior forward Jeff Kubiak for the first semester and junior defenseman Ryan Bliss for the year; I was worried!

After a number of injuries to our forwards, the players responded very well to begin the year and our record (7-3-1) at the first-semester break exceeded expectations since we had started our road trips 0-2-1. They kept plugging away and found ways to win. As the season progressed, we became healthier and in February we were close to our healthiest of the year. Even though we were without Bliss and junior defenseman Dan Wedman on the blue line we had our best February in many years.

Unfortunately, we lost sophomore defenseman Brendan Smith to injury in our last regular-season game. Many would look at the stats and wonder why he was such a big loss. Brendan was able to play and skate against other teams' top lines and was always up in the rush and broke pucks out with his speed. When we lost him it took away many of the matchups that worked to our advantage.

Obviously, this team continued to find ways to win and get back to the ECAC Championship game and the NCAA tournament. When I look back, I will remember how this group practiced hard every day, how consistent they were during the year and how much fun they had during the process of the season. Our coaching staff had such a great time interacting with these guys on a day- to-day basis.

Good luck to our outstanding senior class and we will welcome back an excellent nucleus for the 2017-18 season. Our season-ending banquet is on Saturday, May 6, at the Lake Watch Inn. I hope to see many of you there to honor our seniors and the entire team that never gave up.