

CLIPPER SPORTS

Selects snag playoff spot

By Tony Zerucha

The Eastman Selects came from behind to pass the Norman Northstars and earn the final playoff spot in Manitoba AAA U18 hockey by winning their final three regular-season games last week.

The Selects narrowed the gap with the Northstars by defeating the Kenora Thistles 7-5 on Feb. 21. Eastman charged out to a 4-0 first period lead on goals by Mario Gagnon, Calyb Moore, Calem Normandeau and Cam Sylvester.

They let the Thistles back into the game in the second period, as Kenora outscored them 3-1 to make it a 5-3 contest heading into the third period. Eric Cote scored his 13th for the Selects. The Thistles made it 5-4 only 23 seconds into the final frame, but Jeremiah Warkentine scored at 7:07. Kenora replied again, but Malachi Thiessen iced the win with an insurance tally at 19:41.

Eastman bombarded Thistle goalie Morgan Blackwood with 59 shots. Selects goalie Daniel Banman made 23 saves in the victory. The Selects' power play scored on three of five attempts.

Next was a pivotal weekend series against the Parkland Rangers at the Sun Gro Centre. In the opener on Feb. 24, the hosts found themselves down 2-1 after 20 minutes, with Nathan Forster scoring.

The Rangers made it 3-1 early in the second, but Warkentine and Finley Titterton scored to tie the game. The clubs traded additional goals before the end of the second period to make it a 4-4 contest heading into the third. Thiessen tallied for the Selects.

Eastman took over in the final frame, outscoring the Rangers 5-1. Hayden Kochen, Luc Degagne, Gagnon, Forster and Cote found the net. Shots were 44-43 Park-

land. Sam Fontaine earned the win.

The Northstars also won on Feb. 24, topping the Southwest Cougars in overtime. That left the Selects one point behind the Northstars entering the final day.

On Feb. 25, Eastman fell behind 1-0 at 6:29 of the first period, but they scored five consecutive goals from Warkentine, Kochen, Cote, Moore and Sylvester to take a commanding 5-1 lead early in the third. Parkland scored late but couldn't close the gap any further, leaving Eastman with a 5-2 victory.

While the Selects were taking care of business, the Northstars lost 5-2 to the Cougars and dropped out of the eighth and final playoff spot.

Eastman's reward? A first-round, best-of-five matchup against the first-place Brandon Wheat Kings. The Wheaties finished 43-1 in the regular season, with their only blemish an overtime loss in November. Brandon won all four games against the Selects by scores of 10-5, 7-1, 8-1 and 8-2.

Game 1 is on March 1 at 7:30 p.m. in Brandon. The Sun Gro Centre hosts a March 3 matinee at 1:30 p.m. before the series reverts to Brandon for the third game on March 5. If necessary, Game 4 is in Beausejour on March 7 at 7:30 p.m., with the deciding contest in Brandon on March 9 at 7:30 p.m.

Brandon dominated the regular season statistics. They had the top five scorers, top three goal scorers and top three assist earners.

Moore was the top Select. He finished 14th with 50 points, while Warkentine was tied for 17th with 45. Moore's 25 goals were ninth-best, while Warkentine's 27 assists ranked 19th and Forster's 26 helpers 20th.

High School Hockey Round-Up

Sabres Advance

The Springfield Sabres' boys dropped Game 1 of their second-round series 5-1 to the John Taylor Pipers. Nic Harms scored late in the third period for Springfield's only goal.

They rebounded nicely in Game 2, dropping the Pipers 3-1. Following a scoreless opening period, Liam Johnston put the Sabres on the board at 3:41 of the second period. It was assisted by Cam Osborne and Evan Suchar.

Springfield nursed that lead well into the third period before the Pipers tied it with 5:41 remaining. Suchar scored the go-ahead tally at 17:59, and Liam Bruchanski scored an insurance goal at 19:59. Osborne, Suchar and Johnston all finished with two points.

That same trio was at it again in the deciding game, as all three scored a goal and assist each in a 3-1 win in front of a boisterous crowd. Matt Lidgett won both games.

Springfield now meets the West Kildonan Wolverines, who finished one spot ahead of them in the standings. The Sabres are in tough, as they lost 8-2 and 4-0 to the Wolverines this season.

Game 1 was scheduled for Feb. 27 in West Kildonan, while Game 2 is on Feb. 28 at 3:40 p.m. in Oakbank. The final game, if necessary, is Friday at the Seven Oaks Arena in Winnipeg at 4:15 p.m.

Wild Season Over

The Powerview-Sagkeeng Wild gave it all they had, but they lost in two straight games to Murdoch Mackay.

In the opening game on Feb. 20, the Wild were down 2-0 heading into the third period

before Connor Bruyere scored on the power play at 5:17. The score held at 2-1 for 10 minutes before Murdoch Mackay expanded the lead to 3-1.

But the Wild weren't finished. Bruyere made it 3-2 at 17:04 and set up Alex Gregoire with only five ticks on the clock to force overtime. Murdoch Mackay won with only 10 seconds left.

Game 2 on Feb. 21 was equally thrilling, but this time, the Wild took an early lead when Hunter Neepinak scored at 10:40 of the first period. After Murdoch Mackay tied it up four minutes into the second period, the Wild regained the lead 18 seconds later off the stick of Caleb Campbell.

Unfortunately, the third period belonged to Murdoch Mackay, who scored twice to end the Wild's season.

Panthers Lose Heartbreaker

The Pinawa Panthers dropped their first game, a 4-3 overtime heartbreaker, to the Warren Wildcats. Jaedys Dancyt scored a hat trick, while Lachlan Cuthbert added two assists.

Pinawa turned the tables in Game 2, beating the Wildcats 4-3. This time, Cuthbert scored the hattie, with Dancyt adding his fourth of the series. Myles Rosnow and Jack Reynolds added two assists each.

The deciding game was a dandy, with the teams trading goals in the first two periods. Jack Reynolds and Lachlan Cuthbert tallied for the Panthers.

Following a scoreless third period, the game headed into overtime. That, too, was scoreless, so a shootout was needed. Unfortunately, the Wildcats outscored the Panthers, ending their season.

Clipper Sports Briefs

Hirst Named Interim Niverville Coach

Lac du Bonnet's Dwight Hirst has been named interim head coach of the Manitoba Junior Hockey League's Niverville Nighthawks for the remainder of the 2023-24 season.

The move comes following the dismissal of head coach and GM Kelvin Cech on Feb. 12. Assistant GM Mike McAulay has accepted the role of interim general manager.

Since Niverville's inaugural season in 2022-23, Cech has been the team's only coach.

The 44-year-old Hirst is a former senior hockey player for the Lac du Bonnet Blues and played in the MJHL with Neepawa (96-98). He also played college hockey with Minnesota State U-Makato and the University of Manitoba.

Hirst served as the head coach of the Eastman Selects U18 AAA team for

four seasons before stepping away from the team last year. Hirst will be looking forward to getting his feet wet coaching at the MJHL level.

The Nighthawks had been slumping recently posting a 3-7-1 record from Jan. 1 until Cech's firing. They have not fared any better in six games since, picking up one point in a 4-3 shootout loss to OCN on Feb. 16 and a 7-3 win over the Winnipeg Freeze Feb. 26.

At press time they are 4 points ahead of the Selkirk Steelers for the final playoff spot in the MJHL's East Division.

Lawes, Njegovan Short at Scotties

Team Manitoba's Kaitlyn Lawes, Beausejour's Selena Njegovan, Jocelyn Peterman and Kristin MacCuish managed to squeeze their way into the playoff round at the 2024 Scotties



Dwight Hirst

Tournament of Hearts, but could move no further.

Team Lawes, Northern Ontario's Krista McCarville, B.C.'s Corryn Brown and Quebec's Laurie St-Georges all finished round robin play with 4-4 records, but the Manitoba provincial champions prevailed thanks to having the top last stone draw ranking.

The foursome were sent home Friday following an 8-5 loss to Selena Sturmey of Alberta.



Photo supplied

Cougars defeated Thriftshop 5-2 to win the womens event.

Ol' Blue tourney raises \$10,000 for LdB Arena

The Lac du Bonnet Ol' Blue mens and womens rec hockey tournament was a success as the event raised close to \$10,000 for the Lac du Bonnet Arena.

A total of eight mens and four womens

teams hit the ice Feb. 3-5. In womens play, the Cougars defeated Thriftshop 5-2. In the mens A final, The Runaways beat the Fish from Selkirk 8-4. The mens B event saw Young Guns top Ol'Blue 6-3.

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