

# Bethalto holds off East Alton-Wood River 5-4 in hockey match

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**EAST ALTON** – Hockey's colorful history has contained the stories of many combinations.

Brett Hull and Adam Oates. Maurice Richard and his brother Henri. The Detroit Red Wings' famed Production Line of Gordie Howe, Sid Abel and Ted Lindsay. The Philadelphia Flyers' Legion of Doom – Eric Lindros, John LeClair and Mikael Renberg. The Buffalo Sabres' French Connection – Gil Perrault, Rick Martin and Rene Robert.

You can probably add the Bethalto combination of Joe Watson and Konnor Loewen to that list as the duo accounted for all five of the Eagles' goals in a MVCHA Class 1A game at East Alton Ice Arena Monday night.

And as things turned out, the Eagles needed all five of them as East Alton-Wood River refused to go away, doing all they could to get a tie in the closing stages. Bethalto, however, managed to hold off the Oilers 5-4.

“We played a complete game,” said **Eagle assistant coach John Criswell**. “Everybody picked everybody else up, we played as a team. We had a short bench again, but we still hung in there.”

Of the Watson-Loewen effort, Criswell said “they're some good players.”

It was a typical Bethalto-EA-WR contest, felt Oiler coach John Helmkamp. “This is typical of Bethalto and East Alton-Wood River,” Helmkamp said. “These teams know the playoffs are about three weeks away, so this was a great, hard-fought battle. “(Both Watson and Loewen) had a good game tonight, and Kaleb Harrop was a star on our side tonight; he had two goals and an assist tonight. They just got one more than we did.”

The Eagles got on the board quickly in the opening period, Loewen finding Watson with a pass and Watson beating Oiler goalie Tyler Hamby just 2:58 into the game to put Bethalto up 1-0. It stayed that way until late in the period, when Loewen took a feed from Watson and scored with 1:37 to go to give the Eagles a 2-0 lead.

Things stayed that way for most of the second period until the Oilers erupted for a pair of goals just 18 seconds apart, Harrop beating Eagle netminder Alec Hilliard with 2:42 to go to halve the lead, then Cole Ford scoring an unassisted goal with 2:24 to go to tie things up at 2-2. But 82 seconds later, with Harrop off for a cross-check, Watson gave the lead back to the Eagles when he took a pass from Loewen and scored to put Bethalto ahead 3-2 through 28 minutes.

Bethalto then survived a huge opportunity for the Oilers when, with both Jacob Robinson and Loewen off on tripping penalties, the Eagles managed to kill off a 90-second 5-on-3 situation, though the Oilers tied the game on a Jacob Vassos power-play goal with 10 seconds left in the Loewen penalty, Harrop and Nolan Royse getting assists.

Undaunted, Watson gave the lead back to Bethalto with an unassisted goal with 8:01 left, then scored what turned out to be the winning goal with 6:20 left on an assist from Loewen. Harrop brought the Oilers back to 5-4 on a goal with 4:27 left, but could not get the late equalizer, even after pulling Hamby in the final minute for a sixth attacker as the Eagle defense and Hilliard stood firm.

The Oilers got 46 shots on goal, with Hillard making 42 saves; Bethalto had 24 shots on net, Hamby being credited with 19 saves.

Bethalto next takes on Alton at 8:45 p.m. Tuesday at East Alton, while the Oilers next meet up with Highland at 7:15 p.m. Thursday at East Alton.



