

East Alton-Wood River blanks Granite City in hockey playoff opener

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
February 5 2016 8:20 AM



EAST ALTON – East Alton-Wood River goaltender **Blake Stone** came back from an injury at just the right time for the Oilers.

Stone had missed most of the season for the Oilers recovering from a broken leg he suffered during the football season and recently returned between the pipes for EA-WR. His game Thursday night in the Oilers' Mississippi Valley Club Hockey Association Class 1A playoff opener against Granite City was exactly the tonic the Oilers needed,

Stone throwing the shutout against Granite City as the Oilers took a 1-0 lead in the best-of-three opening-round series, EA-WR blanking the Warriors 4-0 at East Alton Ice Arena.

“Our goaltender continues to get better every game,” said Oiler coach John Helmkamp. “He got a shutout on only 18 shots; that's big for us.”

Getting Stone back has been great for the Oilers, Helmkamp feels. “It's great to have him back,” Helmkamp said. “He's given up four goals in three games now. He's made the team that much better, so that's good.”

The Oilers got a pair of goals from Cole Ford, a power-play goal from Tyler McHatton and a goal from Kaleb Harrop to down the Warriors, Harrop getting the first Oiler goal in the first period, McHatton scoring on a power-play in the late going in the first session, Ford scoring on a second-period power play and Ford scoring again when the Oilers were short-handed in the third period with Stone coming up big time and again to keep Granite City at bay.

“He (Stone) made some saves when they needed to,” said Warrior assistant coach John Kuchar. “Our shots were going into him more than they were going into the net.”

The Warriors also had a key loss in the first period when they lost Jacob Roderick after a first-period collision near the Warrior offensive zone and Roderick did not return to the game. “He (Roderick) has turned into one of our up-and-coming defensemen,” Kuchar said, “and he's pretty solid back there. It's hard when you lose a kid like that that early.”

The Warrior will be facing elimination when Game 2 of the series takes place at 8:40 p. m. Monday at Granite City's Wilson Park Ice Rink (a deciding game, if needed, would take place at 8:15 p.m. Tuesday at East Alton), and Kuchar knows what Granite City has to do to avoid elimination.

“We expect the same thing,” Kuchar said. “It's nice when you've got good support at home, which we do; we know the ice, we know the building; it makes it a little bit better environment.”

While Helmkamp is happy to be in the series lead, he realizes the series isn't over just yet. “We haven't won the series yet though, we have to continue to focus and not take it for granted,” Helmkamp said. “Granite played one heck of a game tonight; that was a good hockey game. They'll be ready to play; they played us toe-to-toe tonight.”

The winner of the Oiler-Warrior series will take on top-seeded Bethalto in a best-of-three semifinal series beginning Feb. 15; the Class 1A championship series is set for Feb. 22-23-25.

