

MVCHA playoff roundup: Bethalto advances, East Alton-Wood River, Alton fall

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BETHALTO 6, EAST ALTON-WOOD RIVER 1: Two goals from Joe Watson helped send Bethalto to the Mississippi Valley Club Hockey Association's Class 1A Final with a 6-1 win over East Alton-Wood River in Game 2 of the best-of-three semifinal series at Granite City's Wilson Park Ice Rink Tuesday night.

The Eagles swept the series from the Oilers to move into the championship series against Collinsville, who eliminated Alton Tuesday night; the final begins at East Alton Ice Arena Monday night.

Konnor Loewen, Justin Wendel, Anthony Russo and Alex Winter also had goals for the Eagles; Kaleb Harrop had the only Oiler goal of the evening.

Games in the best-of-three final will be played Monday, Tuesday and Thursday (if necessary).

BETHALTO 5, EAST ALTON-WOOD RIVER 1: Playoff hockey can be an entirely different type of hockey than might be seen in the regular season. Teams often enter the postseason with an entirely different mindset – teams can sometimes play with a sense of desperation that may not necessarily be there in the regular season, considering what's at stake.

Both Bethalto and East Alton-Wood River, traditional area rivals in any sport to begin with, played the opener of their best-of-three Mississippi Valley Club Hockey Association Class 1A semifinal series knowing that whoever came out on top would have a big advantage going into Game 2.

The Eagles came out on top thanks to a pair of Jayden Kahl goals as the Eagles took a 1-0 series lead with a 5-1 win over the Oilers Monday night at East Alton Ice Arena. Bethalto can eliminate the Oilers with a win in Game 2, which starts at 6:50 p.m. Tuesday at Granite City's Wilson Park Ice Rink.

“We played a decent first period and then a couple of bounces didn't go our way in the second,” said Oiler coach John Helmkamp. “We crumbled a little bit, and that can't happen in the playoffs. Hopefully we'll get it together for tomorrow night's second game and we can force a Game 3 Thursday.”

Helmkamp, though, knows that the series isn't over as of yet since the Eagles still have to win a second game to advance to the Class 1A Final. “You gotta win two,” Helmkamp said, “and push it to Game 3 to give ourselves a chance to win the series. It's still only one game. Our backs are up against the wall, and we've got to play like it.”

The first period was scoreless, not unusual for a playoff series opener, but the Eagles got one break late in the period when Chris Hamby was called for a hook with 34.6 seconds left; the Eagles power-play time carried over into the second period, and Jacoby Robinson took just 47 seconds to score, beating Oiler goalie Blake Stone to put the Eagles up 1-0. A bit more than three minutes later, EAWR responded when Kaleb

Harrop hit Cole Ford with a pass and Ford got a shot past Alec Hillard to tie proceedings at 1-1.

Bethalto's Konnor Loewen gave his team the lead back with 9:22 left in the period when he accepted a pass from Justin Wendle and scored past Stone for a 2-1 Eagle lead. Kahl extended the lead to 3-1 with 1:03 left in the period when he scored past Stone on a power play (Oiler Blake Weishaupt was off for tripping), Anthony Russo getting the assist on the goal.

Kahl scored a second goal with 5:56 left in the third with Gage Wendel assisting and Joe Watson closed out the scoring when he scored on the power play with 2:21 left.

Things got a bit emotional before Watson's goal, Hamby and Robinson both getting into a bit of a scrap, but officials gave Hamby a five-minute major for fighting, which, under USA Hockey playing rules, which govern MVCHA play, also gave Hamby an automatic game misconduct penalty, which means Hamby will be suspended for Game 2.

“Playoff hockey's intense,” Helmkamp said. “This is the most intense game weve played all year; unfortunately, emotions ran a little high for one of our guys and that's not how we want to be; that's not how we want to play.”

MVCHA CLASS 1A PLAYOFFS – SEMIFINALS, GAME 2

COLLINSVILLE 5, ALTON 1: A three-goal outburst in nearly three minutes of the second period helped send Collinsville to the MVCHA Class 1A Final as the Kahoks swept the best-of-three series against Alton 2-0, the Kahoks ousting the Redbirds with a 5-1 Game 2 win at East Alton Ice Arena Tuesday.

Zach Hunter gave the Redbirds an early lead nearly five minutes into the first period, but the Kahoks' Noah Scrum scored in the final seconds of the period to tie things up, then Cole Metzger and Scrum scored twice (to complete a hat trick) in the Kahoks' second-period outburst to put Collinsville up 4-1 through two.

Scrum scored his fourth goal of the game a bit past midway through the third to end the scoring.

The Kahoks will take on Bethalto in the best-of-three Class 1A championship series, which begins at 7:15 p.m. Monday at East Alton Ice Arena; Game 2 is set for 8:45 p.m. Feb. 23 and Game 3, if necessary, will be at 7:15 p.m. Feb. 25; all games will be at East Alton.

