Bethalto captures first MVCHA Class 1A hockey playoff match against Collinsville

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EAST ALTON – If **Bethalto's hockey team** is going to win the **Mississippi Valley Club Hockey Association's Class 1A** championship, the Eagles are going to have to come off the deck to take it.

Three goals each from **Cory Sperry and Noah Scrum** put Bethalto on the verge of elimination as the Collinsville Kahoks scored a 6-3 win in Game 1 of the best-of-three championship series to take a 1-0 series lead at East Alton Ice Arena Monday night. Game 2 of the series is set for 8:45 p.m. Tuesday at East Alton, with a third and deciding game set for 7:15 p.m. Thursday if necessary.

The Kahoks scored three unanswered goals in the second and third periods to grab a 4-1 lead after going into the first break tied 1-1, and **Eagle coach Derek Kahl** knows his team is going to have to come up with a big answer to keep the series alive.

"The majority of goals they got were on defensive breakdowns on our part, breakaways, tic-tac-toe passing across the net between the two of them (Sperry and Scrum); we knew what was going to happen and we just didn't play our game in stopping them," Kahl said.

"We know we've got to play a lot better coming out of the zone; we know we've got to get guys back to stop the breakaways."

The game could have turned in the first period when the Kahoks were awarded a penalty shot with 1:49 left after a Kahok was pulled down on a breakaway. Sperry took the shot, where the puck is placed on the center-ice faceoff dot and Sperry skated in one-on-one on Eagle goalie Alec Hillard. Hillard, however, turned away Sperry's shot to keep the game tied 1-1 and could have given the Eagles some momentum.

"I was hoping that, when (Hillard) stopped it, it was going to be the springboard that was going to get us back in the game," Kahl said. "But we gave up too many odd-man rushes. It killed us tonight."

If the Kahoks could wind up winning the championship Tuesday – after a three-win regular season – **Kahok coach Doug Levy** thought it would be a big achievement for his team. "It would be a big achievement," Levy said. "I know it's important to everybody on the team and to myself – it's my first year as coach – and I would love to come up with a championship. We're all pushing for it."

Anthony Russo scored the tying goal for the Eagles in the first period after Sperry scored his first goal of the game just 2:32 into the game to put the Kahoks ahead. Scrum scored twice in the second period, with Sperry scoring twice in the third and Scrum once more for the double hat-trick for Collinsville. Joe Watson scored twice for Bethalto in the third, one coming short-handed and the other on the power play.

The Eagles had 30 shots on goal for the game, with the Kahoks getting 23 shots off.