

Mouser's power play goal, Currie's 17 saves gives Redbirds 3-1 win, one-game series lead

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EAST ALTON – It's post-season time in the Mississippi Valley Club Hockey Association, and if Thursday night's game between Alton and Bethalto is any indication, it will be an exciting one, indeed.

The Redbirds used a first period power play goal from Tristan Mouser and 17 saves from Caleb Currie to defeat the Eagles 3-1 and take a 1-0 lead in their best-of-three Class 1A first round series at the East Alton Ice Arena.

The Redbirds executed their game plan well, according to head coach Aaron Kestler.

“It's really what we wanted to execute tonight,” Kestler said. “Currie played a great game, came up with some huge saves for us tonight at some big moments. And that's what really kept the boys in the game, and kept willing to play.”

A Bethalto shorthanded goal early in the third period cut the lead to 2-1, but Alton kept going and held the Eagles at bay the rest of the game.

“That power play goal by Mouser, I mean, wow, that was impressive,” Kestler said. “We were talking about that in the locker room right now. That's a (great) skill getting

down there. That shorthanded goal, yeah, that brought us down for a second, but the boys battled through it, and were able to come out with the win tonight. Very proud of them.”

Bethalto coach Brayden Emerick agreed that it was a great game where both teams played hard.

“Yeah, it was a great game; both the team really fought hard,” Emerick said. “They just got a few more bounces that went their way, a few mental mistakes on our part. The game really could have gone either way, it was a really good game.”

Emerick praised both goalies — the Eagles' Kyle Wesolowski and Currie — for their efforts.

“It's always tough playing against a good goalie, but we have a good goalie backing us up, too,” Emerick said. “I mean, these games are great, they're really exciting to watch, and it's really awesome to watch hockey when you go both ways.”

The first period started out a bit slowly, as both teams played somewhat cautiously; in fact, the first shot for either club wasn't taken until 5:09 into the game. As the period went along, both teams had good chances that were stopped by Currie and Wesolowski. With Michael Dixon off for cross-checking late in the period, the Redbirds got the power play goal at 11:56 when Mouser deftly tipped in Shawn Grizzle's centering pass to give the Redbirds a 1-0 lead.



Alton doubled its lead at 6:27 of the second period when Connor Neely banged home the rebound of a Jacob Eppel shot to make it 2-0. The goalies kept it that way, as both Currie and Wesolowski stopped good chances on either end. When the third period started, with the Eagles shorthanded due to a Clark Sasek checking from behind minor, Nolan Kahl took the face-off, skated in alone on Currie and scored at 2:05 to cut the Alton lead to 2-1 and give Bethalto momentum.

The Alton defense buckled down and limited the Eagles' chances, and when there was one, Currie was there to make the saves. The Redbirds got the insurance goal at 12:30, when Tristan Seymour tipped home Neely's centering feed to make the final 3-1. For the game, the Redbirds outshot the Eagles 22-18.

Emerick said that this is the time of the season when hockey is at its best.

“Nothing beats playoff hockey, in any league, anywhere,” Emerick said. “Everyone's up on a whole another level, and it's great. Both teams really came out and played tonight, and they showed exactly what playoff hockey's all about.”

Game two of the series is set for Monday, February 5 in a 7:15 face-off at EAIA, and both teams will be ready to go.

“For the most part, we played a good game,” Emerick said. “They played a good game too; a few mental mistakes that we made really kind of hit us, but other than that, if we come back, limit our mistakes a little bit, we can still win this.”

“Really, just got to come out and play harder,” Kestler said. “Like I said, we kind of executed everything we wanted to tonight. But game two, we know Bethalto's going to bring everything, their backs are against the wall. So we need to be ready for it.”





[Dan Brannan also contributed to this story.](#)