

Kahl steps up to give Eagles 3-2 push over Alton to force playoff game three

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EAST ALTON – Bethalto needed someone to step up big Monday night as the Eagles were facing elimination from the Mississippi Valley Club Hockey Association Class 1A playoffs.

That someone was Nolan Kahl, who had both the Eagles' goals in regulation time and the only goal of a shootout to give the Eagles a 3-2 win over Alton in Game 2 of their best-of-three first-round series at East Alton Ice Arena. The Bethalto win forced a third and deciding game of the series tonight at EAIA.

“Coming into this game, we knew both teams were ready to go and our backs were against the wall,” said Eagle coach Brayden Emerick. “We really had no choice; we had to come out hard or our season's over. We came out and proved we can battle.

“It was a great game; both teams showed up to play, as you saw at the end of the game there. Alton never gave up and it made for some really interesting hockey; Alton really played great, they really came back and battled. We had a few moments when we lost our concentration and they capitalized on it, as any good team would, but we didn't hang our heads after that and we really came back and fought it out.”

“Our first period was a little slow; we weren't executing what we needed to,” said Redbird coach Aaron Kestler. “Our passes were slapping; we couldn't keep control of the puck and they took it to us – that first five minutes, they were in our zone the whole time.

“I'm proud of the way the boys brought it back and came back to tie it up – playoff hockey, that's fun.”

Redbird goaltender Caleb Currie turned in an outstanding performance between the pipes, Kestler felt. “Caleb stood on his head this whole season since we've had him here,” Kestler said, “especially against Kahl here; it's pretty obvious he's their No. 1 (player); that's why a lot of our focus and attention is on him, but he's a good player – he's hard to stop. That whole team is doing pretty good right now”

Kahl got the Eagles ahead not quite midway through the first period when he scored an unassisted goal, skating in and beating Currie to put Bethalto up 1-0; it stayed that way through most of the second period before, with Connor Neely off for interference after a series of penalties late in the second period, Kahl scored an unassisted power-play goal to seemingly put the Eagles in command, Bethalto going up 2-0 through two periods of play.

Undaunted, the Redbirds battled back in the third period, getting to within a goal when Jacob Eppel found Tristan Mouser with a feed; Mouser then found an opening and

scored past Eagle goaltender Kyle Wesolowski to get Alton to within 2-1 of Bethalto with 10:18 to go in regulation. Play remained steady as the Eagles kept trying to get a goal that would put the game away and the Redbirds trying to tie things up.

That tying goal came with 5:31 left when Mouser skated and fed Shawn Grizzle, who beat Wesolowski to tie the game up. Both teams had great chances to get the winning goal down the stretch, but neither team could connect and the game went to a best-of-three shootout to decide the winner.

Kahl opened the shootout with a goal past Currie, bringing up Mouser, who was turned back by Wesolowski; Clark Sasek then stepped up and was turned back by Currie, while Wesolowski stopped the second try by Neely set up the final round of the shootout.

Michael Dixon, trying to clinch the shootout, was stopped by Currie, bringing up Kieran Favazza; Wesolowski was equal to the challenge and turned away Favazza to give the shootout and the game to the Eagles.

Tonight's game will be a do-or-die proposition for both teams. "Game 3 is really exciting," Emerick said. "Both teams have their backs against the wall; they're both going to come out and give it everything they possibly have; it's going to be a really great game."



