

Jerseyville hockey team wins do-or-die playoff game

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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By BRENT FEENEY

EAST ALTON – In a do-or-die situation, one play can sometimes determine the outcome of a game.

One such play took place just 40 seconds into the third period of Thursday night's Mississippi Valley Club Hockey Association Class 1 Western Division play-in game between Jerseyville and Granite City at East Alton Ice Arena.

The Warriors' Cole Deyong was hauled down breaking in on goal. After a brief consultation, the officials called a penalty shot, a one-on-one opportunity for Deyong to score against Panther goalie Gage Wendel.

Deyong was stopped cold by Wendel when a goal could have given the Warriors some momentum. As it was, the Panthers, sparked by a Joe Watson hat trick, went on to take a 4-2 win over the Warriors to advance to a best-of-three series against regular-season West champion East Alton-Wood River, which gets under way at 8:45 p.m. Tuesday at East Alton.

"It was do or die," said Panther coach John Criswell. "For our seniors, it could have been their last game of their high school career, and we went out there and played great. It was a hard-fought game, all 39 minutes of it."

Watson, considering he's just a sophomore, could be headed to a stellar career for the Panthers. "He's just amazing," Criswell said. "As he gets older and bigger, he's going to be really great to watch."

Deyong's miss on the penalty shot really seemed to take a lot of the steam out of the Warriors, and GCHS coach Frank Parker recognized it. "The game really seemed to turn when Cole missed the shot," Parker said. "He had a big game for us, but when he missed, we just seemed to run out of gas."

The loss ended a difficult season for the Warriors; they only won one game and tied another, but Parker believes better times are ahead for the club. "We've got a lot of eighth-graders who will be coming up next year," Parker said. "We had six new players this year who had never played hockey before as well, but overall, we had a very good group of kids who were really respectable and were fun to coach."

"I think we'll be fine."

Jerseyville got out to the early lead when Tanner Dale knocked a shot past Granite City goalie Ryan Bruce just five minutes into the game. Deyong, not to be denied, tied things up at 6:54 when he skated into the offensive zone and fired a shot past Wendel to even the score at 1-1.

Watson took over soon later, scoring twice in nine seconds on assists from Jarrick Lumma and Mitch Green on Watson's second goal to grab a 3-1 lead. The Warriors, 14 seconds after the second Watson goal, got one back when Rylie Brown solved Wendel to make it 3-2 through the first period.

Watson teamed up with Lumma for his third goal at 6:46 of the second period, a goal that ended the scoring, though both teams had good chances the rest of the way.

The turning point came early in the third when Deyong, breaking in down left wing, was taken down by a Jerseyville player at the 40-second mark. The officials were going to call a penalty, but talked it over and awarded Deyong a penalty shot. The puck was placed at the center-ice faceoff dot and Deyong skated in alone to try to cut the lead to 4-3.

Deyong tried to deke to his right and shot, but Wendel was up to the task and blocked the shot, and from that point, the life seemed to go out of the Granite City sails. No goals were scored in the period, though the Warriors went with six attackers to try to force a shootout in the late going.

The save was what Criswell expected from Wendel. "He's an amazing goalie, possibly one of the better goalies in the league," Criswell said.

Jerseyville outshot Granite City 30-23; Wendel had 21 saves for the Panthers, while Bruce turned back 26 shots for the Warriors.