

Collinsville nips Alton 6-5 in first game of hockey playoffs

by Brent Feeney, Sports Writer
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EAST ALTON – Brother acts are common in many sports, and one particular brother act came up big for Collinsville's hockey team Thursday night.

Senior Jason Sperry and his brother, sophomore Cole, accounted for all six of the Kahoks' goals in their Mississippi Valley Club Hockey Association Class 2A North Division semifinal opener at East Alton Ice Arena, each of them scoring three times and assisting on each other's goals three times.

And as things turned out, the Kahoks needed every one of them as Alton mounted a spirited third-period comeback that fell short, giving Collinsville a 6-5 win and a 1-0 lead in their best-of-three series. Collinsville can close out the Redbirds with a win in Game 2, set for 7:15 p.m. Monday night. A deciding game, if necessary, would be played at 8:45 p.m. Feb. 16, with the winner getting Edwardsville in the best-of-three North Division Final beginning Feb. 17.

“Both teams had that fire in their belly,” said Kahok coach Brian Bednara, “and we both came out wanting it hard. We just wanted to concentrate on being responsible on defense, not allowing any backdoor goals.”

Special-teams goals played a role in the outcome; both teams scored twice on the power play. “Our power play was working great,” Bednara said. “We were able to create some pressure and managed to convert a couple of times.”

Perhaps another spark came when the Redbirds, down 5-3 through two periods, decided to make a change in goal, pulling Mitch Klug in favor of Tyler St. Peters at the start of the third period. The change seemed to work as Alton made a run at Collinsville.

“There's times when a team's down and needs a shakeup, and a change in goal sometimes works,” said Redbird coach Abram Henson. “We decided to switch things up, and it worked.”

The Sperry brothers, though, made a bigger impact on the game. “They're both great players,” Henson said. “I've coached them in select hockey. They really work well together.”

“They have a feel for each other,” Bednara said. “They just seem to know who's in position where. They made some really good passes to each other, and they finished them.”

Alton opened the scoring 2:59 in as Jake Cunningham got a pass from Jordan Myer and slid the puck past Caleb Nowicki to give the Redbirds a 1-0 lead. The Sperry brothers tied it up, Jason Sperry taking a pass from Cory Sperry and beating Klug at 7:06 to tie things up. Cunningham, not to be outdone, gave Alton the lead back when he scored, with assists going to Alex Rubin and Myer, at 8:13.

Kain Henson gave the Redbirds a 3-1 lead nearly two minutes later, with Jake Bohn and Christian Shank assisting. The Sperrys teamed up again 21 seconds after the Henson goal to pull the Kahoks to 3-2, Jason Sperry scoring. Then, with Alton's Austn Erthal off for roughing, Jason Sperry tied the game with 27 seconds left in the first period at 3-3.

The Kahoks took the lead at 7:53 of the second, Cory Sperry scoring with assists to Jason Sperry and Jared Drake. The lead went to 5-3 when Cory Sperry scored on the power play, Jason Sperry assisting, at 11:49 of the period.

The Sperrys teamed up on last time at the 48-second mark of the third, Cory Sperry getting the honors. That's when St. Peters was inserted into goal, and the change seemed to wake up the Redbirds. They pulled to within 6-4 when, with Nick Hager off for tripping, Rubin took a pass from Henson and beat Nowicki at 7:24, Tanner St. Peters also assisting. Following that, with Christian Brusatti off for tripping, Rubin struck again, this time from Drake, at 9:46 to get the Redbirds to 6-5.

Alton then went with six attackers to try to tie the game and force a shootout, but Nowicki was up to the task in turning back the Redbirds.

Alton outshot Collinsville 37-25; Nowicki had 32 saves for the Kahoks.