

Dec. 14 Ice Hockey



Nottingham's Dave Robb (left) blocks a Hopewell shot during today's game at Mercer Rink. It was a rough day for the Northstars, who dropped a 10-0 victory to a Bulldog team coming off its first loss of the season (Photo by Dennis Symons Jr./purchase photos at www.dennissymons.com).

Steinert loses first, but impresses both coaches with its hard work ethic

By Rich Fisher
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Dec. 14: Ryan DeClerico's quest to become the first head coach in the world to never lose a game in his career ended today, but that didn't mean it was a disappointing day.

DeClerico saw some good things in Steinert's 5-2 ice hockey loss to Robbinsville at Mercer County Rink, despite the depleted Spartans losing for the first time in five games.

"We played hard, which is what we preach," DeClerico said. "And we played them until the end."

Steinert's effort was not lost on Robbinsville coach Dan Bergan, whose team improved to 5-1.

"I must give credit to Steinert," Bergan said. "They work very hard, they played us tooth and nail the whole game. It was a big win for us and this was a big game for them as well.

"When they put them in the Patriot (Division of the CVC), everybody thought that was a sign of their level of play (decreasing). As I said to anyone who asks me, I thought this was the scariest team we were gonna deal with this year because of expectations. We're Colonial Division and they're Patriot, but in my mind that doesn't mean anything."

Steinert did indeed play tough although trailed for all but 3:40 of the game.

Jared Eckert gave Robbinsville a 1-0 lead just 3:26 into play. Joe Konrath continued his hot streak by tying it with 9:26 left in the period. It was Konrath's 10th goal in the last four games.

But just 14 seconds later Eric Hildebrand tallied to regain the lead for Robbinsville. Dan Cox made it 3-1 later in the period.

Sean Clinedinst got Steinert within 3-2 when he scored from Tanner Dow and Konrath 30 seconds into the second period. But with 22 seconds remaining, Eckert scored one of those late-period crushing goals to regain the Ravens' two-goal advantage.

"We had a bit of a problem getting pucks out," DeClerico said. "We were gassed pretty much with some of the lines and couldn't get it out and they kept cycling on us and kept the pressure on.

"A lot of the goals were rebound goals. PJ (Alexiadis) made good saves, but the puck came out and one of their guys steps in unchecked and puts it home. A lot of rebound goals at the back end of a lot of shifts."

That's not surprising, as Robbinsville's depth at forward has been a key to its quick start this season. And Alexiadis kept things close with 19 saves, including several sparklers after allowing a bad goal on Cox's shot.

"PJ played a real good game," DeClerico said. "He played a heckuva game. We talked about the one he let in the short side, a weaker goal. But he rebounded and played a really good game. We're really proud of PJ."

Robbinsville opened a three-goal lead midway through the third period and Steinert got one last chance to make it close when it got a five-on-three power play with 2:57 remaining. The Spartans had their chances but Ravens goalie Michael Reed was sharp.

DeClerico and assistant Pete Rossi pondered pulling Alexiadis for a three-skater advantage, but thought better of it.

"We talked about it briefly," DeClerico said. "But with a five-on-three we didn't want them to ice the puck and get a lucky one and just end our hopes."

Steinert was playing short handed and may be doing so for a while. Ryan Zujkowski suffered broken collarbone during a club game last weekend and defenseman Carston Raab is out with a concussion.

DeClerico thinks both might be gone for around a month.

"With a concussion it's not day to day, it's pretty much week to week," the coach said. "We're not sure when we'll get him back. You can't come back from concussions quickly. There's a lot of protocol with that."

Losing Zujkowski also hurts, as the sophomore line of him, Konrath and Dow had been smoking in the early going.

"I got checked in the boards and just fell the wrong way," said Zujkowski, whose left arm was in a sling. "I hurt it when I hit the boards. It's pretty bad not playing."

The winger said he might be out two to four weeks, DeClerico said four weeks or maybe longer. A lot will depend on Zujkowski's healing powers and what the doctor says.

Clinedinst took his place on the wing and appeared to fill in nicely.

"Coach Rossi decided to move Sean up to that line to play, and it worked out well," DeClerico said.