

Dec. 23 Ice Hockey

Dudich-Kolber matchup provides nice subplot in Spartans loss to WWP

By Tony Piscotta

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Andrew Dudich and Marc Kolber have played hundreds of games together during their youth travel hockey days with the Lawrence Flames. On Friday, the two found themselves on opposite sides as captain's of their respective sides.

Dudich, a senior captain for Steinert, was assigned the Herculean task of not only shadowing Kolber, the captain and leading scorer for West Windsor-Plainsboro North, but also charged with playing a key role in the Spartans' attack.

While Dudich was not totally successful – Kolber was able to break free for a handful of quality chances and scored two of the Northern Knights' seven goals – the Steinert senior did score the only goal for his team in a 7-1 loss to WWP.

"We tried to match up Dudich with (Kolber)," said Steinert coach Ryan DeClerico. "We always try to match up Dudich on the better players. (Kolber) played a lot of minutes and Andrew did as well. And (Dudich) is also on our power play so there would be times he'd be out on the ice and then have to double shift because Kolber would be on. We've got to have him on the power play because he can do the skill stuff and he can create. But he does get ground down and gets a little tired".

Despite the disappointing final score, and the fact that it was the Spartans' third straight loss, the effort was much better than Wednesday night for Steinert (4-3), which got off to a fast start and drew two power plays early in the game.

"It was better tonight. Last night we were sluggish, tonight we got off to a strong start," said senior Rob Mulcare.

While Steinert came out with a lot of emotion and effort, it was West Windsor-Plainsboro North (4-3-1) that drew first blood. Just after coming out of the box after serving a minor penalty, the Northern Knights Joe Bensky, a Flames teammate of Kolber and Dudich, broke down the center of the ice and converted a pass from Matt Strober; slipping the puck past Spartan goalie P.J. Alexiadis.

The Northern Knights made it 2-0 just over two minutes later when Strober took a pass from Bensky and tucked the puck between the legs of Alexiadis, and added a third goal with just 21 seconds left in the first. Kolber broke free on a breakaway off of a defensive zone face-off and flipped the puck top shelf over Alexiadis' glove.

The second period did not start much better for Steinert as North's Liam Corbett took a shot from between the circles that found the back of the net, giving the Northern Knights a 4-0 lead less than three minutes into the period.

Steinert finally got on the scoreboard when Dudich scored his second goal in two nights – making a move near the top of the right circle and then wristing a quick shot passed a startled David Zohn.

While the Spartans were able to get on the board, the Northern Knights continued to do yeoman's work shutting down the Spartans high-powered line of sophomores Joe Konrath and Tanner Dow with either Sean Clinedinst or Alex Verdi.

"They took away our big guys. And did a nice job on Joe Konrath," said DeClerico. In fact, Konrath suffered a shoulder injury and left the game for awhile late in the second period after he and Kolber collided and then skated into the end boards.

"(Konrath) came back and played with it and played well to his credit. He was in a lot of pain," said DeClerico.

While the big line was being shutdown, Mulcare and freshmen Christian Clayton came close to putting the Spartans on the board.

"We caught them trying to break away and we were able to get the puck down low. And we can cycle pretty well," said Mulcare, who got a quick shot on net only to be stopped by Zohn.

Any chances of a Spartans comeback were snuffed out early in the third as Strober scored what would be the first of three third-period goals and the Northern Knights cruised to the win.

"We've got to learn that we're not going to out-skill good teams. We have to go to the hard areas and get garbage goals," said DeClerico. "We've got to put our hard hats on. Until we buy into that we're going to struggle against good teams. We are not a team that's going to win with flashy stuff. We have to hack away and go to then net against better teams."

And when players like Kolber, Bensky, and Strober, are on the opposite bench instead of skating on your team, lunch-pail hockey isn't such a bad idea.