

Dec. 8 Ice Hockey

Hamilton nearly upsets WW-P South thanks to big effort from Tramontana

By Tony Piscotta

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Dec. 8: In a game in which Hamilton West's ice hockey team was both out-numbered and out-sized it was one of the smaller players in the game that gave West Windsor-Plainsboro-South fits and had the Hornets in position to pull off an upset victory.

Junior Thomas Tramontana scored two goals - and had a potential third goal disallowed - as the Hornets out-shot the favored Pirates, 33-22, and were tied late in the game before junior Chris Clancey's natural hat trick allowed the Pirates to escape with a 5-3 win.

While the loss dropped Hamilton to 0-3, the Hornets may have found some chemistry with their effort.

"We played with a lot of teamwork, getting to the pucks, and getting the puck deep," said Tramontana. "(In our other games) we weren't playing as a team. This was a building block."

Already out-numbered, the Hornets were forced to shuffle their lineup due to the absence of one of their better defensemen. But after the two teams scored two goals each in just over three minutes to start the game, West played sound positional hockey and kept the game scoreless for more than two periods.

"We did a really good job," said coach Matt Hamilton, who pointed out that the Hornets allowed just three opposing shots in the second. "We kept them wide, we limited their shots through two periods."

With senior goalie Allison Pelke making her second career start, and first ever in a CVC game, the Hornets did an outstanding job of blocking shots and keeping the puck on the perimeter - allowing Pelke to gain confidence.

Pelke stopped several shots, matching South's Jon Plester save-for-save after the first period flurry. And starting Pelke in net allowed the Hornets to use their usual starter. Evan Morris, in a forward spot and move Sean Tohill to defense.

"He played an outstanding game." said Hamilton of Morris. "He's the best goalie in the CVC but as much as he gives us in goal he gave us a lot of offensive pressure today."

Skating on a line with Tramontana, Morris was in the middle of a tic-tac-toe passing play in the third period that tied the game at three with just under five minutes left. And he nearly put the Hornets ahead with a deflection in front that Plester just got a pad on 30 seconds later.

"He plays out once in a while in practice. He's a great goalie but he's a great player out, too", said Tramontana, who tucked in the pass play from Morris on a play started by sophomore Gerry Gomez.

Earlier in the third, with the score tied 2-2, the Hornets appeared to go ahead when the puck went in off Tramontana's foot with 6:31 left but the play was immediately ruled no goal by the official closest to the play.

Clancey put the Pirates ahead, 3-2, with 5:17 remaining, making a dash up the ice and tucking a puck past Pelke before Tramontana's goal knotted things.

With the score tied at three, Clancey found himself alone in the offensive zone face off circle, left of the Hornets net with 3:53 left, and snapped off a laser wrist shot to give the Pirates the lead.

Pelke prevented further damage, stopping Mike Morabito's point shot and then stoning Clancey

on a breakaway with three minutes left. But with the Hornets' short-handed, Clancey sealed things with a goal on a wrist shot from the point with 11.1 seconds remaining.

Ironically, the game ended the way it started - with a flurry of goals.

Hamilton took just nine seconds to get on the board as Tramontana skated in on net after the opening face off and made a deke to beat Plester. The Hornet lead was short-lived when a long shot from the Pirates' Brian Tso slipped into the net.

WW-P South took a 2-1 lead when a harmless-looking play near the Hornets net turned into the Pirates second goal as Tso's shot trickled into the net. But the Hornets countered just 22 seconds later when Hamilton junior Joe Olszewski forced a Pirates turnover between the offensive zone circles and put the puck past Plester.

Perhaps the most impressive thing about Tramontana's performance, according to his coaches, was that his third-period exploits were under less than ideal conditions. According to assistant coach Paul "Bone Chip" Vichroski, Tramontana learned that it's not always a great idea to enjoy your mother's good food right before playing hockey.

"He wasn't feeling too good in the third period," said Hamilton,. "But we only have 13 guys and he skates a ton. He's small in stature but he's quick on his feet and tough to knock off the puck."