

Jan. 11 Ice Hockey



Hamilton goalie Evan Morris did all he could to stop the onslaught by WWPN today (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing jbsportsphoto@aol.com).

Kolber and WW-P North overpower short-handed Hamilton

**By Tony Piscotta
Fish4Scores.com**

Jan. 11: Facing Marc Kolber and the West Windsor-Plainsboro North hockey team is a tough task under normal circumstances for most teams in the Colonial Valley Conference. Forced to do so with just 11 skaters and missing its top defenseman proved to be too large a task for Hamilton West.

Though the under-manned Hornets (8-13-1, 6-6-1 CVC) put up a game effort, cutting the margin to 3-1 in the second period and battling to stay close, the Northern Knights top line of Kolber, Joe Bensky and Matt Strober proved too much and WW-P North (6-5-1, 5-3-1 CVC) pulled away for a 7-2 win at Mercer County Park.

"That's something we have to deal with, we always seem to be missing key guys in games like this where we may be a little over-matched but where we have a chance," said Hornets' head coach Matt Hamilton. "Those are the games where we're short - tonight, against (WW-P) South, Princeton.

"Against Notre Dame (the CVC's toughest team) we have our full team. We're at full strength when we play Nottingham (a team the Hornets have beaten twice this season)."

One player the Hornets did have was junior goalie Evan Morris. Despite constant pressure in the first period, he kept the Northern Knights off the scoreboard until a wrist shot by Bensky slipped through his pads with 2:41 left in the first period. Kolber made the score 2-0 just over a minute later with a top-shelf wrist shot that beat Morris to the glove side.

Kolber scored his second goal early in the second period to make the score 3-0 when Bensky sprung him on a breakaway with a long pass from the defensive zone and Kolber again beat Morris high to his glove side.

The Hornets finally got on the board with 5:11 remaining in the second when junior Tom Tramontana beat goalie David Zohn with a high shot off a feed from Kyle Rogers. Zohn had come on in relief of starter Kyle Adair a few minutes earlier and the shot was the first he faced.

Kolber completed his natural hat trick with 1:06 left in the second period.

"I wish I could have had those first four goals back," said Morris, who finished with 29 saves. "(Kolber's) got a pretty good shot and they were moving the puck around."

Coach Hamilton was not as critical of his goalie.

"He's always going to tell you that," said Hamilton. "I've said before that I think he's the best goalie in the county and all of the top goalies will tell you that they want some (goals) back."

What did bother Hamilton was some of the defensive zone turnovers - some of which were at least partially due to the fatigue of having to skate with a short roster.

"Fatigue was definitely a factor, especially in the second period. That was why I took the timeout with about nine minutes left to try and get some extra rest," said Hamilton. "But it's also a little bit of confidence. We have some wingers who are playing maybe more than they used to and they have to learn that they have the ability to control the puck. They can't make blind passes to the point. That's hurt us over and over in games and it did again tonight."

In fact, the goal that likely sealed the Hornets fate - Kolber's short-handed tally at the end of the second which gave the Northern Knights an insurmountable 4-1 lead - came after he stripped a Hornets' defender of the puck and put the puck past Morris before the goalie could react.

"We turned the puck over in the defensive zone too many times and it's something we've done over and over and over," said Hamilton.

The Northern Knights took advantage of the turnovers and the worn down Hornets defense to score two quick goals to start the final period before Hornet senior Brandon Hrymack scored on a shot from the point - assisted by senior Sean Tohill.

WWPN closed out the scoring when Strober scored from the slot on the power play with 44.7 seconds left.

One key player missing in the defensive zone for Hamilton was junior Dave Osnato, who was missing from the game while dealing with a death in the family.

"Of course it's tough without him," said Morris, one of the first people Osnato called after receiving the news. "He's got a lot of people to keep him company and spend time with."

Hamilton, too, was very supportive of Osnato, arguably the Hornets' leader when it comes to tough physical play and creating attack opportunities from the back end.

"It's never an easy situation. He needs to take time to try and get himself right. There's no rush in that," said Hamilton. "(Hockey's) not even a worry. He knows he's in our prayers and in our thoughts and we just hope he's ok."

The Hornets return to action on Friday when they travel to Hollydell Ice Arena in Sewell to face St. Joseph's-Hammonton (3-3-2).

After fielding a fairly competitive team a few years ago, the Wildcats have struggled with a short roster the past two seasons. Two of St. Joseph's three wins this season came against winless Jonathan Dayton - a team Nottingham defeated, 3-2, yesterday.