

Jan. 18 Ice Hockey



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*This was pretty much the story of the game and, particularly the third period, as Hamilton goalie Evan Morris makes one of his 24 saves against Steinert to help Hamilton preserve a 2-2 tie (Photo by John Blaine/purchase photos by e-mailing [jbsportsphoto@aol.com](mailto:jbsportsphoto@aol.com)).*

## **Morris dresses sharp at school and looks sharp in goal as West ties East**

**By Tony Piscotta  
Fish4Scores.com**

All season long Hamilton High West hockey coach Matt Hamilton has been telling anyone who would listen that junior goalie Evan Morris is the Colonial Valley Conference's top goalie. After the Hornets' 2-2 tie with Steinert at Mercer County Park today, he has at least one person who shares his opinion.

"Their goaltender really impressed me," said Steinert coach Ryan DeClerico after the Spartans peppered Morris, particularly in the third period. "I didn't really notice the first time we played them (a 3-0 Hornets' win in the Hamilton West Holiday Tournament) because we didn't get a lot of shots. But he's a really, really good goalie. I was very impressed."

"We told our guys to try and shoot the puck low and the few times we did rebounds came out.

We had to shoot the puck low because his blocker and glove hand were unbelievable."

Morris stopped 24 of 26 shots, making several highlight reel stops, as the Hornets kept Steinert's high scoring forwards in check to extend their unbeaten streak to three games (1-0-2).

"That situation's normal, we're very fortunate to have him," said Hamilton, "You should have seen him in school today. He had his full suit and tie and I knew he'd be ready. I saw that and knew we were going to be ok."

And when Morris wasn't able to make the stop, more times than not one of the three Hornets' defensemen - seniors Dave Osnato and Shawn Hrymack and sophomore Gerry Gomez - were usually there to take away the puck or prevent the Steinert forwards from getting it on net.

"Our three defensemen played outstanding and the two centers (Sean Tohill and Jared Romanski) played well in the defensive zone," said Hamilton.

According to Hrymack, the Hornets defenders and Morris have gotten into a groove this season.

"We play good defense and hustle all the time," said the Hornets senior. "We just try and get a clear line because we know he (Morris) is an outstanding goalie. If we let him see it he'll make the save."

In fact, both teams played well defensively in the first period and neither team had very many scoring chances; combining for just seven shots on goal.

"I thought we had a real good first period," said DeClerico, whose Spartans ended a seven-game losing streak with the tie. "We stuck to our system and played well. We let up the one goal but I thought we had a good first period."

That one goal came on a Hornets' power play after Steinert received a holding penalty.

Tohill, who was a constant threat throughout the game and had several scoring chances, converted from in front after some hard work by Thomas Tramontana to put the Hornets on the board 5:21 into the period.

In the second period, the Spartans finally got on the board shortly after killing off another penalty.

Senior Sean Clinedinst got things started, controlling the puck around the Hornets' net and after Morris stopped the first opportunity by senior Rob Mulcare, and a second chance by Clinedinst, Mulcare was finally able to put the puck past the fallen goalie.

Mulcare would assist on the Spartans' game-tying second goal as well but suffered what looked to be a fairly serious wrist injury in the third period and left the game. Mulcare's loss was a big one for the Spartans.

"He plays on our first or second lines and he does all the simple things and he does them consistently," said DeClerico.

With the score tied 1-1, the Hornets enjoyed their longest period of sustained pressure and finally cashed in after another Spartans penalty.

Junior goalie P.J. Alexiadis made a pair of big saves against Tohill, the second coming on a 2-on-1 break before a Spartan player was sent off for an illegal hit to the head.

The Hornets once again went to work around the Steinert net and took the lead when Tramontana slipped a pass to Tohill, who tipped the puck past Alexiadis.

"In the second period we got away from doing the things we do well," said DeClerico. "Not trying to make the special plays or the flashy plays but doing the simple things."

In fact, it was a simple play that led to the Spartans' equalizer. And one that came about as a result of the "shoot low" strategy the coaches recommended.

Following Morris' stop on Clinedinst's initial shot, junior Alex Verdi was able to pounce on a rebound and slip the puck into the Hornets' net to tie things up with 4:51 left in the second period.

"Our wings struggled," said Hamilton. "They started getting caught too low and then weren't covering their points. That allowed them to keep the puck in our end and extend possessions."

In fact, the Spartans were able to possess the puck for most of the third period but could not solve Morris nor his defenders in front. Morris made 12 of his 24 stops in the final period, including two saves when the Hornets were forced to kill off a 5-on-3 Spartans' power play.

"They did a good job clearing the net out for the most part," said Morris, who feels the Hornets' are on the cusp of making a break through.

"We could've won today. I'm never happy with a tie but we're working our way and progressing. It'll be nice to beat some of the better teams."

With both teams needing a win to maintain their state playoff hopes, the tie was more damaging to Steinert's chances - though the Hornets face the tougher schedule in their remaining games (not including the first round of the Mercer County Tournament).

Steinert (5-10-1, 4-7-1 CVC), would have needed to win today's game as well as its three remaining CVC games against Lawrence, Hightstown and Nottingham and its first round Mercer County tournament game to have the .500 record necessary to qualify for the Public School A tournament. Steinert is still in very good position to win the CVC's Patriot Division as it needs one win in any of the last three CVC games.

The Hornets (6-7-1, 3-6 CVC) are still alive but must play much stronger opponents. After a non-league game with Freehold next week, the Hornets face Valley Division rivals Notre Dame, Princeton and West Windsor-Plainsboro South and have a make-up contest with Robbinsville that has yet to be scheduled.

"It's come up once or twice," said Hrymack, when asked if the team has had any thoughts about the state tournament. "Right now we just want to win one game and then win the next one."

Whether the Hornets are able to earn a tournament berth or not, Hrymack was quick to point out why the team has been able to improve so much since his freshman year.

"Team work," said Hrymack, when asked why the team is doing so well. "We're all friends in the locker room. We have good chemistry and take that out on the ice."