

Jan. 23 Ice Hockey



Shawn Hrymack had Hamilton's goal in a 5-1 setback to Freehold Township today (Photo by Mike Dill/purchase photos at www.michaeldillphotography.com).

No matter what the reason, Hamilton flat in loss to Freehold Township

**By Tony Piscotta
Fish4Scores.com**

Jan. 23: Maybe it was the unseasonably warm weather. Or it could have been the excitement of playing on Senior Night.

Perhaps the pressure of trying to securing the first state playoff bid since the early 1990's was a factor. Then again it might have been rust from not being on the ice since their last game.

Whatever the reason, after playing perhaps its best game of the season in a 2-2 tie with rival Steinert last Thursday, the Hamilton West hockey team could not get in sync tonight at Mercer County Park and fell to visiting Freehold Township, 5-1.

"Everything was just a half step off," said Matt Hamilton, after the Hornets fell to the visiting

Patriots. "Whether it was a pass missing just to the right or a shot going just to the left. Everything was just a bit off."

Indeed. As sharp as the Hornets looked in their game against Steinert, it seemed they just couldn't find a rhythm or sustain any momentum.

Senior Brandon Hrymack, one of two twin brothers who have played varsity all four years for the Hornets, didn't think the pressure of trying to make the state tournament, nor the Senior Night activities were much of a factor.

However, the warmer than usual conditions, which made the ice softer, making it difficult to control the puck and making it that much harder to get around the ice, may have contributed to the tough night.

"I don't think so," said Hrymack when asked if the pressure was a factor. "It was so hot and it was a long game."

In fact, the key juncture in the game may have come at the end of the second period. With the Hornets' trailing 2-1, defenseman Gerry Gomez was called for a roughing penalty as time expired. Following the play, a scrum ensued in which players from both teams were pushing and shoving. As the referees were sorting things out, Hornet defenseman Dave Osnato appeared to say something to one of the officials and was assessed a ten minute misconduct penalty.

When the air cleared, both teams had three players in the box and Freehold Township received a power play to start the third period.

To their credit the Hornets did a great job killing the penalty, particularly winger Thomas Tramontana who, at one point, held the puck along the offensive boards for almost 15 seconds before two Patriots could regain possession.

However, without Osnato the Hornets were forced to use Sean Tohill on defense for much of the period - taking away much of the Hamilton West attack. After out-shooting the Patriots 21-19 in the first two periods, Hamilton West managed just two shots in the third period.

Despite the lackluster play, the Hornets were able to keep things close but another penalty midway through the third period proved costly when a Hornet player was assessed a two minute minor for tripping.

Tohill nearly had a short-handed breakaway opportunity after blocking a shot at the beginning of the power play but the Patriots soon regrouped. With 7:07 left in the game, and just five seconds remaining on the power play, Freehold Township defenseman David Abramovitz ripped a shot that was stopped by Hornet goalie Evan Morris but forward Matthew Martin was there to pounce on the rebound and gave the Patriots a 3-1 lead.

The Patriots continued to mount the pressure, out-shooting Hamilton West 18-2 in the final period, and added two late goals, including the first career goal for forward J.P. McKee, to seal the victory.

"I'll tell you the same thing I just told them, we were very selfish and there was a lot of selfish play," said Hamilton following the game. "That's what happens when you don't play the system."

"We didn't play well at the start and we didn't play well down low, which we haven't had issues with all year. We took some stupid penalties and that's what happens when they decide to be selfish."

And while the Senior Night loss was disappointing, Hrymack and the rest of Hornets were looking at the bigger picture.

"It's unfortunate we didn't win, I think we've won every Senior Night game (in his three previous seasons). We did the best we could," said Hrymack, who was confident that even with a tough schedule coming up the Hornets can still finish on an up note.

"We just have to keep playing hard," he said. "If we keep playing hard we should be ok."

The Patriots opened the scoring at 6:57 of the first period when Austin Treubert poked in a rebound past Morris.

The Hornets evened things with their first of three straight power play opportunities. After gaining possession low in the Freehold zone, Hamilton worked a neat passing play. After Patriots' goalie Mike Broccoli stopped a flip chance by Kyle Rogers, Tramontana slipped a pass to Shawn Hrymack who deposited a shot into the open net.

Both teams had opportunities in the second period but the Patriots capitalized on their first power play opportunity of the game to take a 2-1- lead.

After winning a face-off in the Hornets end, Martin and Adam Friedman had back-to-back shot opportunities from just below the circles from both sides of the Hornet net. Martin again retrieved the puck just below the left face off circle and did not miss - labeling a shot just under the cross bar and past Morris' shoulder.

Both Hamilton and assistant coach Paul "Bone Chip" Vichroski were searching for answers afterwards.

"It's possible (that the pressure of what was essentially a playoff game was a factor)," said Hamilton, "We haven't played this way all season. It was disappointing to see.

"We need all 14 guys and tonight we didn't have all 14 guys. That's for sure."

With the loss, the Hornets record slipped to 6-8-2. The next two games are against the CVC's top two teams - Notre Dame and Princeton - and then the Hornets close out the league schedule with West Windsor-Plainsboro South.

West gave the Pirates all they could handle earlier in the season, playing without Osnato, and was tied late in the third period before South pulled away late for a 5-3 win.

The Hornets' first round Mercer County Tournament game will also take place before the state tournament deadline and there has still been no date announced for their make-up game with Robbinsville. Teams need to be .500 or better at the deadline - and may petition for an at-large bid if they are within three games of .500.