

## Jan. 6 Ice Hockey

### Mistakes are proving costly to Steinert as slide continues

By Tony Piscotta

Fish4Scores.com

**Jan. 6:** Watching some of Steinert's talented young forwards make plays at times, it is easy to forget that they are mostly sophomores and freshmen.

Until they make mistakes in their own end that too often lately have been ending up in the Spartans' net.

"We can play with these teams, that's the thing," said first-year Steinert coach Ryan DeClerico following the Spartans' 6-1 loss to Pennington at IceLand today. "We just hit these sections of poor play."

On the plus side, the Spartans are beginning to recognize when they are trying to do too much - which has often led to costly turnovers and scoring chances against.

"It's no longer a matter of knowing what we have to do because they can tell (when they make mistakes)," said DeClerico. "You can hear them making frustration sounds when they're on the ice on plays where they did not clear the puck or tried to feather the puck on the ice to start up the play rather than making the safe play. Right now, we cannot err on the side of finesse, we have to make the safe play."

Steinert's first mistake came midway through the first period, when Red Raider Ryan McGann opened the scoring. After Steinert netminder P.J. Alexiadis made the stop on Alexander Thomas, McGann connected on a rebound.

Pennington stretched the lead to 2-0 right after arguably the Spartans' best scoring chance of the opening period.

Sean Clinedinst, playing defense due to the absence of junior Peter Pitman, made a rush from his point position to get a tough shot on Pennington goalie Stephen Gasior. Senior Rob Mulcare's follow-up chance was blocked in front, providing Pennington's Jon Pionati with an opportunity to quickly gain possession and race up ice for a breakaway opportunity, which he converted.

Andrew Dudich, one of five seniors for the Spartans and the team's top defenseman, said the game fit a familiar pattern, as Steinert (5-8, 4-5-0 CVC) has been unable to play with the consistency the team showed in racing to a 4-0 start.

"They (Pennington) were completely beatable but we started slowly," said Dudich. "We need to learn to play three complete periods and we haven't done that in the last few games."

In fact, the third period, which proved to be the Spartans' undoing in their previous game against Princeton, was statistically the team's best against Pennington. Unfortunately it was 5-1 by then.

"We got pressure on them all game but especially in the third," said DeClerico. "The third period was ten times better (than against Princeton) but we're still not getting pressure and we have to get more shots. We have not shot enough."

The Spartans had four shots on goal in the third period, and fifteen for the game. They held the Raiders to seven shots in the third- with the only goal coming on a breakaway by Pennington's Andrew

Fosina with 1:44 remaining.

Earlier in the period, junior goalie Alexiadis had a pair of highlight reel stops on two breakaways - stopping Bradford Widenmeyer with just under eight minutes remaining and then making the save of the game on a diving play on Thomas with 3:13 to play.

"He's a steady goaltender," said Dudich. "He knows he needs to bear down and it's hard. He's had a lot of pressure on him, especially playing almost every game this year."

On the plus side, the Spartans did get some welcome help - as sophomore Ryan Zujkowski returned to the lineup after missing eight games with a broken collar bone.

Zujkowski scored the Spartans' lone goal at 6:56 of the second period on a quick passing play from forward Joe Konrath and Dudich and played a strong two-way game.

"Having him back is huge," said Dudich. "It's an advantage for us because he's another talented forward and he knows how to play his position defensively and he does it consistently."

It was two defensive breakdowns early in the second period that allowed the Red Raiders to stretch the lead to 4-0.

With Konrath sitting in the box for a slashing penalty taken at the end of the first, Pennington was able to generate tremendous pressure on the power play and after a shot by Pionati was blocked in front, the Red Raiders Daniel Speeney pounced on the rebound.

Before the Spartans could catch their breath, Pennington scored 14 seconds later when the exciting freshman Thomas, who scored two goals in Pennington's previous win over Hopewell Valley, beat a Spartans' defenseman to the outside and then flipped a back hand shot past Alexiadis.

After Zujkowski's goal made the score, 4-1, the Spartans had an opportunity to chip further into the lead when Pennington received a minor penalty for holding but could not generate much of an attack.

"We weren't able to move the puck as well as we have been," said DeClerico, who feels the power play has also been hurt by the Spartans' lack of ice time. "We have a lack of practice time lately and we haven't been on the ice together much."

Speeney scored his second goal of the period and game shortly thereafter, giving the Red Raiders an insurmountable 5-1 lead. With three Spartans surrounding him, Speeney somehow gained control of the puck and then flipped a backhand shot into the net.

Steinert returns to action on Tuesday when it faces unbeaten Notre Dame at Mercer County Rink.