

King Rebellion upsets national champion Blues 4-3 in Collingwood to take Game 1 of OJHL Quarterfinals

By Jim Stewart

The King Junior A Rebellion drove north to snowy Collingwood on Friday night and upset the second-seeded Blues 4-3 to take a 1-0 lead in their best-of-seven OJHL West quarterfinal series. The seventh-seeded Rebellion ??in front of 761 raucous fans at Eddie Bush Arena ??also ended Collingwood's league-best 14-game unbeaten streak. The Blues' last loss was January 18 when they dropped a 4-1 decision to the first-place Flyers in Leamington. On Sunday afternoon at the Zancor Centre, the opportunistic Blues fired four power play goals en route to a 5-2 win to tie the seven-game series and spoil the fun of King's first OJHL playoff game at the sparkling new recreational facility. Rebellion forward Antonio Cerqua, who scored the game-winner on Friday night, liked his team's effort in Games 1 and 2: ?In both games, we came out with heavy hitting and good energy, but today we took too many penalties and gave their power play too many chances. They have a great power play so we have to stay out of the box. We've been a better team than them when it's 5-on-5. We're outscoring them 5-on-5 so we need to be more disciplined.? On Friday night in Collingwood, King forward Owen Bruining opened the scoring, with helpers earned by Mikhail Zakharov and Marshall McCharles, at 8:58 of the first period. The Rebellion followed Coach Joslin's recipe for road success which he delineated quite presciently last weekend after the club's 3-3 double-overtime tie versus the Toronto Patriots: ?Stay disciplined, play the right way, stick to our systems, and weather an early storm that will be brought by the Blues' fans.? Sixty-five seconds later after Bruining's go-ahead goal, Blues' Captain Marcus Lougheed fired a power play goal to make it 1-1 and the teams remained deadlocked heading into the first intermission. King, indeed, weathered the early 20-minute storm, but Collingwood ? ranked #8 in Canada ??took a 3-1 lead with a pair of second period goals. Damen Boose and Lougheed scored seventy seconds apart before four minutes had elapsed in the middle frame to give the home side a two-goal cushion. However, the feisty Rebellion squad fought back and Kyle Baston's goal at 16:13 cued the King comeback in Collingwood. Justin Pavese and Aidan Russell earned assists. Pavese's unassisted goal with 26 seconds left in the second period pulled the visitors into a 3-3 tie. The tying goal by Pavese shifted the momentum of the game. Consequently, the Rebellion came out firing in the third period. At 1:44, Cerqua's power play goal, set up by Zakharov's second assist of the game, put the visitors ahead to stay. Cerqua, who scored four game-winning goals for King during their furious drive for a playoff spot, described his game-winner at Eddie Bush Arena: ?Pavese's goal really picked us up ??it was really nice and it made us work hard to start the third period. Zakharov dished me up a pass ??I ripped it high and Bruining did a great job screening the goalie.? King goaltender Tre Altman turned aside all ten shots he faced in the third period to curtail any comeback by Collingwood. The 5th-ranked goalie in the OJHL (based on SAV%)?turned aside 27 of 30 shots to earn the precious Game 1 road playoff win versus the reigning Canadian Junior A champions. Cerqua noted the significance of the playoff victory in Collingwood: ?It was huge. Taking a lead against the back-to-back (Ontario) champs was a great feeling for us. The rink was banging.? On Sunday afternoon, a string of off-setting roughing and cross-checking penalties set the tone during the first period with pairs of combatants being escorted to the sin bin. However, Collingwood was awarded a pair of crucial power plays and scored twice with the man-advantage in the opening 20 minutes. Zander Vecchia scored at 10:45 and Damen Boose made it 2-0 at 14:02 as the Blues rebounded from their home ice loss on Friday night. Rebellion defender Jacob Xu got the home side on the board when he converted Owen Bruining's pass to cut Collingwood's lead to one. As a contrast to the first period when 12 minor penalties were called, the middle period featured no infractions by either side. However, Blues forward Dillon Silas banged one off the pipe and past Altman with 6:36 left in the period to give the visitors a 3-1 lead heading into second intermission. The Rebellion's first power play of the game forty-five seconds into the final frame yielded multiple scoring opportunities, but the Rebellion missed the mark on three good looks. The Blues capitalized on King's missed chances when Boose slid a pass to Cameron Eke who zipped the puck through a crowd from the right circle past Altman at 14:55 to provide Collingwood with its third power play goal. King narrowed the deficit to 4-2 when regular-season-leading-scorer McCharles created space and fed Zakharov. The smooth-skating centre earned his third assist of the series when he slid one on to Fairbairn's tape at the blue line and the Rebellion defender fired an 80-footer past Collingwood goaltender Noah Tegelaar with 5:56 left in the final frame. In the ensuing celly, Fairbairn let out a war whoop in the direction of the Blues faithful camped out in the northwest bleachers. On their final power play opportunity of the game, Collingwood's Will Hughes cut to the net off the left wing and roofed one over Altman's right shoulder to provide the margin of victory. Cerqua, who was in the

sin bin for Hughes's goal, was not dismayed by the loss on home ice. The inspirational veteran, who tallied 14 goals and 23 assists during the regular season, was steadfast in his belief in the Rebellion's chances to win the series: "We're very confident in our abilities. We showed that during the back half of our season. We can play with any team when we stay out of the penalty box and do what we need to do."