

Juvy Red Wings hanging on in OMHA playoffs

By Jake Courtepatte

In their quest for back-to-back provincial glory, the Juvenile Schomberg Red Wings are not making it easy for themselves.

It was deja-vu for the perennial powerhouse in the first round of OMHA playoffs, cruising through the Newcastle Stars in three straight games for the second year in a row to earn a spot in the quarterfinal series.

And once again, there they meet the Loyalist Jets. That is where the similarity has ended between this year's squad and the one that made a trip to the semis look easy in 2015.

The Wings quickly fell four points back of the Jets in the first-to-six-points series last week, just one win away from ending their season. However, their resiliency has brought the squad right back into the thick of the competition.

Returning to Trisan Centre on Saturday, the afternoon crowd was adamant in not seeing their team go down in three straight. The goaltending duo was stellar throughout the first period, with neither giving an inch on either side in a scoreless frame. Mitchell Harknett had perhaps the only quality scoring chance of the frame, a wraparound that beat the Loyalist tender but with the net coming off.

The puck was back on Harknett's stick early in the second, sent in alone on a breakaway but losing the handle on the shot. More Red Wings action followed, with Calvin McHugh thinking he opened the scoring on a wrist shot mid-way through the second, but the pick trickled over the line after the referee blew a quick whistle. A word with the ref did not get McHugh or a frustrated Wings squad anywhere.

Finally, in the dying minutes of the period, Dan Giglio found himself wide open in the Loyalist slot and had plenty of time to find an open corner.

They continued to press in the third period instead of falling back defensively, a tactic that worked out when Luca Germinario found a hole through traffic with five minutes left. Giglio notched his second of the game in the final two minutes, giving his team the 3-0 victory.

A slim 1-0 win on the road the next day kept the playoff hopes alive, drawing the Wings back even with four points apiece. In the event of a tie in Schomberg on Saturday, the series will return to Loyalist on Sunday for a sixth and deciding game.

Puck drop Saturday is 3 p.m. at Trisan Centre.

The Lambton Shore Predators have already booked their semifinal ticket with a sweep of the Belmont Rangers. The winner of the Red Wings/Jets series will take on the winner of the South Bruce Blades and Central Pert Rep.

For schedules, visit www.schombergminorhockey.com.