

Collingwood follows its season-long winning recipe to eliminate King from OJHL playoffs in five games

By **Jim Stewart**

After dropping Game 1 on home ice to the upstart seventh-seed Rebellion, the Collingwood Blues swept the next four OJHL West quarterfinal contests by deploying a winning recipe that has served the reigning Canadian Junior Champions all season. The main ingredient of that winning recipe is the Blues' potent power play. After Collingwood scored two goals with the man-advantage in Game 1, the CJHL champs fired ten more power play markers over the remaining games in the series, including four in Game 2 in a 5-2 win at the Zancor Centre. In addition to a potent power play, the Blues' winning recipe included consistent offensive production from Zander Veccia (10 points in the series --third in OJHL playoff scoring) and Damen Boose (9 points in the series --fifth in OJHL playoff scoring), a deep roster of goal scorers, strong goaltending from Noah Tegelaar, and a loyal fanbase filling their home rink to capacity. Collingwood's decisive, series-clinching 7-1 victory in Game 5 --in front of 1,081 fans at Eddie Bush Memorial Arena --featured two power play goals, a goal each from Veccia and Boose, Daniel Markevych's first three goals of the playoffs, and Tegelaar turned aside 23 of 24 shots to earn the win. All the ingredients of a championship hockey team were displayed by mighty Collingwood on Friday night. With 1:11 left on the clock and trailing 7-0, the Rebellion got on the scoreboard when Kyle Baston's power play goal beat Tegelaar. Leading scorer Marshall McCharles and Captain Jake Anderson earned assists on the franchise's final goal of its inaugural season in King. The turning point of the series took place late in the first period during Game 4 on Wednesday night. The Rebellion stormed out of the gate at the Zancor Centre and built a two-goal margin 15 minutes into the first period. Adam Smeeton's power play goal at 10:57 staked the Rebellion to a 1-0 lead, their first opening frame lead since Game 1. Smeeton banged in Owen Bruining's rebound from between the circles that beat Tegelaar cleanly. Less than five minutes later, Mikhail Zakharov scored a highlight reel goal to give the home side a 2-0 cushion on their seventh shot on net. Zakharov displayed great patience after receiving a sliding pass from McCharles. The London Knights' commit deftly dangled the puck in front of a range of Blues defenders, exploited a gap in their defense, and slid the puck past Tegelaar who looked beatable on this night. The sky seemed to be the limit for King with the reigning champs reeling in the first fifteen minutes of Game 4 and the Rebellion appeared to be on track to tie the series at two games apiece. With the first period seemingly in hand, the Rebellion continued their sound defensive work--deploying a stretch 3-2 zone that cut off the Blues' 5-on-5 skating lanes. However, disaster loomed when McCharles drew an interference penalty in the neutral zone with 3:10 left on the clock and Ryan Fairbairn was sent to the sin bin for cross checking with 1:27 left in the first period. The Blues' vaunted power play scored on both opportunities --Boose beat Tre Altman 56 seconds into the first man-advantage and then set up Will Hughes for the equalizer 23 seconds into Fairbairn's infraction. To make matters worse for King, the Blues scored their third consecutive goal and took their first lead of Game 4 when Sam Lockyer's big wrist shot whistled past Altman high glove side less than two minutes into the second period. Although Antonio Cerqua's power play goal evened the score with 3:26 left to play in the middle frame, the visitors took control of the game with three more consecutive goals early in the third period by Hughes, Max Campbell, and Vecchia to stake Collingwood to a commanding 6-3 lead. McCharles drew the Rebellion a little closer with 3:38 left in the final frame when his shot slipped over Tegelaar's shoulder and dropped in under the crossbar, but Peter Kioussis's power play goal provided the Blues with their seventh goal of the game to set up a must-win Game 5 in Collingwood for King. Collingwood's decisive 4-1 victory in Game 3 --in front of 815 fans at Eddie Bush Memorial Arena --replicated much of Game two's scoring pattern that the Blues won 5-2 at the Zancor Centre. Once again, the Blues took a 2-0 first period lead, the Rebellion narrowed the margin early in the second period, but Collingwood scored the next two goals to put the game away. Once again, the Rebellion never led, but King did limit the mighty Blues' power play to one goal compared to the four man-advantage markers they surrendered last Sunday afternoon. Kioussis opened the scoring on Monday night in Collingwood at 5:13 of the opening frame and Boose tallied his third of the playoffs at 12:40 to give the home side a two-goal advantage heading into first intermission. Twenty-two seconds into the middle frame, McCharles fired his first of the playoffs. Zakharov, who was a constant offensive threat in the series, earned his fourth assist versus the Blues on McCharles's marker. Ethan Facchina's power play goal mid-way through the second period restored Collingwood's two-goal lead and Lockyer closed the Game 3 scoring at 10:49 of the third period to provide the Blues with their second consecutive three-goal victory.