

Jacks reclaim top spot in standings despite mixed week

BY VERONICA REINER
vreiner@woolwichobserver.com

Three games in as many nights last week saw the Wellesley Applejacks go 1-1-1. That may not have been what they'd hoped for, but the three points were good enough to reclaim top spot in the South Doherty Division of the Provincial Junior Hockey League (PJHL).

After an outright 6-3 loss in Ayr November 14, the Jacks suffered a 4-3 overtime loss in Woodstock the following night. They bounced back on home ice Saturday night, however, posting a 6-1 win over Tavistock, the team previously sitting atop the division standings.

Things got rolling against the Ayr Centennials, who took the lead early and would never relinquish it.

The home team scored at 3:36 and then again at 17:35 to make it a 2-0 game after the first period.

Ayr struck again just over a minute into the middle frame, making it 3-0 before the Jacks finally got on the board. Zach Ribeiro, assisted by Warren Gorman, scored at 14:51. Just

over three minutes later, it was a one-goal game when Shaun Pickering took advantage of a power play, with Carson Wickie and Kyle Fischer picking up assists.

The two teams returned to the room for a second time with Ayr up 3-2.

The Centennials were quick off the mark again in the third, making it 4-2 at 1:27. Wellesley wasn't about to go down without a fight, however, with Connor Bradley retaliating at 8:06. Assists went to Wickie and Austin Cousineau on what would be the Jacks lone goal of the period.

Ayr kept up the heat, solidifying their lead at 11:28, and then capping the night with another goal at 14:39, making it 6-3 at game's end.

The shot count was a little more evenly matched than the scoreboard – 37-35 in Ayr's favour.

"Ayr did something different. It surprised me ... it was an easy two points for us, I thought. Didn't go down that way at all," said club president Terry Brick. "I saw they beat Tavistock on Friday night, and I thought 'what?'"

The Jacks looked to take

out their frustrations on the Navy Vets the following night in Woodstock, though the game would turn out to be a close one, mirroring the teams' records this season.

Gorman (Troy Vandembussche, Matt Caskanette) put Wellesley on the board at 4:55, but Woodstock responded shortly after at 6:31. Wellesley regained the lead at 12:17 thanks to Owen Lane (Zachary Lyons) so that it was 2-1 after one.

The second period was more evenly matched – Woodstock potted a goal quickly at 2:28, before Wellesley's Shaun Pickering replied unassisted at 11:52 to restore the Jacks' one-goal lead after 40 minutes.

There was only one goal in the third, with the home side knotting the score at 3-3 just past the midway point of the period. Tied after regulation, the teams would head to OT.

It was Woodstock's Kurtis Christo that decided the match, scoring at 2:15 of the extra frame, assisted by former Applejacks player Reade MacInnes – "a little payback for us, I guess," said Brick.

Wellesley was back at home Saturday to take on the Tavistock Braves for their last game of the week-end, with home ice proving to be an advantage over the previous two nights. It didn't start out that way, however, as the visitors pushed early, eventually outshooting the Jacks 12-4 in the opening frame.

"It was surprising," said Brick. "The way the first period went, it was like uh-oh ... we were totally dominated and outplayed, everything was in our end. It was actually a little frustrating to watch."

The Jacks didn't have many chances, but they did make one count, scoring the lone goal of the stanza off the stick of Lyons (Lane) at 13:12.

The Jacks found their legs in the second, scoring four unanswered goals to seal Tavistock's fate. Ribeiro (James Ranson, Lyons) kicked things off at 4:14, taking advantage of a power play. Cousineau kept the momentum going while shorthanded at 13:02. Gorman and Fischer picked up the assists. Gorman (Brendan Baker) scored another at 14:23, while Ribeiro wrapped up

the scoring frenzy at 16:09, with Lyons and Lane grabbing assists.

It was 5-0 after two periods.

Wellesley added a sixth goal soon after play resumed in the third, as Pickering (Cousineau, Gorman) potted one more for good measure at 1:28. With the game out of reach, the Braves finally got on the scoreboard at 11:51, but that was it. The buzzer sounded with the Jacks up 6-1, though the visitors had a 31-30 edge in shots.

Netminding was a big part of the difference, said Brick.

"Kailem Chappelle ... Saturday night, he won that game for us," said Brick. "It could have been

3- or 4-0 by the end of the first period. He stopped a real nice breakaway. He was very sharp, on his game."

The win moved the Wellesley (12-2-1-4) one point ahead of Tavistock (13-3-1-1) in the division standings. This weekend, the Jacks look to pad that lead when they host the Paris Mounties on Friday, then welcome the Woodstock Navy Vets for a rematch the Saturday night. The puck drops at the Wellesley arena at 8 p.m. in both cases.

"You gotta keep winning," said Brick of the team's plan for staying in the top spot. "If you lose even one game, someone could pass you."

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