

Good sportsmanship displayed between West Seneca, Amherst Squirt Select teams

Sportsmanship lives in Western New York Youth hockey, and a great example of it this week occurred between the West Seneca and Amherst Squirt Select teams on Friday, March 9 and Sunday, March 11.

On Friday, these two teams met at the Nichols School (Dann Memorial Rink) and played a hard-fought game that stood 2-1 in favor of West Seneca.

With about seven minutes left in the third period, the crowd was silenced by a violent collision between two Amherst players that left one player lying motionless on the ice. As is customary, the players from both teams went to the benches while the Amherst coaches were helped by the West Seneca coaches in attending to the motionless player.

Squirt Major Select assistant coach John Tomczak said the coaches from West Seneca continued assisting with only one concern, the hurt player.

"Two spectators, a nurse and a paramedic, also came to our player's aid (they may have been West Seneca parents)," Tomczak said. "Again, there was no concern for

resuming the game, only to make sure that the player was tended to properly."

Tomczak said the game ended as the hurt player was taken to Children's Hospital by an emergency crew that responded with remarkable speed. Tomczak said all X-rays and tests were negative, and the player is OK.

That night and the next day, Tomczak said the hurt player's family received many calls from teammates' families about the players' well-being.

"While this was terrific, it was not unexpected," said Tomczak. "These kids and their families have come to know each other throughout the season, as we spent many hours at the Amherst Pepsi Center and other rinks around Western New York."

Tomczak said what was unexpected (maybe it should not have been) were the calls from the West Seneca coaches and families that had gone out to our coaches and families to check on our player's well-being.

Tomczak said his team was further surprised and encouraged when, prior to the team's game on Sunday,

one of the West Seneca coaches visited the Squirt Select locker room with a card for the hurt player signed by all the players on the West Seneca team wishing him well.

"While a small gesture, this was a wonderful surprise for the player who was the center of concern," Tomczak said.

Tomczak said select hockey can bring out some very competitive instincts in parents and players.

"This competition is a terrific experience in many ways for the kids, but it has some bad moments as well," said Tomczak. "This experience was an example of all that is good about youth hockey and youth sports. While these two teams competed vigorously during these two games, the competition did not overshadow the kids."

"Our players are 11 years old," he added. "At this age (and all ages), we need to keep them safe and teach them about fair play, safe play and sportsmanship above all things. This weekend, the West Seneca Squirt Select coaches (and families) showed a terrific example for the kids they coach and for all of us."

Mite division

Kantor wins goaltending duel, Rangers post 1-0 victory

Mite Ranger netminder Jake Kantor turned in yet another stellar playoff performance on Saturday at the Amherst Pepsi Center.

After giving up only one goal in each of the Rangers' first two playoff games, Kantor stopped every shot he faced against the White Sabres. And Kantor needed to be perfect, because down at the other end of the ice, White Sabres' goaltender Dallas Brown was nothing short of spectacular.

In what was a sign of things to come, Brown had to make a save on Ranger forward Matt Cohen just eight seconds into the game and then made save after save to keep his team in the contest. The Rangers pelted Brown with 33 shots from every angle and from nearly every player as he turned away everything until Alex Streng was able to poke home a rebound with just 6:01 remaining in the third period for the game's only goal.

Ranger goalie Kantor had to come up with a number of big saves of his own,

starting with a rob of White Sabre forward Zach Surowiec four minutes in.

White Sabre sharpshooter Brady Kyle had a chance to put his team on the board early in the second period, but Kantor flicked a glove to snag Kyle's high wrist. Kantor also made a terrific save on Geno Dire to keep the game scoreless through two periods of play and then made enormous saves on Ben Wolfson and Michael Wells in the third period.

And Kantor, who has given up only four total goals in six games this season in the Ranger net, got plenty of help from his teammates as well.

Late in the first period, Ranger forward Jonathan Phillips skated hard and dove to break up a scoring chance by a streaking Jeffrey Browne. Early in the third period, Dire broke in on net, but Ranger defenseman Streng laid out to knock the puck away just as Dire wound up to shoot.

But Dallas Brown stole the show and almost the game. The Rangers had at least

a dozen glorious scoring chances, but Brown denied them time and again. He stoned Cohen, Michael Kreuz, and Brennan Hurley several times each and also foiled excellent scoring opportunities by Streng, Chris Dirienzo, Phillips and Austin Stanley.

With three minutes to go in the first period, Ranger defenseman Mark Venditti hit forward Hurley with a perfect outlet pass that sent Hurley in all alone on the White Sabres' goal, but Brown stood tall.

Midway through the second period, Brown robbed Kreuz after the Ranger forward went coast to coast through a sea of white. At one point early in the third period, Cohen got three successive shots off from just outside the goal crease but could not beat Brown.

Dogged puck pursuit in the offensive zone by Pat Greeley, Cam Kiefer, Patrick Rosen, Stanley and Streng finally paid off for the Rangers, when Rosen got the puck

in front to Stanley for a shot, and Streng, from a scrum in front of the White Sabres' net, poked in Stanley's rebound. Seconds later, Cohen broke free with a chance to break the game open, but Brown stoned him again and then over the next couple of minutes made great saves first on Kreuz and then Hurley, yet again, to keep it a one-goal game and set the stage for another exciting playoff ending.

For the third time in as many playoff games, the Rangers found themselves nursing a one-goal lead and facing an empty net at the other end of the ice as the final seconds ticked off the game clock.

With 28 seconds remaining, a penalty against the Rangers put the White Sabres on the power play. They pulled the goaltender to give them a two-man advantage as they looked for the tying goal, but the Ranger defense, led by Drew Elliott and Ryan Arrastia, held up and prevented the White Sabres' potent attack from getting off a shot.

Black Sabres run away from Red Wings

The Mite Red Wings couldn't stop the Black Sabres in Saturday's high-scoring 7-2 victory.

The first period started very evenly with both sides showing great defense and protecting their goalies.

Even so, both goalies worked hard in the net, saving many shots. However, with 5:07 to go, Nick Carbone had a run and a shot on goal that rebounded, only to be hammered into the net by Dan Mosher.

Not quite three minutes later, a tussle at the back of the net saw the puck knocked away by Hunter Noll, and Elliot Whittaker picked it up to send it straight into goal. The period ended with the Black Sabres ahead 2-0.

The second period was a crowd pleaser. Six goals were scored, four to the Black Sabres and two to the Red Wings.

Twenty-four seconds into the second, the Red Wings' Matt Grugnale stole the puck in his own zone and made a run and shot on net to score the first goal for his team.

Less than a minute later, Noah Rosenthal made two shots on goal that were diverted by Red Wings' goalie Ryan O'Donnell but knocked away a third rebound to Tyler Roberto, who whacked it into the net for the Black Sabres' third goal.

Another two minutes went by, and a tussle in front of the Black Sabres' net led to a faceoff, which saw McKenna Rushford of the Red Wings slide it past Jacob Ostrowski. After a couple of unfortunate bad falls, one from each side, which thankfully resulted in both players standing back up and rejoining play, Rosenthal made a run down

the ice and a pass to Roberto, who slammed another shot into the net to bring the Black Sabres to 4-2 with 4:40 to go in the second.

Two and a half minutes later, Zachary Gannon and Aaron Bengart both made a number of shots on goal and chased after rebounds, but it was Gannon who was able to shoot the puck into the net to score the Black Sabres' fifth goal. Finally, less than a minute later, Nick Pieri took a pass from Roberto and slid it past O'Donnell to score the Black Sabres' sixth goal.

The final period only lasted five minutes due to time constraints, but it was Pieri who was able to grab a rebound from a shot by Rosenthal to score the final goal for the game and the second for himself. Black Sabres' MVP Nick Pieri was awarded the game puck.

Bruins fall to Stars, 4-1, at Pepsi Center

It was another early day at the Amherst Pepsi Center as the Stars faced off against the Bruins on Sunday. The Bruins won 4-1.

When these two teams met early in the year, the Stars hung on to win by one goal. The game this week proved to be just as exciting. Both teams have developed well over this season, and both defenses had their hands full trying to stop their opponent's offensive rushes.

The story in this game was the goaltending by Stars' goalie Michael Trossman and Bruins' netminder Jacob Zurat. Both made terrific saves throughout the game.

The first period was a tightly played contest with Trossman turning away shot

after shot, including a Joey DeMarco breakaway, while Zurat stopped good shots from Michael Gagliano, Leah Kramer and Jake Siegel and breakaways from Logan Gare and Bryce Baker.

The second period continued in the same manner, with Trossman again stopping a Bruins' breakaway put together when Steve Metzger got the puck from Dylan Birzon and went in on net.

Midway through the second period, however, Hunter Endress took a pass from defenseman Joe Tomczak and found the back of the Bruins' net, putting up the first Stars' goal.

During the next shift, defenseman Connor Bender broke in on goal from the blue

line, but his shot missed the net. The puck hit the boards and came back out front, where Jake Siegel was waiting to fire it home, adding to the Stars' tally.

On the next shift, the Stars' second line converted as Gare centered the puck to Max Ferro, which he redirected past Zurat into the net.

The Bruins had several opportunities, but strong back checking by the Stars prevented the Bruins from putting points on the board. Bender, Michael Calleso, Cam Carney, Turner Dirrgl, Nick Kieffer and Tomczak repeatedly prevented Bruins' shots on goal.

The play in the third period again went back and forth, with both teams having

opportunities as Matt Schrlau hit the post for the Stars, and Bruins' Dylan Birzon just missed the open side of the net at the other end of the rink.

The Bruins finally foiled Trossman's shutout hopes with three minutes left, as the Stars were unable to clear the puck from in front of their goal. Trossman kicked the puck out twice but was unable to cover up, and Joey Demarco was able to push the puck over to Matt Drewery, who flipped it up into the net. The Stars answered right back, though, as Ferro broke in on the net from the top of the circle in the Bruins' end, put a deke on Zurat and tucked the puck neatly behind him into the open net as the shift ended.