

Marko leads skilled Sweet Home offense

by PATRICK J. NAGY
Reporter

Five years ago, Sweet Home was the laughingstock of the Section VI Western New York Varsity Hockey Federation with a 0-23-1 record.

After sporting a Federation-best 12-1-3 record last year, 17-4-3 overall and qualifying for the New York State playoffs for the first time in school history, the Panthers will be the hunted.

Several players have helped the Panthers along the way to its success, but none have meant more to the Sweet Home program than Ryan Marko.

Already the school's all-time leading scorer with 111 points (49 goals, 62 assists), the senior forward won the Federation scoring title despite missing nine games. He finished his junior year with 43 points (16 goals, 27 assists). He had six game-winning goals and five short-handed goals.

Besides Williamsville North's Nick Fronczak, Marko is the only other returning Federation player who earned New York State all-star honors. Marko is the only returning player who earned First Team honors. Fronczak was an honorable mention.

Marko's vision to see teammates for passes and his stick work are what makes him stand out above other players.

"He can see the ice like no one else," said Sweet Home coach Dave Gerspach. "I've been holler-



Sweet Home's Ryan Marko skates past Williamsville North's Chris Marsack during the Panthers' 4-3 loss last Thursday at the Amherst Pepsi Center Feature Rink. Marko is the reigning Section VI Western New York Varsity Hockey Federation scoring champion and Sweet Home's all-time leading scorer.

Photo by Joe Eberle

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ing at him to shoot the puck once in a while because he always trying to set up teammates with great passes. He's too unselfish."

"When he grabs the puck, everyone gravitates to him," he added.

Marko doesn't have his buddy, Alex Esposito (Sweet Home's second all-time leading scorer,

all-state honorable mention, graduated in June) anymore, but he will center the top line with juniors Ryan Gutt and Chris Covel. Gerspach feels the Marko-Gutt-Covel line will generate a lot more offense than Marko's line did last year.

Another solid line will see 6-foot-2, 205-pound senior Jim Cardinale center his brother, Colin, the JV's leading scorer last year, and senior Mike Campise.

Gerspach feels splitting Marko and Jim Cardinale on separate lines will only help his team's chances of winning.

"We don't have to lean on one line," said Gerspach. "Separating Ryan and Jimmy will help us a lot. If teams shut down Ryan, they'll have a tough time stopping Jimmy's line."

The third line features senior assistant captain Rich Beaudet,

who plays much bigger than his 5-foot-11, 160-pound frame, centering sophomore Pat McMahon and freshman Adam Titanic. McMahon came up from JV halfway through last season. Adam Titanic is the son of Morris Titanic, the No. 1 pick by the Buffalo Sabres in the 1973 entry draft. Adam Titanic was the leading goal scorer on modified last year.

The Sweet Home defense will be led by seniors Justin Reich and Daryn Cavalier and junior Dominic Puntello. Reich is a four-year varsity player; Cavalier a three-year player. Cavalier is co-captain with Marko.

They will also debut 6-foot-2, 225-pound juniors Cam Hollander and Ricky Brooks, both from JV, and return senior Alex Gilmour, who broke his collarbone on the first day of tryouts last season.

Federation hockey to debut new playoff format

by PATRICK J. NAGY
Reporter

A new playoff format will give every team in the Section VI Western New York Varsity Hockey Federation a shot of going to the New York State tournament. But the new rules are a little confusing.

To clarify, here are the changes.

For the first time in league history, there will be a small school and large school Federation champion. In the past, only one overall Federation champion has been crowned.

In addition, the winners of the small and large school Federation titles are the teams who will advance to state regional games. The old rule stated whichever

large and small school teams that have the best state qualifying records would move on.

But here's the catch. The teams in the finals each have to be public schools to advance to states. If one of the teams is a Catholic school, the public school who won the regular season league championship will go to states, even if the public school defeats the Catholic school to win the large or small school Federation crown.

Catholic schools have their own state championship. St. Joe's, Canisius, Bishop Timon-St. Jude and St. Francis are the Catholic schools in the Federation.

"I think they want to catch the teams that are playing their best hockey at the end of the year," said Sweet Home coach Dave Gerspach, whose team has never played for a Federation title.

"It makes it a little clearer now for who deserves to go (to states)," added East coach Mike Torriello. "Winning the league does mean something."

The Federation is also two teams bigger. Clarence joins Williamsville North, St. Joe's, Frontier, Canisius, Kenmore West, Orchard Park and Lancaster in the large school division while Niagara Falls is placed in the small school division with Sweet Home, Williamsville East, Williamsville South, Amherst, Timon, St. Francis, and Kenmore East.

Each Federation team will also play four crossover games (large school versus small school) which do not count towards state qualifying purposes.

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Tigers no longer rebuilding

When the 2007-08 Amherst varsity hockey team takes the ice this season, head coach Rich Crozier's expectations will be high.

Crozier, son of former Buffalo Sabres coach, Joe Crozier, enters his fourth season behind the bench for the Tigers and expects improvements from the 4-19-2 overall and 1-15 league record from last year.

"We've had this year circled on the calendar for a few years now," said Crozier. "With 12 seniors on this year's team, we expect that experience and maturity will be our biggest asset for a successful season."

Crozier will look to his top forward line to lead this year's squad.

Senior forward Mike Gruttaduria was selected captain and will lead the team on and off the ice. Gruttaduria is returning after a broken leg ended his junior season.

"Mike looks better than ever," said Crozier. "He worked extremely hard to get physically ready for his senior season. We'll count on Mike, not only for the physical presence and continuous effort that our team has seen over the past three seasons, but Mike will be looked upon to score some big goals for us as well."

Joining Gruttaduria on the top line are four-year players, seniors, Matt Allwes and Al McQuiggan.

"We have had all three of these players for four years now," said Crozier. "It's exciting to see how they have developed into great hockey players. We'll need them to produce a lot of our offensive punch this season."

McQuiggan was tied for the team lead in assists last year.

"Al's a good playmaker with great speed," said Crozier. "He'll see a lot of time on the power play and penalty kill for us this season."

Allwes was tied for second in points last year. "Matt is our most natural goal scorer," said Crozier. "He has good hands and a great shot. We'll need him to get some goals for us."

Other forwards that the Tigers will be counting on include seniors Dan Hubbard, Steve Rubach, Phil Cultrara, Josh Larwood, Blake Napierala and junior Stephen Mugel, all returners from last year's team.

"Our season depends on the contribution of these players," said Crozier. "I need players like Hubbard, Rubach and Cultrara to have good seasons. We've seen signs of what they can do last season but this year, I need consistent contributions game in and game out."

The Tigers' forward lines are wrapped up by newcomers, sophomore Alex May, Dave Rubach, Kyle Dains and junior Sean Mullane. May, Rubach and Dains will play together in what may be the only all sophomore line in the Federation.

"We are really excited from what we have seen so far," said Crozier. "They haven't missed a beat and at times have been our most consistent line."

On defense, the Tigers will count on returning senior AJ DiLorenzo and junior Kevin Denny.

"AJ has worked hard on his game and has really improved," said Crozier. "His shot has to be one of the hardest in the league."

Denny was the Tigers' most improved player last season as a sophomore.

"Kevin is one of the top athletes on the team," said Crozier. "Kevin will be expected to lead the defensive core and help our newcomers."

Newcomers on the backline include senior Max Georger, junior Alex Dennis, sophomore Chris Farmelo and freshman Mike Thompson.

"There is some inexperience on the blue line,

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