



MnJHL season defined by depth and excitement

By: Nick Clark – MnJHL Director of Media Relations

With a little over a month left in the 2009-10 regular season, the Minnesota Junior Hockey League appears to be heading in much the same direction it ended up in a year ago.

Granite City and Rochester, the two teams that a year ago met up in the Bush Cup Finals and represented the MnJHL in the Tier III Junior A National Tournament, have reached the three-quarters pole locked into a virtual tie standings wise.

As of Jan. 14, the Lumberjacks held an eight point lead over Rochester in the MnJHL standings, with Twin Cities lurking just two points behind the front-runners.

The Wisconsin Mustangs and Edina Lakers sat fourth and fifth respectively, with a two points separating the race for the final home ice position for the MnJHL playoffs, which will begin in early March.

In fact, a grand total of five points stand between Twin Cities, Wisconsin and Edina, and the Minnesota Owls, with a league-low 33 games played, could still be a factor as they need to make up a dozen points to pull into fourth.

“It’s been a thrilling season thus far,” said MnJHL Commissioner Bob Breu. “The depth the top end of the league has shown is unlike anything we’ve seen in some time.”

The Hudson Crusaders, Minnesota Flying Aces and Minnesota Wildcats round out the bottom third of the MnJHL standings.

While the competition between the teams has been exhilarating, the chase for the MnJHL scoring title has been just as tight.

Rochester forward Tyler Groth (Fargo, N.D.) currently leads all players with 63 points, and he’s followed by Granite City’s Sean Kenny (Reno, Nev.) at 54 points and the Twin Cities Northern Lights duo of Josh Shingler (Shawano, Wis.) and Garrett Windle (Downington Pa.), who sit with 49 and 47 points respectively.

Kenny has netted a league best 29 goals, and Groth’s 39 assists are also tops in the MnJHL.

Twin Cities goaltender Josh Lehr (Appleton, Wis.) leads all goalies with 16 wins, followed closely by Granite City’s Matt Grove (Crookston, Minn.), who has 15, and Edina’s Eric Wobschall (Owatonna, Minn.), who has racked up 14 victories thus far.

Grove has posted a league best saves percentage (.931) and goals against average (1.86), and Minnesota Owls netminder Nick Cafrelli (San Jose, Calif.) leads the league in shutouts with three.



Rochester Ice Hawks Blue Division Champions

Finally, amidst the excitement that has produced those numbers and the neck-and-neck races heating up in the league standings, the MnJHL brought back its Showcase Tournament in December.

The three-day event, which was held Dec. 15-17 at the Super Rink on the National Sports Center campus in Blaine, Minn., drew countless college and junior hockey scouts to a tournament that mirrored the competitiveness seen throughout the entire MnJHL season.

The nine league teams were split into three separate divisions, and all three mini-tournaments came down to the final day.

In the end, Rochester won the Blue Division, which also consisted of Granite City and Twin Cities. Edina was the champion of the White Division, which included the Minnesota Owls and Wisconsin Mustangs, and the Flying Aces captured a Red Division championship after beating both Hudson and the Minnesota Wildcats. "The Showcase was everything we hoped it would be," said Breu. "It was well attended by scouts from all levels of hockey, and the teams helped put on what was a true showcase of what the MnJHL has been so far this season."

The Minnesota Junior Hockey League is pleased to announce its Players of the Month for October and November.

The October award winners are as follows:

Forward: Garrett Windle (Twin Cities Northern Lights)

Garrett Windle, a 5-foot-10, 163-pound forward from Downingtown, Pa. could have had his name copyrighted within the Northern Lights scoresheets in October. Windle was held scoreless just once in 10 games, and finished with nine goals and 10 assists as the Northern Lights won seven times in that span. "We didn't have a lot of goal scoring in October, and he managed to step up," said Twin Cities head coach A.J. Degenhardt. "In games where they were close he always found a way to get that timely goal, and he did it by going hard. He's not the biggest guy, but he plays bigger than his size is. He goes to the hard areas and he's crafty with the puck. He's a tricky, his endurance is good and he moves side-to-side. He does it all, and that gives defenders fits."



Garrett Windle

Defenseman: Joe Frechette (Edina Lakers)

The resurgence in Edina could be directed in a number of ways, but there is little doubt it's started with defense, and Joe Frechette was the Lakers best blueliner in October. The 6-foot-4, 180-pound defenseman registered just a single assist over the course of the month, but his steady play has been the cornerstone behind the nearly worst-to-first turn-around for the Lakers. "If anyone has seen him play, they know how vital he is to our ongoing success," said Lakers head coach Wes Durand of the Littleton, Colo. native. "He is our captain and contributes in both ends of the rink significantly. Other teams have good defenseman, but I have yet to see one that impacts the game as dramatically as Joe does."



Joe Frechette

Goaltender: Jeff Dunaisky (Wisconsin Mustangs)

The goaltending in Wisconsin has been lights out since the start, and in October, Jeff Dunaisky played his part.

The Mustangs went 3-1 in his starts, as the 6-foot-1, 190-pound, Cloquet, Minn. native posted a goals against average of 2.50 to go with a .925 saves percentage in those four appearances. "Really, Jeff meant the difference in our team in October," said Wisconsin Mustang head coach Donnie Roberts. "He was our best player, without a doubt, and maybe one of the top four or five guys in the league that month."



Jeff Dunaisky

The November award winners are as follows:

Forward: Sean Kenny (Granite City Lumberjacks)

Granite City forward Sean Kenny spent the month of November taking over the scoring league in the MnJHL. In a dozen games, the Reno, Nev. native averaged exactly a goal per night, finishing what was a 22-point month with 12 goals and 10 assists as the Lumberjacks went 10-2. "Sean's been playing great for us," said Granite City head coach Brad Willner. "He's working hard on both ends so the ice and it's paying off. His goal is to play Division I hockey, and he's starting to get looks by some Division I schools. I think that will continue to motivate him throughout the year."



Sean Kenny

Defenseman: David Audette (Minnesota Flying Aces)

The Minnesota Flying Aces turned up the heat defensively in November, holding half of their eight opponents to three goals or less. David Audette (Rogers, Minn.) dressed in each game, finishing with nine points (1 goal, 8 assists) and posting an impressive plus-6 rating. "David's numbers for the month speak for themselves," said Minnesota co-head coach Brett Shelanski. "He is a defenseman who controls the hockey game most nights when he is on the ice, and he does everything. He logs close to 30 minutes of ice time a night for us, kills penalties and quarterbacks our top power play unit."

Goaltender: Simon Eriksson (Rochester Ice Hawks)

Simon Eriksson, who hails from Tumba, Sweden, notched back-to-back shutouts in his final two starts of the month, beating Hudson 5-0 and then the Minnesota Owls 3-0 to cap a 30-day span in which his only setback came in a 29-save, 2-1 loss at Granite City Nov. 6.

"His month was no different than any other month we've had with Simon, and what I mean by that is he is just solid all the time," said Rochester head coach Nick Fatis. "He does what you want from any goaltender, which is give you a chance to win when he puts on the pads. He's done that consistently."



Simon Eriksson

U.S. Women trip up Lakers in OT

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By Nick Clark/MnJHL Director of Media Relations

Exhibition held at Richfield Ice Arena

By description, the match-up between the Minnesota Junior Hockey League's Edina Lakers and the U.S. Women's Olympic Hockey game Saturday, Jan. 16 was an exhibition.

But in the midst of what was an un-official send off for the women to Vancouver from the MnJHL, a rather serious hockey game unfolded inside Richfield (Minn.) Ice Arena.

And despite an onslaught of shots and scoring opportunities out of the Edina side, it was the women's national team that skated away with a 1-0 overtime victory.

"That was a pretty good game," said U.S. head coach Mark Johnson. "They challenged us, and we spent a bunch of time in our own end. They are big, they are strong and they move the puck well. It's good for us, and it was nice to see us pull it out in the end."



Respectfully Submitted,

Bob Breu

Minnesota Junior Hockey League Commissioner

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