

# Panthers defeat unbeaten Dragons, hold first place in north

By Kyle Grondin

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Working through a brief losing skid, the Plano East hockey team is back to form with four straight victories.

The Panthers are on top of the division standings through 10 games, after briefly falling behind with losses against Plano West and Denton County. Head coach Thomas Joyce wanted to see the team go back to simplifying the game.

“When it comes to it, we’ve stuck to the game plan,” Joyce said. “When things go well, it’s easy to get comfortable and you kind of get high on yourself and it turns to complacency. Coming out of that skid, we’ve been able to get back to our game plan and have some impressive players getting things done.”

Last Thursday, the latest win came against Southlake Carroll, the top team in the varsity silver south division. The Dragons were undefeated heading into

the contest but fell 4-2 to the Panthers.

Aaron Keith opened the scoring for Plano East on the power play 10:19, remaining in the first period, assisted by Skylar Bawcom and Cade Willis on the goal. Bawcom’s two assists in the game brought his league-leading point total to 28 on the season.

“The big thing that’s created Skylar’s success is the team,” Joyce said. “We’re now seeing kids who are buying into

moving the puck, and we have almost all of our goals coming off of assists. So guys like Skylar and Jud Criss are doing great things by working together and playing off of each other.”

The second period was all Southlake, who scored two goals to take the lead despite being outshot 14-10 by Plano East.

The first came on the power play with 10:40 remaining and the second just before the end of the period.

Down 2-1 in the third, the Panthers came out aggressive. Outshooting the Dragons 16-8 in the third period, Plano East finally broke through with two goals 23 seconds apart to take a 3-2 lead. Jud Criss scored an even-strength goal assisted by Bawcom, followed quickly by Cale Morrow’s finish that proved to be the game-winner. Keith added his second goal to seal the victory, while Micah Laird made 23 saves.

Plano East’s turnaround over the last four games started on the defensive end. The Panthers surrendered 12 goals in their two losses but have only allowed nine goals in their last

four games.

“It’s just about cleaning up the areas in front of the net,” Joyce said. “We’ve identified our defensive players and who has really bought into what we’re preaching and we are getting back to good defensive hockey. Defense is a selfless position at times.”

Now at 8-2 on the season, Plano East sits four points ahead of Prosper in the varsity silver north division. After losing two in a row to Plano West and Denton County, the Panthers have won four games.

Plano East will travel to Birdville Thursday night to try and win its fifth in a row



Steve Korner/Courtesy Photo

**Peter Loncar** dekes between the defensive players while on the attack for the Plano East hockey team.



Steve Korner/Courtesy Photo

**Mathis Lipe** skates into the offensive zone for the Plano East hockey team.