

Wolfpack falls just short in Div. 2 hockey championship, qualifies for OFSAA

Written By ROBERT BELARDI

The Iona Dolphins defeated the Robert F. Hall Wolfpack 3-1 to win the division two high school championship last Wednesday.

Both teams play a similar style of hockey. They work hard, beat you to the puck and shoot as if their careers depended on it.

In the first period, both teams were on edge. Nerves had not completely settled in. The Dolphins were on the penalty kill immediately and the Wolfpack powerplay could not get organized.

On the Wolfpack's second power play of the period, the boys finally settled in, raining down shots on Owen Hennessy in the Iona goal. The Dolphins goaltender denied them all.

Later on, in the first period the opening goal arrived. Confusion between Wolfpack goaltender Marcus DiPassio and his defence beside the net resulted in a scramble for the puck.

Dolphins player Luke DiCroce slotted home the loose puck for a 1-0 lead.

The Dolphins settled in after their goal and created more scoring chances before the end of the frame.

At the beginning of the 2nd period, the Wolfpack came out strong.

The shot from Justin Pulis was spilled by Hennessy. A scramble in front of goal could not be capitalized on.

Then the Wolfpack fell into penalty trouble. A few tripping calls forced the boys to be in the box, however, their penalty kill came to life, holding off the Dolphins onslaught.

The Wolfpack came the other way, crafting a few more chances. In this end to end period, no team found the back of the net.

In this crucial third period, the Dolphins came out with a vengeance. The Wolfpack looked cumbersome. The boys seemed nervous.

The Dolphins held the Wolfpack out of their own zone for the first half of the period and forced their opponents to take on some penalties.

With over five minutes to play, John Milinkovic used his blinding speed to his advantage, to earn himself a breakaway.

The captain rifled the puck home top shelf passed DiPassio and you could sense, the end was near.

With an empty net, the Wolfpack tried to generate more offense.

Dolphins defenceman Ryder Steele put the puck in the open net from almost the full length of the ice.

The relentless Wolfpack continued playing and Nick Amato broke the deadlock, firing it top shelf from past the hashmarks, ruining Hennessey's shutout.

The final whistle blew and it was over. But, not entirely over.

After the awards ceremony, with silver medals around their necks, the Wolfpack hockey team was told a truth from head coach

Mike Mattachini.

The boys are headed to the Ontario Federation of School Athletic Associations (OFSAA) tournament after March break in St. Catharines.

In years past, the Wolfpack have finished fourth, third and second in that order.

All that is left to earn to complete the record books, is number one.

After the match, Mattachini described how proud he was of the boys.

Mattachini said, "I've been proud of this team and in years before. We've had a program here that delivers these kids year after year. It's special and I love being a part of it."

Last season Iona made it to OFSAA and brought home the silver medal. Any time you medal at OFSAA, that school is given two bids for the next year.

"We haven't been in three years," said Mattachini, when asked when his last appearance at OFSAA was for the school.

"OFSAA runs such classy tournaments for any sporting event. It's organized. They have things for you in your dressing room in advance, they have drinks, they have food. They have a special banquet before you start. Ex-NHL'ers show up, it's a big deal. It runs for four days."

Mattachini will play shinny with his team to keep them on the ice and host practices and exhibition games to keep the boys in shape in preparation for the bigger tournament.