

Whalers clinch West crown

Some things are assured, anyway. The Plymouth Whalers' 5-3 win over the Windsor Spitfires in Windsor Sunday clinched the Ontario Hockey League's West Division title for the Whalers and assured them of at least a No. 2 seed in the upcoming OHL Playoffs. Plymouth still has nine regular-season games remaining, but its record is 38-12-4-6 (85 points); Windsor is 38-21-6-4 (66 points).

The Whalers remain two points behind the Erie Otters for the overall lead in the OHL.

The win did not come easily for the Whalers, playing their fourth game in five nights. They took the lead on three separate occasions, but it took an empty-net goal in the closing seconds by Damian Surma to assure the victory.

Preston Mizzi opened the scoring for the Whalers in the first period, with assists from Kris Vernarsky and Nate Kiser.

HOCKEY

Windsor knotted it early in the second on a power-play goal by Ahren Nittel.

Stephen Weiss answered with a power-play goal for Plymouth midway through the second period, assists going to George Nixas and Tomas Kurka. But the Spitfires tied it again with a goal early in the third period.

A score by Chad LaRosa 5:51 into the third put the Whalers ahead for good. Chad Wiseman increased their lead to 4-2 at 15:23. Kurka and Weiss assisting.

Windsor pulled goalie Mike Leighton and it paid dividends when Steve Hildenbrand beat Whaler goalie Rob Zepp to make it 4-3 with 1:19 left. But the Spitfires could not repeat that success, and Surma's empty-netter clinched it.

A night earlier at Compuware

Arena, the Whalers again held on to beat London 4-3. The Knights took early control, getting first-period goals from Mike Stathopoulos and Joel Seherban. Weiss netted a goal in between for Plymouth (assisted by Kurka and Kiser) to make it 2-1 London after one.

Kurka tied it at 2-2 with the only goal of the second period; Weiss and Mizzi assisted.

Bryan Stewart (unassisted) and Chad LaRosa (Vernarsky, Mizzi) gave Plymouth a 4-2 lead with 8:57 left in the third period. The Knights narrowed the gap to one on a power-play goal by Dennis Wideman with 7:02 remaining, but they could get no closer.

Paul Drew stopped 25 shots in goal to get the win for the Whalers. Aaron Molnar had 24 saves for London.

The Whalers have two games this weekend, traveling to London Friday and hosting Ottawa Saturday (7:30 p.m. at Compuware).

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Livonia Stevenson is an extremely well-coached team. "They've got great team speed, a great goaltender and Kevin (Marlowe, the goalie) played extremely well. Shoot, he shut us out three times."

Mark Blazak, assisted by Dave Bonello, made it 3-0 with 5:51 to play in the game. He took a feed from behind the net and got his own rebound.

Bobby Zagata scored with 7:27 left, capitalizing on a turnover, with brother Tommy drawing the assist.

The Spartans' final tally came with 2:38 to play when Johan Edlund wrestled the puck in off goalie Greg Diven's shoulder as Stevenson wound up with a 34-32 advantage in shots for the game.

Shoper will find his team in a similar position tonight when it plays a Redford Unified team it also handled during the regular season.

"That was early in the year when they'd lost some players," he said. "This is not the same team we'll be facing tonight."

"In playoffs of any type, the first thing you think of is that it's a one-game elimination."

Every time you go out on the ice you have to give it everything you've got. Because, if you lose, it's over.

"Farmington had three things going for it. This is Mike's old team; we'd beaten them twice previously, and we knew they'd be playing the game knowing it could be the last game of their season."

The Flyers seemed to wear down midway through the game. The Spartans began beating them to the corners for loose pucks, and the Flyers weren't as crisp finishing off their checks.

However, they picked it up in the third period and were getting the occasional odd-man rush.

"Our kids never quit," Harris said. "We had some injuries, so we were not quite as deep as you should be at this time of year."

"I felt our team won with class this season and lost with dignity. I guarantee we will build on this season. We'll have a different look next year."

Harris gave junior goalie Danny Zales playing time over the last 7:27, leading to one of the game's highlight moments.

With 30 seconds to play, starter Diven, his prep career

over, called up to his father, who was taping the game for Farmington.

"Hey, dad," he shouted. "Thanks, for hockey, for everything."

REDFORD CC 13, W.L. WESTERN 3: Two-time defending state champion Redford Catholic Central (22-0-3) rolled to victory over Wallis Lake Western (7-13-3) behind three goals and two assists from Mike Raligan in a first-round game Monday at Redford Ice Arena.

The game was halted after two periods because of the mercy rule.

Jim Spilewak and Ryan Lesocki each contributed one goal and three assists.

REDFORD CC 4, BROTHER RICE 1: The Shamrocks (21-0-3, 10-0-2) scored four unanswered goals in the final period to beat Birmingham Brother Rice in a Michigan Interscholastic Hockey League game Saturday at Redford Arena.

Rice, 2-10 in league play, struck in the first period when Justin Korik tallied an unassisted, short-handed goal.

CC's Jared Ross scored a power-play goal just 30 seconds into the third from Brett John and Jim Spilewak to make it 1-1.

With eight minutes to play, Spilewak scored the game-winner from Mike Raligan and Andrew Eggert.

Ross added another goal from John, and Mike McClean capped the scoring from Mark Demmer and Dean Storm.

Andrew McCoy and Danny Bridges split time in the CC goal. They faced just 14 shots; Rice's Chris Eppert made 33 saves.

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