

Battle for No. 1 moves to Compuware Arena

By PAUL BEAUDRY
STAFF WRITER

A lot of high school hockey fans think the Division I regional opener Tuesday between No. 1 Redford Catholic Central and No. 2 Farmington Unified is to be the "real" state title game - no matter what happens in two weeks.

It is, therefore, appropriate the "real" state title game be played in the same arena as the real state title game.

Because both teams are highly ranked and the demand for tickets outstripped the capacity at Redford Ice Arena, Tuesday's 8 p.m. game has been moved to 4,000-seat Compuware Arena in Plymouth Township - the site of the MHSAA finals on March 6-9.

"I think it's great for high school hockey," Farmington coach Mark Vellucci said. "This way everyone gets a chance to see the two top-ranked teams in the state. Our boys are excited and I'm sure the CC kids are excited, too."

The foundation for this was laid shortly after the regional pairings were announced. As luck - had or good, your pick - would have it, the random draw placed CC and Farmington to play in the second game Tuesday, after the Livonia Churchill and Redford Unified contest at 5 p.m.

"This would have been two big

crowd-control games," said CC athletic director Bob Santello, whose school is the host for the tournament. "Churchill and RU are close and draw people. Then you have parking and our game coming in. So the Farmington people initiated the possibility of moving the game out with the MHSAA."

Seating at the 1,000-seat Redford Ice Arena had more to do with it than anything. Both schools received an initial allotment of roughly 300 tickets, with the remainder to be sold at the gate. That was pushing it with the number of CC fans who would want to attend and not enough for the general public.

But it was nowhere near enough for the Farmington fans, who have increased their numbers as the team has stayed unbeaten - now at 24-0.

So talks began with the Michigan High School Athletic Association, which has never moved a tournament game in any sport solely because of fan interest, to shift the game to Compuware.

"We're absolutely thrilled," said Marta Laird, president of the Farmington Hockey Boosters. "This hockey community is just huge. But I was really shocked when our 400 tickets were gone in (15) minutes. We're hoping to have that kind of community turnout at Compuware."

"For this area, the only (alternat-

ive) venue was Compuware. Everything fell into place. We're very fortunate they could make the ice available to us and fortunate (MHSAA assistant director) Randy Allen stepped up and said, "These are unusual circumstances, and we need to change it."

Once Allen saw the demand for tickets was real and not a potential one, he - along with Santello and Farmington district athletic director Dennis Noe - agreed to the move.

"It's an appropriate move in this case, and we're fortunate that we had the facility available to be able to do this," said Allen.

"The goal is to accommodate the fans. If it were a few fans we were dealing with, that's one thing. But the demand from Farmington was so great that everyone felt this was the proper move."

And it might be for the best, too. Fans will get the same feeling as they do at a game for the rink's regular tenant - the Ontario Hockey League's Plymouth Whalers.

The regular game staff, the public address announcer, the goal judges and concessions will all be the same.

The Churchill-RU game won't be along for the ride, however, and will stay at Redford Arena for their 5 p.m. game.

"Ticket prices are \$5 at both sites. Both schools have sold out their advance ticket allotments and, at

Compuware's request, there will be no pre-game sales at CC or any of the Farmington high schools. Tickets will be available at the arena's box office during regular business hours Monday and Tuesday.

Compuware will get a flat fee for the facility rental and whatever it makes in concessions. Redford Arena will be reimbursed for the ice time as well as a sum for lost concessions for that game, and the MHSAA makes the money, from the gate.

As for the game itself, it's tough for the Nos. 1 and 2 teams to meet so early, but such is the case of a blind draw. It's not the first time it's happened, and it's not the first sport.

But, for it to happen when both teams are so hot - and throw in the fact it's the first time the state finals will be held at Compuware, moving here from Flint's IMA Arena this season - it could live up to its billing.

"I think it's great that we get to show a top game at a first-class facility," CC co-coach Todd Johnson said. "The kids are really looking forward to it. I hope Farmington brings everyone and that every kid in our school goes, too."

"People will talk about what a shame it is that one of these teams has to go home on the second night of the tournament, but this kind of game will be great for high school hockey in Michigan."

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CC puts game together in romp over G.P. North

For the first time in a long time, Redford-Detroit Catholic Central had its best hockey players on the ice together at the same time.

And Grasse Pointe North found out what can happen when that happens on Wednesday night as top-ranked CC rolled over the Norsemen, 10-1.

"I think it's only the second or third time all year where we had the players, who we felt were our top 20 guys at the beginning of the season, playing together," CC co-coach Todd Johnson said.

"It didn't help (the Norsemen) that they had their best defenseman suspended and a two-time all-star player not dress while he waited for the MHSAA to rule on his eligibility. They weren't on their game. After we made it 4-1, I think they stopped working."

It was close for the first period as CC (9-0 Michigan Interscholastic Hockey League, 19-3) held a 2-1 lead, but the Shamrocks kicked it in gear in the second to take a 6-1 lead.

Brandon Naurato led the scoring parade with three goals, while Eric Giosa and Kevin Hornal had three assists. Drew Kahle had two goals and an assist, Dave McGordy had a goal and two assists, Pat Coldren had a goal and an assist, Tommy Mullen had a goal and an assist and Jason Lewarne and Andrew Eggert had a goal each.

The Shamrocks had 29 shots on goal, while CC goalies Jimmy Blanchard and John Garza made seven and five saves, respectively.

CC closed out the regular season on Saturday night against Birmingham Brother Rice and will open Division I regional play against No. 2 Farmington Unified at 8 p.m. Tuesday at Compuware Arena.

HOCKEY

FROM PAGE C1

waiting for it," said Farmington junior assistant captain Brett Laird, who had a hat trick against Mott.

"Now it comes up in the first game of the playoffs, and every- one wants to be ready for it."

The possibility of a Farmington-CC matchup was likely since it was known from the start of the season both teams would be in the same regional.

But a game between Nos. 1 and 2 would make a good championship game - for the state title, not just the regional.

"Whether it's the first round of the regional or the state final, it always comes down to one game," Farmington senior captain Jeff Tosiano said, "so you

just have to take them one game at a time."

Vellucci noted the last team to beat Farmington was CC in last year's regional final. It was 2-2 after two periods, but the Shamrocks eventually won, 4-2.

"We stayed with them for two periods, but we didn't have quite the depth," Farmington senior captain Mike Hand said. "We only had three lines, so they wore us down and took control by the third period."

"We gave them a good game, but we feel we're much improved. We're excited for the challenge again this year."

Scouting the opponent

Vellucci saw the Shamrocks in the Trenton Showcase earlier this year and observed CC usually pulls away from the opposing team in the third period. The Flyers also have four

lines this year, a solid corps of defensemen and good goal-tending, Vellucci said, adding "We're pretty much equal with them" in that regard.

Laird said he and his teammates know what they need to do when they play the Shamrocks.

"Everyone has to go out and give 110 percent all game," he said. "We have to play a three-period hockey game and not one or two."

"It's going to take everyone's best effort and no individual play," Hand said. "We have to play as a team all three periods. We can't let up at all, because they'll pounce on us if we do."

Despite their record, the Flyers know they'll be regarded as the underdogs Tuesday.

"Oh, yeah," Tosiano said. "Four years in a row! You've gotta beat the best to be the best." Should the Flyers upset the

Shamrocks, however, they're confident they have a team capable of winning the state title.

"This next game is huge," Hy said. "We know we can go all the way, but all we're thinking about is CC."

"When you're in single elimination, the next game is the most important, and that's all that matters," Tosiano said.

Vellucci and many of his players planned to attend the CC-Brother Rice game Saturday night to scout their next opponent.

"I've got some buddies on the (CC) team, so I have a good idea how they play," Tosiano said. "They're the best until someone beats them."

"If everyone plays his game and it comes down to the wire, hopefully, we'll get the bounces and lucky breaks and come out with a victory," Vellucci said.

Flyers whitewash Corsairs

It was Senior Night Wednesday, and Vellucci played his 13 seniors early in the game, which meant the Flyers had some different combinations on the ice.

Mott goalie Austin Durham did well and shut out Farmington for two thirds of the first period, but the flood-gate opened once the Flyers put their regular lines in the game.

It helped that Farmington was on the power play for its first two goals, too. Hy sandwiched a pair of goals around one by Hand for a 3-0 lead in the first period.

Adam Chornoby (13:35), Michael Singer (13:09), Laird (9:53) on the power play, Brett Ramsay (7:27) and Louie Powell (2:05) scored goals in the second period.

Laird scored again at 9:53 of the third and added a short-hand goal at 6:51, which invoked the 10-goal mercy rule and ended the game.

Flyers goalie R.J. Ulrich earned the shutout. Farmington outshot Mott, 49-4.

"(The 24-0 record was) a total team effort, not relying on three or four players but everyone contributing," Hand said.

"We're all going for the same goal, and that's to keep playing as long as we can."

"It pays off when you have a group working hard every day," Tosiano said, adding the key to Farmington's success has been selflessness.

"Everyone out there is playing for what's on the front of the jersey, not on the back. That's what sets us apart."

"We know we could do it," Hy said. "It was a matter of concentrating every game. We did it and our next goal is CC Tuesday."

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