

Tuplin's goals cancel X Tigers-Blue Eagles in AUHC Finals

by Greg Dennis

It's strange how a player can emerge from the shadows of more illustrious teammates and become a hero at playoff time. Last year during their romp to the Atlantic University Hockey Conference Championship, Mike Brennan was the Dalhousie tigers unlikely candidate, netting a team-leading five goals.

This year, Chuck Tuplin, a first year performer from Hull, Mass., was thrust into the spotlight after scoring the tying and winning goals against the St. Francis Xavier X-Men in the third and deciding semi-final playoff game last Sunday, won 4-2 by the Tigers. Coach Pierre Page was pleased with the acquisition of Tuplin but a training camp injury sidelined the winger for a month and a half.

A defenceman who knew he was being cut from the team threw a cross-body at Tuplin during a two on one drill, tearing the ligaments in his leg). On returning to the lineup, Tuplin found that he had to make a major adjustment to university hockey and university life. After a shaky beginning, he finally found himself and played well in the last few weeks of the season finishing with six goals and ten assists. Thus far in the playoffs, Tuplin has three goals.

The Tigers split the first two games of the series with X, winning 7-3 Friday night before closing 3-1 on Saturday. The defending champs will travel to Moncton, N.B. tomorrow to tackle the Université de Moncton Blue Eagles who edged the St. Mary's Huskies last weekend to advance to the finals.

Adrian Facca and Brian Buzzard Gualazzi scored the Tiger goals in Sunday's victory. Don Matheson had Dal's lone goal in Saturday's loss while Tuplin, Louis Lavoie, Dwight Houser, Bark Haddad, Rick McCallum, Gualazzi and Jim Bottomly scored in the opening game.

The first game was all Dalhousie as relentless forechecking allowed the Tigers to apply sustained pressure throughout the contest. The Tigers took a 1-0 advantage into the second period but only because of Ken Bickerton's flawless goaltending and excellent penalty killing. The referee, questionable at best, handed the Tigers five of six minors but X failed to capitalize. Three goals early in the second period, a minute and 41 seconds apart, sparked Dal to victory. McCallum's goal at 3:11 was the winner and gave the Tigers an insurmountable 4-0 lead.

The second match of the series was dominated by the Antigonish squad, the X-Men outshooting the Tigers 37-24. Perhaps over-confident from their relatively easy win the night before, the Tigers were flat all game save for ten

minutes of the second period. Penalties—oh those penalties—hurt the Tigers. X's John MacLellan scored the games opening goal with two Tigers in the penalty box and a pair of minors late in the game with the X-Men ahead 3-1 dashed any hopes of a Tiger comeback.

A scrap in the second period resulted in 74 penalty minutes handed out and featured a wicked slugfest between big Houser and X-Men tough guy Peter Martel.

A curious ruling was handed down prior to Sunday's final game by league officials giving X the home ice advantage. The 'home team' is allowed the final personnel change before face-offs. Friday night the Tigers had this right and matched their checking line of Bottomley-Glen O'Byrne-Houser against X's high scoring Cuomo-Keating-Landrigan unit and effectively bottled them up all evening. Saturday was, as it should be, X's home game but the ruling to allow them the advantage the following day was peculiar. Since when does the team that works hard to finish first lose the home ice advantage? Someone at the top is a few dimes short.

The Tigers, nevertheless, outplayed their rivals for two periods but because of miraculous goaltending by George Barrett, the score was only 1-1 entering the final 20 minutes. The X-Men were ahead 2-1 late in the game and had the tigers on the ropes. But Tuplin's tying goal deflated X's balloon. Nineteen seconds later Tuplin deflected Lavoie's slapshot past a shook-up Barrett to give the Tigers a 3-2 lead. Sensing victory, the charged up Tigers rarely let the X-Men out of their own zone and when Gualazzi scored the 4th goal at 18:31, the X-Men were history.



Chuck Tuplin

Tuplin described his tying and winning goals. "Gualazzi was in the corner and Danny Cyr was in front of the net. I was carrying the puck along the boards and since they had those guys tied up, I just threw it in front from outside the faceoff circle hoping Danny would get a rebound. He (Barrett) wasn't ready and the



Gary Ryan in action against St.F.X.

Dal Photo/Grandy

shot hit his stick. He tried to put his glove on it but it trickled right into the net. On the winning goal, Louis took a shot from the point. I was in front trying to screen the goalie and the puck tipped right off my stick about halfway up and went in."

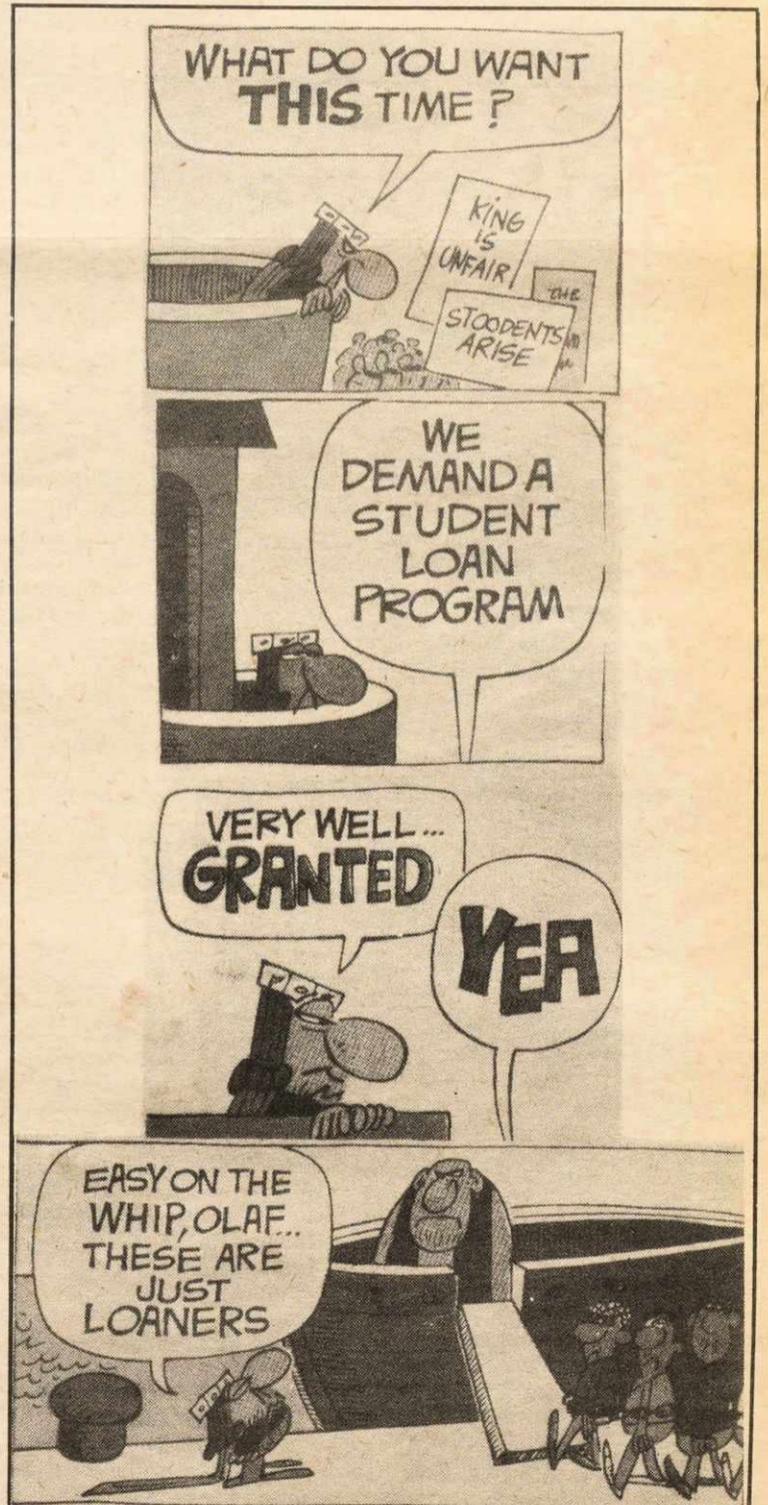
Tuplin admitted they weren't the prettiest goals but "They all count. Barrett was playing good but he was pretty lucky. It took something fluky, like the tying goal to shake him up."

The Tigers will play the first game of the AUHC finals in Moncton at the J. Louis Levesque Arena on Friday night then return to Halifax for the second game to be held at the Forum at 8:00 p.m. A third game, if necessary, will be played in Moncton Sunday. U de M, like Dal is coming off a tough series. Although the two best teams probably won, it could easily be SMU and X in the final. Both teams were underdogs but played ballsy hockey and gave it their all.

Tiger defenceman Gary Ryan, a native of Moncton and a former Blue Eagle is looking forward to the series. "The first two times I played up there, I was nervous playing against my old team; in front of friends. It's gonna be a good series—fast and probably rough."

"They're a fast club but we've changed our forechecking since the last time we faced them. They won't be getting too many two on ones or breakaways against us. Jean Perron (Blue Eagle coach) works hard but as a system they are weak. When they have the puck, they can score but they don't know what to do without the puck. A good system will win every time."

"Of course, the Tigers will come out on top."



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