

Tigers caught napping

BY NIK MADAN

"We just weren't hungry enough tonight," said Dalhousie hockey rookie Dallas Gray, and he was right.

The UPEI Panthers came into the Tigerdome last Saturday with a definite agenda: they needed a win to move them into third place in the MacAdam Division, and to secure a playoff berth against St. Thomas. For the Tigers, with a playoff spot versus St. FX assured, this game was nothing more than a chance to do a little fine-tuning before the playoffs.

Nevertheless, the Tigers started the game aggressively, with Tim Hill and Craig Brocklehurst coming close to scoring. However, it was UPEI who got the breakthrough to take a 1-0 lead into the first intermission.

The second period saw more of the same with the Tigers being repeatedly denied by the heroics of David Mitchell in the UPEI net, which included a magnificent save on Dal's David Carson on a shorthanded breakaway. UPEI, on the other hand, were able to make the most of their chances and scored three goals against a somewhat disinclined Tiger defence.

The game was far from over with the Tigers mounting a spirited comeback in the third. Shane Gibbs, the most consistent of the Tiger defencemen on the night, scored a richly deserved goal at

12:20. He pounced on a loose puck following some textbook forechecking by Jason Pellerin which created space in the offensive zone. Spotting the goalie's downward movement, Gibbs shot high to the glove side with the kind of finish most forwards would be proud of. This goal gave the Tigers hope, and they continued to press forward.

It was not to be, however, as Mitchell made save after save to keep the Tigers from adding to their tally. A fifth UPEI goal sealed it for the visitors, who were able to ice the game for a 5-1 victory.

Game MVP Gordon Walsh of UPEI commented on the difference between the teams: "To be honest, Dal didn't really play too well. It was a big game for us, and a nothing game for them. We knew we had to win, and we came to play. We lost earlier in the sea-

son to them, and we knew we had to work on our penalty killing because they punished us [on the power play] last time."

The Tigers finish the season with a 13-11-4 record, an improvement on last season, and go into the division semi-final series against a St. FX team ranked seventh in the nation. The Tigers have a 2-3-1 head-to-head record with St. FX this season.

"We gave up quite a few three-on-twos and two-on-ones," commented Gibbs. "Usually we're a team that doesn't do that. That's kind of our game plan, to be even all over the ice. I guess tonight we just had a little bit of a breakdown, and were just working out some bugs before the playoffs."

Brocklehurst added, "We weren't too intense tonight. I guess we're looking forward to Tuesday."

Exall

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playing time on the court.

He observes that Dal's team chemistry is solid, more so than Calgary's, and he attributes his development to the depth of the coaching staff as well as encouragement from veterans. He cites former Dal setter greats Paul Villeneuve, now an assistant coach for the team, and CIAU All-Canadian Scott Bagnell as major influences.

Exall also speaks well of the

team's head coach. "Al cares about what you are doing schoolwise just as much as your progression as an athlete," he says.

It has been a fulfilling year for Exall as he has contributed to team tournament successes, including two silver medals and a first place finish at the Waterloo Warrior Invitational. "I really like the travelling aspect of the program, I'd never had the opportunity to play Quebec teams before," says Exall. More recently, he garnered Player of the Game honours in a match against UNB.

Exall unexpectedly stepped

into the role of starting setter after another player withdrew from the program.

"I would have rather earned my position than take it over," he says, "but you work hard and hope that you are doing a good job." When asked if the transition to a starting player involved a lot of pressure, he responds: "The coaches put as much pressure on us as we put on ourselves."

Exall has no reason to worry, as coach Scott says, "I know the athletes have great respect for him. Peter has brought a refreshing attitude to the team."

"I am very pleased with his improvement through the year," adds Scott, "his strong points are his commitment to learn and improve. As well, his ability to follow the game plan."

Teammate Terry Martin echoes this statement noting, "He (Peter) is a great addition to the team this year. He takes exactly what we work on in practice and executes it in game situations. We, as a team, can connect mentally because we can count on him."

The Tigers will play out their regular sea-

son at an AUSA Tournament at UNB this weekend. They're on track to win their 17th divisional crown when they host the Atlantic Championships next weekend at Dalplex. While the AUSA may not be as competitive as his former conference, Exall cautions, "We still have to be on top of our game."

It's this substantial work ethic and dedication that has made Exall an asset to the Tigers. He's shown that he is more than ready, but he quickly adds that the success the team has been experiencing so far has been the result of a strong team effort.

Exall is now focusing on the remaining AUSA competition in hopes of earning the opportunity to represent Dal at Nationals. He's particularly keen because they're being hosted in his home town by his former school, the University of Calgary.

Daily practices, a full course load and weekends away leaves little time for anything else, but Exall makes time to keep in touch with his family weekly on the phone. However, he has no regrets about coming to Dalhousie.

"Halifax is a great city, the people are very friendly," he says.

"I will be finishing my degree here. It was a great decision to come."

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