

Alliance hockey team falls short in sectional finals

By Brad Hartmann
HERALD CONTRIBUTOR

The look on the Warbirds/Beaver Dam Alliance co-op girls hockey team could tell it all: frustrated and devastated.

It was a match-up between the two top teams in the state as the Alliance tried to beat its rival Fox Cities for the fourth time this season but lost 5-2 Friday evening at the Fond du Lac Blue Line Family Ice Center in the WIAA sectional finals.

"We were all nervous in the beginning. We knew we could do this. We went to state last year so this nervousness shouldn't be happening to us right now," said Fond du Lac senior Drew Deanovich. "We didn't make good passes. We could have communicated more. I thought we were rushed in what we were doing. We were slapping the puck to where we thought it was going to go."

Oshkosh North junior Hattie Verstegen helped spark the Alliance (21-4) offense by delivering the first goal with 2:54 left of the first period on the team's sixth shot attempt. Waupun senior Morgan Brown was credited with an assist as she threw the puck in front of the net, finding Verstegen.

The Alliance was the aggressor in the first period, winning six of seven face-offs, but couldn't capitalize on a couple of opportunities as Deanovich missed two shots off the right side of the net and Beaver Dam senior Alyssa Heim had a shot



Photo by Michael Trzinski, Wisconsin Prep Hockey

Hattie Verstegen (right) from Oshkosh North and a member of the Warbirds/Beaver Dam Alliance team, competes for the puck in the WIAA sectional final against Fox Cities on Friday night in Fond du Lac.

hitting the cross bar at the 10:06 mark.

Heading into the locker room, many Alliance athletes encouraged each other to get the puck to the red line and deep. But just 34 seconds into the second period Fox Cities' Madelynn Jablonski would tie the game on a power-play goal with assists from Lauryn Hull and Victoria Nelson.

The Stars took the lead on a breakaway goal from McKayla Zilisch, followed by their third goal with 4:18 in the period on a controversial call as Kourtney Koster poked the puck past goalie Abby Okon as it was pinched between the post and her pads. After review the referees awarded the goal to Koster.

The Alliance rallied to cut the deficit to 3-2 as Verstegen scored her second goal with 3:23 left in the second period with assists from Eve Lundin (Beaver Dam)

and Brown.

"I just tipped it. It was the perfect opportunity. We practice that shot every day. I was hoping for a tip or deflection," said Verstegen. "I was hoping we would carry that momentum into the next line. Everyone was more motivated because we got back into the game."

The Stars continued to frustrate the Alliance by scoring two more goals, including one by Nelson that deflected off Verstegen's stick and did a rainbow into the net just 39 seconds into the third period. Morgan Treml would score the Stars' final goal with 11:02 remaining with an assist from Zilisch.

Inside the net, Stars goalie Hattie Berndt had 20 saves while Okon saved 21 shots for the Alliance. The Stars outshot the Alliance 26-22. On the power play the Stars converted 1 for 2 while the Alliance went 0 for 2.

Last season the Alliance finished 19-9 after a 3-2 overtime loss to the Cap City Cougars in the WIAA state semifinals. Next season the Alliance will be going through a rebuilding mode leaning on the experience of Verstegen and Okon as the team is graduating 10 players.

"Being a senior we knew this was our last chance to go to state. They caught us when we were out of position," said Brown. "We had a great season. We were undefeated in conference. We had a great record with some high-scoring games."

"Now seeing Fox Cities and how they are going to feel at state, that's just the hardest part that we are going home and they are continuing playing."

