

At LCN ... bad penalties will get you less ice time

Deep down, Chris Rojem is burning.

Yes, the coach of the L'Anse Creuse North hockey team is excited at the same time. The Crusaders are in the midst of the best start in school history and are fresh off a five-goal victory over their rivals at L'Anse Creuse. But, still, something nags at him.



Fred Costello

SLAP SHOTS

It's the penalties. While it is true that the Crusaders are rolling over most of the

competition – evidenced by a county-best 49 goals scored – the coach knows that undisciplined play will come back to bite the team if it isn't careful.

"Our penalty minutes are really high," Rojem said. "My job is to lower those penalty minutes. We're getting them at bad times. We're fortunate enough to be able to play our way out of those situations, but it's a matter of time before people start to capitalize."

Now that that's off his chest, Rojem can focus on the things the team has been doing well. And there have been a lot of them.

Coming into the season, Rojem was pleased to find that several new players had abandoned the travel ranks and come on board at LCN. The coach now sees a team that is strong in net, has solid defense and the ability to roll four potent forward lines. Overall depth has been a key factor in the Crusaders dominance. Though the team lost 12 seniors from the 2007 team, a new dozen solidify this year's group.

Through eight games, the Crusaders boast a 7-1 record overall and have won all three games against fellow Macomb Area Conference White Division foes. The team has yet to take a division crown, but – especially up front – is looking like this might be the year.

Rojem can't help but boast



L'Anse Creuse North boys ice hockey coach Chris Rojem, right, talks with his team during a recent practice. The Crusaders are off to a 7-1-0 start to the season, despite drawing more penalties than the coach would like.

Macomb Daily photo by David Dalton

about his "Production Line" of Nick West, Taylor Tyll and Chris Davis – and who could blame him? The trio of senior forwards combined for an astonishing 41 points through its first six games. A familiarity among the players has resulted in a unique synergy that yields nothing but results.

"They have got some of the quickest feet I've ever seen in this league," Rojem said. "They are really good skaters. Davis can really put it in the net and West or Tyll are great at setting him up. They anticipate the play and they've got really good chemistry together."

Senior forward Brad Glowe also has caught the coach's eye. Providing a scorer's touch with a work ethic and physical style of a checking winger, Glowe has given the team a nice contrast to

Power Five

1. Eisenhower – Eagles are the only undefeated team in the county
2. L'Anse Creuse North – One-loss Crusaders face Ike on Thursday
3. Anchor Bay – Knocked off Shores then battled LCN close
4. Dakota – Split against non-conference foes in Midland
5. Utica – Win over Troy Athens could be a good stepping-stone

— FRED COSTELLO

its finesse line. Rojem said that Glowe also excels in the classroom.

Senior Brenden Ludeman continues to anchor the team's defensive corps. He and classmate Matt Kennedy are both players who have been around the team for a few seasons and know what is expected of them. Through eight games, the unit is keeping opponents in check – the Crusaders

have yet to give up over five goals in a game.

Some of that, of course, is to the credit of the team's goalies, which have been another major bright spot. Splitting time between the pipes are a pair of first-year players in sophomore Alex Sypniewski and freshman Brian Ellis, both of whom came from travel hockey. It is pretty unlikely that many teams would

look forward to having such a young pair of goalkeepers, but in Rojem's case, he sees it as nothing but a blessing.

"They have been a phenomenal tandem," Rojem said. "When you can build a program around a freshman and a sophomore – that's huge in high school hockey. They're getting equal playing time right now and the team's confidence in them is really strong as well."

The numbers bear out his sentiments. Through the first eight, the goalies have allowed 2.5 goals per game.

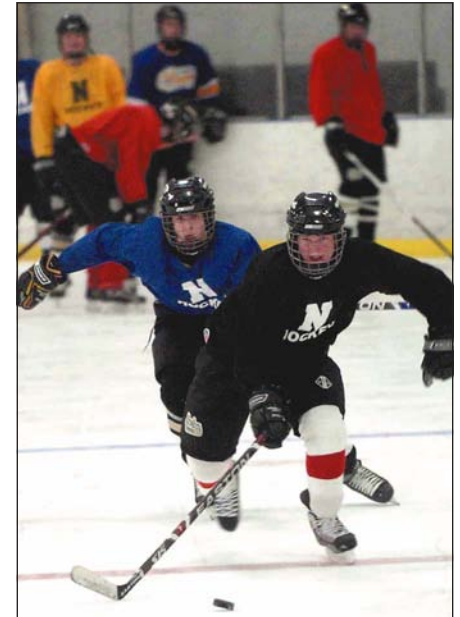
In the preseason, Rojem noticed how well the upperclassmen were treating the first-year players. He has continued to be proud of the way the team gets along off the ice and how it pulls

See LCN, Page 7



Macomb Daily staff photo by Craig Gaffield

Anchor Bay swimmers, from left to right, Aaron Shields, Nick Victor and Andrew Leopardi joke around in the pool during a recent practice. Aaron is the younger brother of former Tars swimmer Justin Shields and Nick is the younger brother of Matt Victor, who also swam at Anchor Bay. Leopardi is the son of current Tars coach Steve Leopardi.



Macomb Daily photo by David Dalton

L'Anse Creuse North practices at Mount Clemens Ice Arena earlier this season. The Crusaders face Eisenhower tonight in a MAC White Division game.

LCN: Off to 7-1-0 start

Continued from Page 6

for one another on the ice. The strong bonds being formed now are the ties he hopes will bind the team as it tries to capture that elusive first White Division title.

"I look at this one game at a time, as a lot of coaches do," Rojem said. "I think if we play our game, the outcome will be positive. Our goal is to win the White and go into the state playoffs and represent our area. We know we can put the puck in the net, it's just that the intangibles – like discipline, remain an issue."

Back to those penalties, again. It can be very difficult to control a team's discipline. There are 20 players each going full steam on every shift to ensure they make the coach and the school proud. But teenage tempers are known to fly and it doesn't take much once the helmets and gloves are on (or off).

However, Rojem has found his solution. He's going to take away the one thing he can control: ice time.

"My strategy is: dumb penalties equals less playing time," Rojem said. "These kids love to play the game. They believe in each other and I believe in them. But when you average 10-12 penalties a game, that's just unacceptable."

When Rojem talks about the "crime and punishment" aspect of the game, it is almost impossible not to take him seriously. His day job as a detective sergeant with the Macomb County Sheriff's Office *just might* have something to do with it.

Please send comments, story suggestions or high sticks to macombdaily-hockey@yahoo.com

Family tradition

Anchor Bay swimmers look to make a splash

By John Hetzler

Macomb Daily Sports Writer

A strong gene pool has helped make Anchor Bay strong in the swimming pool.

Swimming

Aaron Shields, Nick Victor and Andrew Leopardi look to continue a family tradition of success this

season for the Anchor Bay swimming and diving team.

Shields is the younger brother of Justin Shields, who was an all-state swimmer for the Tars and now swims at Wayne State.

Victor is the younger brother of Matt Victor, also a state-qualifying swimmer at Anchor Bay and now with the Warriors'

college program.

And Leopardi is the son of Tars coach Steve Leopardi, who believes Anchor Bay has the look of a winner this year.

"We should do really well," Steve Leopardi said. "We have a young team. Last year they were mostly first year swimmers. I'm really looking forward to county. I think we can do really well, but I don't know how well."

Shields won the 50 and 100 freestyles at the Macomb County Swimming and Diving Championships last season, and he also was a state qualifier.

He struggled at last year's state finals after his goggles came off during a preliminary heat, but that has given him renewed incentive for this season, his coach said.

Just one meet into the year, Shields proved he is focused by recording a state-qualifying time of 49.68 seconds in the 100

free.

"(He wants) to do a lot better at states," Leopardi said.

Victor placed second in the breaststroke and individual medley at last year's county meet, and Leopardi said he sees similarities between both Shields and Victor.

"Both started at young age," Leopardi said. "They both have been swimming a long time. You can see that. They're stroke technique is there."

Though the Tars dropped a tough one-point decision to MAC Red Division rival Dakota in its opening meet, Leopardi believes his team could have a special season in the MAC White.

"They've already (recorded) some of the best times," Leopardi said. "They did well."

Send comments to john.hetzler@macombdaily.com.

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