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Accepting the challenge

Stevenson hockey making most of opportunities

By Brad D. Bates
C & G Sports Writer

All the 2008-09 Utica Stevenson hockey team needs is a challenge.

That's why after seeing his team top Macomb Area Conference White Division leading Macomb L'Anse Creuse North to pull within three points of the lead, coach Al Korolewicz couldn't wait for the second half of the season.

"It was the most important game of the season," Korolewicz said of the Titans' 6-4 win Jan. 9 at Great Lakes Sports City, which improved the team's record to 8-3-1 overall, 2-0-1 in the MAC White.

"Every game that we've put a high level of emphasis on, they've stepped up to it." Prior to the big win over LCN, the Titans stepped up to perhaps a bigger challenge when they won the St. Clair Shores Unified Lakers Holiday Invitational Classic Dec. 27 at the St. Clair Shores Ice Arena.

"We beat St. Clair Shores Unified and Dakota to win the Shores tournament," Korolewicz said of his team's wins against the past two MAC Red champions.

"I expected us to be competitive, but to handle them on consecutive nights was something. It wasn't a shock, but it was very gratifying."

While the Titans' 3-2 wins against the Cougars and Lakers weren't surprising, they did prove what Korolewicz had expected about this team all along.

"A lot of people gave us credit at the beginning of the season, but no one but our coaches knew exactly what we could achieve," Korolewicz said.

The return of junior forwards Justin Zyvon and Drew DeMarti to the lineup has given the Titans a scoring punch to match their improving defense, which continues to jell with junior newcomer Rick Ice in net.

"My best forwards last year were sophomores, and they're my best forwards this year," Korolewicz said. "Will Shier and Brandon Young have really stepped up and helped a defensive corps that was lacking experience."



Photo by Patricia O'Blenes
Utica Stevenson junior forward Taylor Weiss breaks away for a goal during the Titans' 6-4 win against Macomb L'Anse Creuse North Jan. 9 at Great Lakes Sports City.

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Ice has backstopped the top defense in the MAC White to the tune of a 2.14 goals-against average.

“He plays a very traditional butterfly style, and he just makes stops,” Korolewicz said of Ice. “Even if he’s a little out of position, he just makes saves. That’s all I care about.”

With Stevenson just behind LCN in the White standings, and a win against the Crusaders in hand, the Titans control their own destiny in the season’s final seven league games.

And the combination of Zyvon and DeMarti — who have combined to score 23 goals and 45 total points — Ice in net, and the leadership of his seven returning players is why Korolewicz feels his team will make the most of the challenges that are sure to arise in the second half of the season.

“When you play in a league with only 10 league games, it’s tough,” Korolewicz said. “You need players to talk in the locker room, and we didn’t have that last year until some of the younger guys stepped up. That helped last year, and it’s really carried over to this year.”

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