



THE WEEKLY BUZZARD

The Official Newsletter of The Warinanco Over The Hill Ice Hockey Club

Opening Night a Whitewash

Warinanco Park, NJ-Friday, October 27th, marked Opening Night, of year 35 for the Warinanco Over the Hill Ice Hockey Club. A little after 10:00 PM, one by one, players entered the cavernous locker rooms of The Warinanco Park Ice Skating Center. Long lost friends getting together with a lot of catching up as the players dressed for the first time this year. Pete Scolara and Aaron Berg, Hockey North America teammates of Glenn Davidson, John Markham and Kevin Kelly were two new faces in locker room one. Pete and Aaron fit right in as their so called friends did their best make them as uncomfortable as possible.

WOTHHC's fearless leader Richie Pollack was there collecting money and adding the only air of responsibility in this eclectic group of senior hockey players. Since taking over many, many years ago, it's been a roller coaster ride for Pollack. Back in the early 90's, due to low turnouts there were thoughts of ending the Friday night skates. With many a night, skating 4 on 4 and using some creative financing, Richie was able to keep the group together. With fate playing a roll new blood appeared and the longest continuous running ice hockey skate in New Jersey continues.

As the skaters gathered at the rinks open door waiting for the buzzer. When the buzzer went off, there were no laser light shows or man-made fog machines (though nature's fog was ever present) or loud music blaring as the players quietly took the ice. As each player took that first glide, echoes of past players seemed to hover over the season's first warm-up. Names like Greenspan, Shaw, Lybeck, Mucci, Brimat, Pokecheck, Fisher, Burnett, Lawson and Healey all part of the foundation of 35 years of Friday Nights. You couldn't tell it was the first time on the ice in 6 months, as the skaters went through the motions. The warm-up seemed no different than any other Friday night. The goalies took their positions and the skaters took their best shots. Once again, all was right with the world.

The night also offered another notable addition, the return of goalie Val

Maleckar. The one time WOTHHC regular was back between the pipes taking over for Ralph Seher, who has gone into semi-retirement for personal reasons. All of the WOTHHC members will miss the confident goalie, who was never afraid to mix it up and show up the best of WOTHHC snipers. During the warm-up, Maleckar too shows an air of confidence and seems to pick up where Seher left off. This could prove to be a problem for whatever side he plays against.

As both sides figured out lines, there is an uncertain sense of anticipation. For many of the skaters, no matter the level you play opening night always brings a different kind of butterflies. No one is quite sure what to expect and play tends to be a bit more spotty than usual. With both first lines ready to play, defenseman Jack Lenart dropped the puck for centers; John Markham and Ken La Bella and season started.

It didn't take long before Markham, who looked to be in mid season form, tallied a season opening natural hat trick. Dark goalie, Jerry Neilson, who is listed as being 57 years old, but we know different, made some great saves. Unfortunately costly rebounds found their way to Markham's stick and white was off and running. The often-maligned Markham and justifiably so was jubilant in raising his stick and hands in celebration of each goal. The dark team took note and for the rest of the evening it seemed the center had a bull's eye painted over the buzzard on his sweater. Every time he touched the puck, there was a dark player all over him and they were successful in shutting down his goal scoring for the rest of the game. Markham may not have scored another goal, but he added four assists to end the evening with 7 points, a career best for any game. Halfway through the first period and down 4-0, the dark team finally scored their first goal of the season as Pollack, slid the puck past a very surprised Malecker.

As the initial skate progressed, the dark team seemed to find it defensive groove. The blue line trio of Ken Snyder, Bobby Pagan and Vince Cartier were able to settle things down after the initial rush of goals from the white team. Joining Markham on the forward lines were the cagey Charlie Snyder(no relation to Ken), the always hard skating Joey Marchwinski, playing his first game after season ending knee surgery, the solid two way player Kevin Kelly and rookie Aaron Berg, All night long, the swarming white offense battled, giving the dark defense all it could handle and then some.

Opening night also highlighted the continuing battle between white forward Charlie Snyder and dark goalie Jerry Neilson. Even as Neilson settled in, Snyder seemed to have a rare night in besting the acrobatic goalie. As the nimble goalie turned away many of the white team shots and cut down on the big rebounds, Snyder seemed to have the goalies number. On one particular 2-on-1 rush with Snyder skating down the right side of the rink, Cartier backed up playing the pass to forward Kevin Kelly. Neilson, cut down the angle had an unobstructed of the tenacious forwards blast, that somehow found Neilson's five hole. It was that kind of night for the dark team.

As the night progressed it was apparent that offense was a problem for dark. Six months of rust was very evident . The two forward lines had their chances in the offensive zone, but white's defensemen Lenhart, Davidson and the gristly veteran Paul Kardos acted more like the Great Wall of China. Though Peter Toliias, Bill Weiss, Ironman Joey Seeman and LaBella joined Pollack with opening night goals, the white team didn't allow much in the way of shots. Even with newcomer Peter Scolara doing a great job of moving the puck and passing, the night belonged to Maleckar, who played more like a Vezina Award goalie, smothering most of whites shot.

Night One: White had the offense, defense and goalie.

GAME NOTES: The Elias Sports Bureau confirmed at the end of the night, that John Markham's 4 assists were the first 4 of his 4-year WOTHHC career. Elias also noted that for the second year in a row, Richie Pollack has scored the first goal the year for dark side. Elias stated that goalie Jerry Neilson and forward Joey Seeman have skated in every WOTHHC season since the inaugural skate in 1972. Both push back father time and continue to contribute as much today as they did year one. Notable players missing from opening night included, Matt Jagusak, Scott Marchal, Carl Roth, Dave Paltjon and brothers Joe and Mike Marselle. One other notable skater missing was Mike Silvestri who is currently on assignment to the New York Tombs, a hockey team in the NYC Police Athletic League. Silvestri is expected to make his return to the big club in late December. The status of Glenn Coutts and Bobby Baker unknown. Coutts, the smooth skating forward has faced numerous off ice injuries the past couple of seasons and is awaiting medical clearance before he decides if he will return for his 33rd season or announce his retirement. Bobby "Shake and Bake" Baker has also faced injuries. He has spent the last season getting physical therapy and taking part in a Merk drug trial. His agent has contacted team officials advising them that Baker has no intention of retiring. He is working out privately and under the care of his personal trainer. When pressed for a date, his agent was non-committal, saying Baker will return when he feels he is ready to contribute and play up the level of hockey that has been the benchmark of his legendary career. Team officials have also announced that the 35th Anniversary Banner will be raised in a pre-skate ceremony during the annual holiday skate. Invitations have been sent out to all those who have skated on Friday nights. The team will also host a post game gala to celebrate the 35 years of Friday Night Hockey.

Evenings Players

White: Forwards; John Markham, Charlie Snyder, Kevin Kelly, Joey Marchwinski, Aaron Berg. Defense; Jack Lenhart, Glenn Davidson & Paul Kardos.

Dark: Forwards; Rich Pollack, Peter Toliias, Bill Weiss, Ironman Joey Seeman and Ken LaBella & Peter Scolara. Defense; Ken Snyder, Bobby Pagan and Vince Cartier