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EP looks invincible during shutout win

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PAWTUCKET -- East Providence could do no wrong.

The unbeaten Townies took a huge step toward advancing to their first state championship series in nine seasons on Friday night before a full house at Lynch Arena, outplaying North Smithfield from start to finish and outshooting the Northmen by a 3-to-1 ratio en route to a 4-0 triumph.

Freshman defenseman Bryan Soderberg scored a pair of unassisted goals for the Townies, who outshot the Northmen by a 39-13 count and would have blown away their visitors had NS goalie Bryan Lowe not stand on his head for most of the night and turn away 35 of the shots in an admirable effort. Advertisement

"We were very good in all aspects," added EP coach Gregg Amore, whose squad is now 21-0 in Division 3 action. "We moved the puck well. We took the body well. Our defensive zone coverage was stifling. (North Smithfield) may have had one shot from the slot, and when you can limit a team to one shot in 45 minutes, you're doing something."

Amore hopes his Townies can produce a repeat performance tonight at 9 p.m., as EP will try to sweep the series on the road at the Smithfield Ice Rink. If the Northmen stop the Townies, a third and deciding game will be held Monday night at 7:30 p.m. back at Lynch.

Speaking of Lynch, the Townies and Northmen played in front of one of the largest crowds the arena has hosted this season, as both bleachers were packed with fans, a couple of them bringing airhorns.

"We've received a lot of support, and that's been a help to us this year," added Amore. "In every big game we played, we've had crowds like this, and I couldn't be happier. And if you look in the crowd, you can see a lot of the old players, even going way back to the '70s and '60s."

Adding to Amore's happiness was his team's discipline on the ice. After taking 18 minutes in penalties in their quarterfinal-round sweep of Johnston, the Townies only took two on Friday on a meaningless tripping penalty in the second period.

The Northmen, who had the third-most penalty minutes in the division and 22 in their quarterfinal-round series against Mount Hope, got whistled for 16 more in Friday's contest, and two of them led to power-play goals.

"They were very physical and very dirty, but we didn't respond," admitted Amore. "We had to eat a lot of garbage tonight, but we did it because we have bigger fish to fry."

"We talked about that all week, and hopefully, we'll do it again tomorrow night. I think if we stay out of the box and play 5-on-5 or better all night, everything will take care of itself."

The Northmen received their first penalty just 30 seconds into the game, and 32 seconds later, Soderberg, who didn't record a point in the Johnston series, made them pay with an exceptional individual effort.

The Northmen, trying to fight off the power play, dumped the puck into the Townies' end, and Soderberg scooped it up and brought it down the ice, and once he hit center ice, he picked up speed, zipped past a pair of defensemen, and one-timed a shot past Lowe.

"For my money, Bryan's by far the best defenseman in the league," said Amore. "He does everything. Not only is he a very good defenseman, he's also a good offensive player and a good passer, and he shoots the puck well."

Pat Gormley then doubled the Townies' lead at 10:35 by reeling in a pass by Louis Peterson and flipping a shot off Lowe's pads that he quickly recovered and dumped past Lowe's left pad.

The Townies made it a 3-0 game 2:12 into the middle period on a power-play score by David Hill, who in a crowd of players in front of the NS net, deflected a vicious slap shot by Anthony Tavares past Lowe.

Soderberg, who almost got his second goal at 7:40 with a slap shot that deflected off Lowe's glove and off the crossbar,

eventually found the back of the net 4:45 into the final period with a hard slap shot that Lowe had no chance at stopping.

Peterson, who was the Division 3's leading scorer with 58 assists and had four goals in the series against Johnston, was a going concern all night for the Northmen, who had his undivided attention and blanketed him defensively.

"They smothered Peterson," said Amore. "They fronted him, and you never see that in hockey. Their guy wasn't paying attention to the puck, he was paying attention to Peterson. But we have enough players who can score, so that really didn't bother us."

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