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### As expected, EP battles Scituate for Division 3 title this weekend

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#### **PROVIDENCE -- There won't be any surprises taking the ice in this year's Division 3 state championship series.**

Throughout the regular season, East Providence and Scituate established themselves as the teams to beat in Division 3, and this weekend, the two teams will renew acquaintances at Providence College's Schneider Arena and play for all the marbles in what promises to be a very competitive best-of-three series.

The series opener is slated for Saturday at 1 p.m., and Game 2 is Sunday at 1 p.m. If a third and deciding game is needed, it will take place Tuesday at 1 p.m. Advertisement

"This is what everyone expected," added EP coach Gregg Amore, whose Townies are back in the finals for the first time in nine years and seeking their first title in 25. "And that's the way it should be. The two best teams in the division playing for the championship, and we'll see who's better in a three-game series."

The Townies are the slight favorites. They closed the regular season with an 18-0 mark and the Division 3-Central crown and led all Division 3 squads in most goals scored (117) and fewest goals allowed (18). They also swept their quarterfinal- and semifinal-round series with Johnston and North Smithfield.

The Spartans, meanwhile, are back in the finals after losing last year's title series in three games to Tolman High. This season, they captured the Division 3-North title with a 17-1 record, with their only defeat coming at the hands of the Townies -- a 5-3 setback back on Feb. 5 in Cranston.

They also finished second to EP in goals scored (87) and fewest allowed (23) and swept PCD/Wheeler's co-op team in the quarterfinals and Division 3-South champion Middletown in the semifinals.

"They're very similar to us," admitted Amore. "When you're looking at the two teams in this series, you're looking at two mirror images. They have one forward that's a really good goal scorer. They have a very good defensive corps. They have a very good goalie. It's like talking about us."

The high-scoring forward on Amore's mind is senior center Peter Simeone, who scored 31 goals for the second straight regular season and led all Division 3-North scorers in goals and total points (43).

Simeone, who also added eight goals and five assists in the Spartans' four playoff games, is the all-time leading scorer in the Spartans' four-year history as a varsity club with 91 goals and 135 points.

Scituate's goalie, senior Alvin Durning, is also a four-year starter who also owns his share of team records, and this season, led all Division 3-North netminders in goals-against-average (1.18), save percentage (.946), and shutouts (six).

And the Spartans' list of four-year veterans doesn't end there. Senior defenseman Derek Luther ("He's one of the best defensemen in the state -- all three divisions," admitted Amore.) contributed 10 goals and a team-high 19 assists this season, and has teamed up with classmate Nicholas Bryant (11 assists) to give Scituate a superb 1-2 backchecking tandem.

"They have a lot of seniors -- nine of them -- with a lot of experience," reported Amore. "And they were in the finals last year and lost to a tough team, so that's significant as well."

Three other players who made strong contributions to the Spartans' overall success are freshman left wing Bryan Luther (12 goals, 18 assists), sophomore left wing Cameron McDermott (12 goals), and junior center Kevin Lang, a punishing forechecker and arguably the Spartans' most physical player.

"There's a few differences between us, and one of them is their physical play," said Amore. "They're much more physical than we are, but I think depth-wise, we have more speed than they do, and I hope we can use our speed to our advantage in this series."

All in all, it makes for an exciting series which promises to be as close as the team's regular-season meeting on Feb. 5.

In that game, the Townies grabbed an early 2-0 lead, but the Spartans "really pounded us physically in the second period," admitted Amore, and came back to knot the score at 3-3 at the end of two sessions.

But the Townies reclaimed their lead in dramatic fashion, scoring twice in the final 4:35 on goals by senior left wing Travis Barao and senior center Louis Peterson and soaring to their 5-3 victory.

"It was a dead-even game," admitted Amore. "We were very good offensively. I think we had better scoring opportunities than they did. We took 28 shots, and about 15-20 of them were quality shots. But their goalie was good, and he kept them in the game.

"I think all the games in this series are going to be close," continued Amore. "No one's going to win a 4-0 game, and I can't see either one of us giving up more than four goals in this type of atmosphere. It's going to be fun."

While the Townies should get offensive punch from the likes of Peterson, the division's top scoring threat with 58 points (20 goals, 38 assists), junior right wing Pat Gormley (24-17-41), senior left wing David Hill (16-21-37), and junior right wing Ross Amaral (10-16-26), and exceptional play from defensemen like junior Jeff Fontes and freshman standout Bryan Soderberg, the player who should make a big difference will be the man between the pipes, sophomore Cameron Ford.

Ford, like Durning, led his division in GAA (1.06), save percentage (.942), and shutouts (six) and came up big whenever he needed to deliver a clutch stop.

"In all playoff games, goaltending is the key," admitted Amore. "At the end of this series, whichever team's goaltender comes up big -- not by the number of saves, but the times they make the saves or the kind of saves they make -- that will be the difference, as it should be in any championship series."