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Toledo St. John's claims hockey title for school, city by Jeff Brehm



Jeff Brehm

Toledo St. John's Jesuit was able to knock off 2005-06 state champion Parma Padua 6-4 in the OHSAA state hockey championship Saturday to claim the first title in the 30 year history of the state tournament for the city of Toledo.

Jeff Brehm has more.

COLUMBUS - Defending state hockey champion Parma Padua Franciscan was able to fend off one challenger bent on earning respect for its district this weekend, but not two.

The Bruins (28-10-1), from the traditional hockey powerhouse Northeast District, held off a late rally by Central District representative Upper Arlington to win Saturday's semifinal 3-2. But in Sunday's championship at Nationwide Arena in

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Columbus, it was Padua that fell behind early and then saw its comeback bid fall short in a 6-4 loss to Toledo St. John's Jesuit.

The victory by the Titans (29-7-3) marks the first time in the 30-year history of the state hockey tournament that a team from the Toledo area has brought home the crown. That was a fact not lost on either squad.

"It's kind of a relief," SJ senior captain Andrew Heldt said. "People have been stopping me all week at the rink, saying 'Bring this one back for Toledo.'

"It's nice the state trophy is coming back to St. John's. We don't exactly get a lot of respect there but I think we will now, for a while."

"I've never looked upon the hockey in Toledo as being a weak sister," said Bruins coach Doug Hauser, whose club split with SJ during the regular season. "I've always highly respected the hockey teams that have come out of Toledo and we know we have to play well to beat them."

For all but a few minutes of Sunday's title match, the Titans looked like the better team. St. John's, which had fallen behind Huntington Valley University School 3-2 in the first period of their semifinal contest before going on to win 5-3, wasted little time finding the back of the Bruins' net against Padua freshman goalie Evan Phenny.

First to score for the Titans was junior Cameron Hauenstein, who ended a personal scoring slump in a big way. He flipped the puck past the 5-6 Phenny from the right side on a power play 4:55 into the first period. And just 34 seconds later, SJ sophomore Raymond Morris scored from the same side on an assist by senior Shane Hetrick.

"We knew what we needed to do early to set the tone of the game and I think the goals early kind of shook their goalie up a little bit and kind of put them on their heels," Titans coach Mike Hayes said. "Our JV team had played against Phenny, and our JV coaches gave us some pretty good information on him."

But the Bruins also showed they could score in a hurry. Only 23 seconds after his

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team fell behind 2-0, Padua senior Chris Coyle got an assist from Evan Phenney's older brother, Justin, and slapped the puck home from directly in front of the goal.

Both teams would score one more time in the stanza. Hauenstein went first, snaring a deflected shot by Dan Johnson and stuffing it past Phenney. Then Zack Stryffeler answered for the Bruins on a power play with just under a minute remaining that made it 3-2.

The Titans dominated the middle period, scoring on two of their five shots against Phenney and allowing only four Padua shots on goal. The first point came just 28 seconds in, when Heldt flipped in a wrist shot from the left side. Then Johnson scored on an assist from Tad Huber at the 5:02 mark.

"We tried some different things and it didn't seem that anything at any one time really clicked for us," Hauser said. "We were trying different line combinations to see if we could bust loose and pretty much all the different things we tried either backfired on us or couldn't ignite us."

Hauser pulled Phenney, who finished with 11 saves on 16 attempts, and junior Anonio Bucca fared a little better, allowing only one goal while tallying 12 saves. And it didn't hurt that the Padua offense, facing a 6-2 deficit after Hauenstein notched his third goal early in the final stanza, finally came to life.

"As a Padua hockey player, you're taught from day one to always sell yourself out, always keep going on the ice," senior Chris Seidenwand said. "It doesn't matter how many goals you're down by; it's how you finish the game."

Stryffeler started the Bruins' rally with a powerful shot at the 2:31 mark, just 18 seconds after Hauenstein's score. And when a scuffle in front of the SJ goal left the Titans shorthanded, Padua's Mike Stokar made the most of a pretty pass from Joe Sposit to pull his team to within 6-4 with 8:20 to go.

"You're never feeling great when you're two goals down but I felt a little bit of a momentum change, and I thought for a two- or three-minute span that if we could get that next one we'd be right back in it," Hauser said. "All year, we've been a dangerous team when we're behind. We always like to weather the storm."

“But I’ve got to give St. John’s credit. A lot of teams will start playing real defensive (in that situation), but they regrouped very well.”

Marzec, who finished with 27 saves, did not allow any more of the Bruins’ 15 shots in the period to get through, even after Bucca was pulled in the waning moments, and soon the ice was littered with SJ sticks and helmets as the Titans celebrated a state championship.

The Bruins finished with a 31-29 edge in shots on goal. Both teams scored on two of their seven power plays and both tallied seven penalties for 14 minutes.

“All credit goes out to St. John’s. They played a great game,” Hauser said. “They knew our team pretty well, and I think they had a game plan in mind and they implemented it pretty well.”

“We are familiar with them,” Hayes said. “Because we played them twice this year and because when I got back to the room last night, the coaches sat down and broke the film down from those two games.

“We saw some things that we thought we needed to be aware of and we saw some things we thought maybe we could take advantage of. We felt that if it was our forwards against their defensemen down low, we would win a lot of those battles.

“Our forwards got a step on them quite a bit in their end and winning the battles down low. That’s how we were getting the pucks in the net.”

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