

Bulls heat up Pueblo ice

By Michelle Wells

Imagine making it all the way to the Mountain Division finals in just your second season playing as a junior hockey team. You have just taken down your greatest rivals and all that is left to advance to the national stage is to win one more game.

Now imagine you are playing this championship game in an arena that is essentially empty. You've been in a quarantine bubble, with little-to-no face-to-face interaction with the outside world, no organized practices and you fall short of claiming this last win.

This is how the Pueblo Bulls' first experience in the playoffs looked last year and how their season sadly came to an end. Thankfully this year has a different look, as the Bulls wrapped up their first home playoff series in franchise history and are more determined than ever to bring a National Championship to Pueblo.

"Oh, it's definitely going to be something special," said 20-year-old forward Felix Turcotte, leading up to the series. "As you said, it's going to be the first time in franchise history, so I know fans are (going to) be excited and, like, my parents are coming down from Montreal to come to see the playoffs so it's definitely going to be exciting."

Turcotte would open the scoring for the Bulls in the first game of their best-of-three against the Provo Riverblades. The goal was scored 5:53 into the second period.

After coming away with a loose puck in the neutral zone, Turcotte was off to the races, firing a wrist shot on Provo's goalie, Patrick Colburn, and cleaning up his own rebound. Overcome with excitement, he instantly fell to the ice, crashing into the end boards where he was met by a herd of his elated teammates.

The Bulls would not find the back of the net again until the third period. Forward Braedon Lacomy, who was playing in his first game back from injury, received a stretch pass off the far-side boards, creating a breakaway opportunity. From there Lacomy went forehand, backhand, and over the glove of Colburn.

Defenseman Austin Gipson and forwards, Thomas Soucy and Isaac Hood would follow up with goals of their own to close the game out.

Saturday's game started out on a different note, which at first was a little nerve-racking for Bulls fans. The Blades sent an early message to Pueblo,

scoring less than a minute into the game off a wrist shot from Sean Morris.

Captain Benny St-Onge would not let the home crowd panic for long, however, and took it upon himself to put everyone at ease. He answered with a snapshot of his own, six minutes later.

Hood was back at it again tallying the go-ahead goal and extending his goal streak to two games. His goal came after picking up the loose change off a shot from teammate and star center Brendan Dicker.

Austin Tessier of Provo would tie the game up at two, scoring the only goal in the second period.

Nonetheless, Soucy put the Bulls back on top early in the third period, opening the flood gates for Pueblo.

Dicker notched his third point of the night, receiving a centering feed from St-Onge in the low slot and burying the puck over the pad of Provo goalie Axel Rosenlund.

Later defenseman and Alternate Captain Connor Williams would drive to the net, throwing a backhandler that went short-side top-shelf, giving the Bulls a three-goal lead.

This looked to be the end of the game until Turcotte found the back of the net with under 20 seconds remaining in the contest. Turcotte found the scoresheet twice in this game, registering two goals and

one assist, and came away with three points on the weekend in front of his visiting parents.

"It means a lot to have the opportunity to host our first-ever playoff series here in Pueblo," Bulls General Manager David Nelson said. "Not only have we as an organization been waiting for this but our fan base has as well. (It's) been a long two years with the pandemic, and I think the playoff series was amazing!"

Home ice is always crucial when it comes to playoffs, Nelson said.

"So it is nice to get back to (a) normal playoff format and have the fans on our side. We always say it that we have the best fan base in the league, and with how loud our fans get it makes it very difficult for opposing teams to come in and play against us in our own barn," he said.

The Bulls head to Utah to take on the Outliers at 7 p.m. Friday, 6:30 p.m. Saturday and noon on Sunday, if necessary.

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