UNH Men’s Hockey: The Takedown of the Number One Seed

Brianna Williams, Sports Editor

DURHAM N.H.- For the first time since 2015 the University of New Hampshire (UNH) men's hockey team (1-0-0) has beaten the number one ranked Boston University (BU) men's hockey team (1-1-0, 0-1-0).

From start to finish the crowd on the edge of their seats with solid and intense hockey happening in every moment.

48 seconds into the game UNH received a penalty for too many men on the ice. Junior forward Robert Cronin served the penalty for the team.

With time running out on their power play, BU’s Tom Willander threw the puck on net against a screened sophomore goalie, Tyler Muszelik. Luke Tuch then was able to redirect the puck off his stick which would result in BU earning the first goal of the game.

The next several minutes would consist of UNH trying to regain momentum and BU looking to increase their lead. However, when BU’s Dylan Peterson received a penalty for tripping UNH would get their chance.

UNH’s junior forward Liam Delvin took this opportunity to screen Mathieu Caron’s line of vision. At the time sophomore forward Cy LeClerc fired the puck from the high slot to make things even at one a piece. This would be the second season in a row that LeClerc scored the first goal in the season opener for the Wildcats.

A little over two minutes later, the Wildcats would take the lead as first-year forward Ryan Connolly drags his BU defender to the corner, leaving Delvin unattended in front of the net for another power play goal.

At just over five minutes to go in the first period BU ties the game up after a turnover by the Wildcats. The goal would go to Macklin Celebrini who scored off an odd man rush, assisted by Willander.

The action did not stop there in the first period as BU was able to gain an advantage off of another odd man rush. Willander scored a one-timer from the left side of the slot which was assisted by Celebrini and Peterson.

For the final goal of the period UNH’s senior defenseman Luke Reid crept in from the blue line and scored off of a one-timer, the goal would be assisted by Delvin and Connolly.

Once the second period started UNH took full control. So much so that they scored a goal less than two minutes in. Sophomore forward Morgan Winters would bury the puck into the net off of a low slot feed from Cronin and first-year forward Marty Lavin.

A few minutes later LeClerc received a penalty for tripping. However, that would not stop the ‘Cats.

Winters would capitalize off of a BU turnover in the neutral zone leading to a breakaway where he would score a shorthanded goal.
The last BU goal of the game was from Celebrini who scored off a one-timer from just outside the slot assisted by a no-look, back handed pass from Lane Hutson.

By the time the third period started things were getting chippy between the two teams. Both teams would spend a big amount of time in the penalty box. Muszelik would continue to show up big time for the ‘Cats.

At the 3:05 minute mark sophomore forward Kristaps Skrastins put the Hockey East matchup away as he was able to score off a rebound from a shot on net by junior defenseman Alex Gagne. This would close the game out at 6-4 favoriting the Wildcats.

UNH has not beat a number one seed team since April 10, 2003 when they played Cornell in a Frozen Four game.

While it may have surprised some people that UNH would take down the number one seed BU head coach, Jay Pandolfo, was not.

“I’m not surprised. I mean, this league it’s a tough league. Every night you have to be on your game to win. I’ve seen that the last two years being a coach in this league. There’s a lot of good coaches. There’s a lot of competitive players and yeah, you have to be on your game if you want to win in this league, and clearly that showed tonight,” said Pandolfo.

Pandolfo took the blame as to why his highly anticipated team struggled to keep up with the Wildcats.

“I think probably the biggest takeaway for me is I’m not doing a good enough job coaching because I don’t have our guys ready. I don’t have our guys playing the right way. So I’ll take responsibility. It’s not good enough,” said Pandolfo.

Despite his frustration with the team, Pandolfo took the time to compliment the UNH team and how they played that night.

“I give them a lot of credit. They played a great game. They played their structure very well. They played what they thought could help them win the game and it paid off for them. They put pucks behind, they had a really good forecheck,” said Pandolfo. “They won more 50-50 battles, they got pucks to the net. They got bodies to the net. They found a way to find rebounds. They did everything very well”.

UNH head coach Mike Souza knew BU was talented but created a next play mentality for his team so they could be successful.

“It’s cliche, but it’s just win your next shift. That’s all you can focus on then that’s the mentality. That’s what we talked about, even if you had a productive shift the last time out that doesn’t mean anything the next time you go on the ice. But that takes a lot of emotional energy to kind of reset and do it again,” said Souza.

Like Pandolfo, Souza was not surprised by UNH winning due to how tough the Hockey East league can be for all teams.

“Our league’s tough... there’s gonna be no easy nights for us. There’s gonna be no easy nights for BU and that’s just the way it is. Some days it’s you wake up and you say ‘oh man, we’ve got this team next week’ and there’s just no running from it,” said Souza. “But that’s why I think we have the best conference in college hockey and kinda beat each other up pretty good throughout the year. Just happy to be on the winning end of it tonight”.

Souza gave credit to Winters for his performance during the game and the improvements he has made while being back at UNH.

“Morgan’s been outstanding since we got back to school. He can really really skate. He’s a cerebral player. He’s probably got underrated skill,” said Souza.

Winters had missed a huge portion of last season due to a serious injury, so finally being able to go out and perform was an important moment for him.

“A lot of butterflies just last year kind of put me through the wringer a little bit, having double shoulder surgery back to back. I was just super excited to get out there. As soon as the puck dropped, the butterflies went away and it’s time to go to work. So it worked out really well,” said Winters.

Winters recognizes how competitive the Hockey East league is and looks forward to continuing to work and battle all opponents throughout the season.
“Any team can win any night, no matter who you're going against in this league. It's a really good league this year, I think it got a lot better... Doesn't matter who we're playing. We're going to show up, we're going to work, try to outwork the other team, and just do all the right things, play the right way, as coach says all the time, and just be smart hockey players,” said Winters.

The Wildcats will be welcoming the number four ranked Quinnipiac University to Durham on Oct. 20 and 21 at 7 p.m. Both games will be airing on ESPN+ and Saturday's game will also be on NESN.