UNH Men’s Hockey: First Playoff Win, Third Straight Against Lowell

**Brianna Williams, Sports Editor**

DURHAM, N.H.- For the first time since 2015 the University of New Hampshire (UNH) men's hockey team (20-14-1) hosted a playoff game in the Whittemore Center at Key Auto Group Complex. Coincidentally enough, March 13 2024 also marked the 50th anniversary of the first home playoff game played for UNH.

To kick off the playoff run UNH welcomed University of Massachusetts-Lowell (Lowell) men's hockey team (8-24-4). This was the third straight game for the Wildcats and Riverhawks.

The first half of the first period was filled with shots on goals and a couple of penalties before a team would earn a point for the board.

Around nine minutes left in the first period Robert Cronin took a shot on goal. Lowell goalie Henry Welsch stopped the puck and hit it to the blue line. Luke Reid saved the puck from going over and kept it in UNH possession. Reid then carried the puck to the front of the net and pushed it over to one side. From there Harrison Blaisdell backhanded the puck into the net for the first goal of the game.

The second period was complete silence from both teams. This would be the eighth period in a row for the Riverhawks that they have not scored in.

Not much more happened in the third period until the last five minutes when Lowell was on the power play.

During that time Lowell had quite a few shots on goal. UNH came up big with some defensive plays.

Time kept dwindling and both goalies were stopping everything that came their way.

With just over two minutes to go Lowell pulled their goalie.

Cy LeClerc seemed like he was going to advance UNH's lead but hit the pipe instead. UNH tried to scramble for the puck while two Lowell defenders tried to act as goalie.

Lowell proceeded to get the puck down to their offensive zone and spent time there before UNH gained possession back.

It seemed like with four seconds left UNH was going to get their lead to two but when icing was called at 3.5 seconds Lowell got one more chance.

The game ended with a score of 1-0. That was the third straight shutout for UNH goalie Jakob Hellsten and his fifth of the season. His last three shutouts were against Lowell.

Head coach Mike Souza gives credit to Hellsten for his game all season long.
“I thought both goalies were excellent. Jakob’s played well for us all year. He played well again tonight. He made the saves he was supposed to and the ones that he had to to win. I’m very, very happy for him. He’s playing with a lot of confidence and I think that should give our team that’s playing a lot of confidence,” said Souza.

Hellsten was happy with the shutout but felt it was due to his teammates’ performance rather than his own.

“It’s funny because sure it’s a shutout but I don’t feel like I’m doing anything special... I played okay, I played fine,” said Hellsten.

Hellsten predicts that the upcoming quarterfinal game at UMaine on Saturday, March 16 at 7:00 p.m. will be another close scoring one.

“Obviously it would’ve been a little easier on the nerves to win four nothing today but I mean that’s how it’s going to be, it’s playoffs. I think it’s good it gets me ready for the next game because it’s probably going to be the exact same way. It’s going to be a tight game, I don’t know if it’ll be low scoring or high scoring,” said Hellsten.