

RoughRiders lead USHL in scoring

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Cedar Rapids RoughRiders have been a scoring machine in the United States Hockey League this season.

The RoughRiders lead the USHL in scoring at 5.6 goals per game, a healthy pace through five contests, and the scoring has been well-distributed on the club.

Sixteen of the Riders have scored at least one goal. Eighteen players have collected at least one assist, which is almost everyone on the team.

Even Chris Birdsall, the top goalie, has an assist.

Andrew Poturalski, a forward from Williamsville, N.Y., is not surprised by the prolific scoring so far.

"I knew we had a strong offense and a lot of guys can contribute," said Poturalski, who leads the parade with three goals and eight assists for a total of 11 points. "Everyone's been working hard and we've just been playing our system and sticking to the plan. And everything has been working so far."

The RoughRiders have a 4-1 record heading into Friday night's home game against Youngstown at 7:05 p.m. They have scored at least four goals in all five of their contests and poured in 14 goals in their two road games last week.

They buried Fargo, 7-1, last Thursday, then topped Tri-City, 7-4, on an extended trip that covered 1,500 miles through Minnesota and Nebraska.

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The RoughRiders have used 22 skaters and two goalies, so just about everybody has contributed to the potent offense.

"We thought that we might have some good balance," Coach Mark Carlson said Wednesday. "We'll see what happens as we move forward."

The RoughRiders scored five goals in the third period against Fargo, then notched five more goals in the third period at Tri-City. They scorched the nets for four goals in a span of 4 minutes, 48 seconds against Fargo.

"We knew coming in this year that we had a lot of depth, and Coach has been telling us that," said Poturalski. "We know it doesn't have to be one guy each night. Everyone can contribute every time, so if we keep working and keep following the system, everything will be good."

Jason Kalinowski has contributed two goals and eight assists for 10 points, and he's collected at least one assist in all five games.

Alec Marsh has scored four goals in five games. Andrew Oglevie, Judd Peterson and Jack Rowe have three goals apiece. Dylan McLaughlin and Charlie Curti have four assists apiece.

The RoughRiders work hard on their conditioning, which may have been a factor in the five-goal outbursts in the final period of their last two games.

"I think for sure," said Poturalski. "Everyone bought into our summer training and we've been working pretty hard since the beginning of the season and in practices. We're been doing a lot of conditioning, and it's starting to pay off."

Poturalski, who played for the RoughRiders last year, is happy with the team's 4-1 start.

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"I think that's a good start for the team, but it's a tough league and it's not easy to do that every five games," he said. "If we can keep going and keep getting points, that's all we need to do."

Carlson likes to see everyone contributing to the team's success.

"I think it's good," he said. "I think we do have balance. We don't have a superstar, and that's great. We've got to have everybody going every single night. That's all there is to it."

"With this group, we can't afford to have one guy take a night off or a practice off. That's something that we're working on. If we have one passenger, we're in trouble."

The RoughRiders play at Chicago Sunday.