

Riders trim Fargo in shootout, 3-2

Written by Ryan Suchomel

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It was a shootout and then some Friday at The Stable, and the Cedar Rapids RoughRiders relied on two defensemen to light the lamp and deliver a 3-2 win over Fargo.

Cedar Rapids trailed going into the third period 2-0, but scored twice and forced overtime, then won the game in the shootout.

Goalie Chris Birdsall stopped 7 of the 8 shots in the shootout, helping deliver the second shootout victory of the week. Danny Tirone was in goal on Tuesday for a shootout win over Dubuque.

"We have two goalies we have lots of confidence in," RoughRiders Coach Mark Carlson said. "You need that in this league."

Birdsall turned away the first five shots from the Force (4-10-1) in the shootout, then Fargo's Josh Elmes put one in the 5-hole.

Mark Auk took to the ice for Cedar Rapids needing to score or the game would be over.

"I was pretty confident in my move," Auk said. "Speed up fast, slow down, and wait until he makes an opening."

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Auk faked left and stuck the puck in the right crease, which made the 2,651 fans at The Stable go crazy.

Two more Fargo players were turned away by Birdsall, then Charlie Curti got his number called.

"It was pretty intimidating," said the defenseman from Mound, Minn. "I hadn't been in that situation before. It was my first official shootout since pee-wees. It was pretty nerve-wracking."

Curti had his mind set on the move he was going to show Force goalie Cam Johnson.

"We were pretty late into it and I was like, all right, let's see what I've got," Curti said. "It was a little something unorthodox I don't think the goalie has ever seen. I kind of made it up. You just go backhand five hole, then I just kind of, ran across, put it in there before he can react."

Curti was the eighth shooter. Most shootouts end after the initial five shooters get a chance.

"We got a lot of guys experience," Carlson said. "And two defensemen came through for us."

It was a big change from the first time this season when the two teams met. Cedar Rapids won that 7-1 on Oct. 17 in Fargo, N.D.

"Last time we put a beating on them, but every team in this league is good," Curti said.

"The real lesson from this is this is a real what-have-you-done-for-me-lately league," Carlson said. "A month ago doesn't matter."

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The win helps keep the RoughRiders two points off the Eastern Conference lead. Cedar Rapids (10-3-1) hosts Dubuque (10-3-1) Saturday night in a big showdown at 7:05.

Fargo was the aggressor early, outshooting Cedar Rapids 17 to 7 in the first period. The Force took an early lead 5:45 into the first period when Teemu Kivihalme converted a one-timer from C.J. Hayes.

Fargo added a power play goal late in the second period when Mason Morelli put the puck just under the top bar over Birdsall's shoulder to make it 2-0. Cedar Rapids had not been shut out all season. The last time was a 1-0 loss to Dubuque on March 16.

"We just needed to be better," Carlson said. "We're learning that it takes 60 minutes. We're getting there."

The players said Carlson gave them a not-so gentle reminder between periods.

"We were not really following what Coach's plan was," Auk said. "He gave us a pep talk and we figured it out."

"Our coach got us between periods and got us going," Birdsall said. "He told us if we get the power play goal, we'd win the game. We did."

Cedar Rapids took the ice in the third period with 1:15 remaining on a power play from the previous period. Corey Petrash scored the goal off his own rebound, following an initial shot on goal by Dylan Steman.

Just 36 seconds into the third period, and it was 2-1.

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Less than a minute later, Ivan Provorov scored the game-tying goal with 18:38 left.

"Coach didn't have a big speech; we knew what we needed to do," Curti said. "Over the past couple games, we haven't had the high-energy stuff."

The RoughRiders outshot the Force 11 to 5 in the third period and overtime, but couldn't come up with the game-winner. Fortunately, the shootout went their way.

"We like our goaltenders, and we think we can score goals in a shootout," Carlson said.

Cedar Rapids improved to 5-1 at home and 2-1 in shootouts.

"It's good for us to feel what it's like in that situation," Auk said. "It makes us more comfortable when it comes around."

Fargo 1 1 0 0 0 - 2
Cedar Rapids 0 0 2 0 1 - 3

F - Teemu Kivihalme (Christian Cakebread, C.J. Hayes)

F - Mason Morelli (Tanner Jago)

CR - Corey Petrash (Dylan Steman)

CR - Ivan Provorov (Dylan Steman)