RoughRiders net 500th win in team history

Written by Jim Ecker
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The Cedar Rapids RoughRiders were a happy bunch of guys Saturday night after they captured the 500th victory in team history.

The RoughRiders topped Sioux Falls, 4-2, in a USHL game before 2,567 fans at the Cedar Rapids Ice Arena and celebrated the milestone victory in their locker room.

Coach Mark Carlson has been with the RoughRiders since the successful franchise began 16 years ago and he spread credit throughout the organization.

"As I told the guys, I've been fortunate to be here since Day 1," he said. "I really look at it as the organization's 500th win, the Cedar Rapids RoughRiders' 500th win in team history. To be a part of that is pretty cool.

"You don't win any hockey games without real good people and real good players and assistant coaches and trainers and equipment people and great owners," he remarked. "So I've been fortunate to be around all of that."

The RoughRiders have gotten off to a fast 7-1 start for 14 points this season. They are tied with Muskegon for first place in the Eastern Conference, but Muskegon (7-3) has played two more games than Cedar Rapids.

Erik Foley, who has been on a hot streak, scored two goals for the RoughRiders Saturday night,

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including an empty-net tally with three seconds left to clinch the victory after Sioux Falls had pulled its goalie.

Sioux Falls (3-6-1) peppered Cedar Rapids goaltender Ben Blacker with several dangerous shots with about 15 seconds left in the game, but Blacker made a sprawling save and closed all the angles. A few seconds later, the RoughRiders won a face-off and the puck rolled to Foley with nobody   between him and an empty goal.

Foley flicked the puck into the net and victory No. 500 was in the books.

"It was really nice that we could get the 'W' for Coach," said Foley. "He's a really good coach and he's been there for every bit of it."

Zach Court and Ross Colton gave the RoughRiders a 2-0 lead in the first period. Sioux Falls pulled within 2-1 in the second stanza, but Foley made it 3-1 with an assist from Dylan McLaughlin.

The Stampede scored with 27 seconds in the second period to sneak within 3-2 and it stayed that way until Foley delivered the empty-netter with three seconds remaining.

The RoughRiders have featured a balanced attack this season. None of the RoughRiders ranked among the top 24 in USHL scoring when the game began, but 15 players have scored goals and 18 have collected assists.

Blacker, a 17-year-old rookie, has established himself as one of the top goalies in the league with a 6-1 personal record. He has allowed only 13 games in seven games between the pipes.

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"I think we have a really good team. We're really deep," said Foley. "We've gotten contributions from every line. It's really nice that our whole team in contributing. I think we have a really good thing here."

Carlson never dreamed he'd be here for 16 years and 500 victories.

"I don't think you ever think you're lucky enough to be in a spot for that long," he said. "I moved here from the East Coast and I liked it right away. It's a great city with great people and a first-class facility. I feel fortunate to be part of it."

Carlson has liked his club's depth since the year began.

"We really like our group that we have here," he said. "Tonight, for instance, we did an awful lot of good, and we made it a lot more difficult on ourselves than we had to, probably, but we found a way in the end."

The RoughRiders will play their next three games on the road before hosting Fargo on Saturday, Nov. 8.

Sioux Falls   0   2   0 - 2
RoughRiders   2   1   1 - 4

CR - Zach Court (Andrew Gaus, Casey Jerry)
CR - Ross Colton (Adam Gaudette, Cal Burke)
SF - Joey Marooney (Kieffer Bellows)
CR - Erik Foley (Dylan McLaughlin)
SF - Kieffer Bellows (Clint Lewis)
CR - Erik Foley (empty net) (unassisted)

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