

Gernhofer is quick help for Riders

Written by Mike Condon

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Tyler Gernhofer did not take long to make his mark in Cedar Rapids.

Acquired on Thursday from Bloomington for Jason Kalinoski, Gernhofer has not even practiced with the RoughRiders yet but he already has a game-winning goal.

Gernhofer's one-timer from the right circle at 16:12 of the third period broke a 2-2 tie, giving Cedar Rapids a 3-2 win Saturday night over Fargo before 2,684 fans at the Cedar Rapids Ice Arena.

The victory pushed the RoughRiders to 11-1-0 for 22 points, which is good for first place in the USHL's Eastern Division.

"We've watched Tyler for years and we have always liked him," said Riders Coach Mark Carlson of the decision to acquire the 5-foot-9, 230-pound Gernhofer. "We think he makes us a deeper hockey team and he's only going to get better."

The win was the second in as many nights for Cedar Rapids, in the midst of a three-game, three-city weekend schedule. The Riders won a 5-4 overtime decision Friday in Sioux Falls and will be on a bus early Sunday morning for a 3 p.m. game in Bloomington, Ill.

"This is why guys come to this league," Carlson said of the grinding weekend schedule. "If you want to be a pro, you have to get used to

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doing these things.

"Six hours away from home last night, getting home at 4:30 in the morning is tough," he continued. "I was really proud of the way we stuck with it."

Sticking with it has been the Riders' mantra this season. In Friday's win at Sioux Falls, goaltender Ben Blacker was hit with a four-minute spearing penalty and a game misconduct with just under six minutes remaining. Cedar Rapids killed off the four-minute penalty, tied the game in the final two minutes and won it on Erik Foley's goal in overtime.

Ryan Larkin came on in relief of Blacker to win Friday and was back in the net Saturday.

"I wasn't expecting it last night," Larkin said of his relief effort. "It was a little nerve-wracking, but I didn't have too much to do use the guys played so well in front of me." beca

He received the same support Saturday. The Riders outshot Fargo 43-27, but had a difficult time getting the puck past Fargo netminder Robbie Beydoun.

"I was really happy with the guys tonight, the way they stuck with it," Carlson said. "Some pucks didn't fall in for us there early, but we didn't get discouraged. They stuck to the plan and were able to get the job done."

Fargo grabbed a 1-0 lead when Mason Morelli tipped in a shot from the point on a power play at 6:38 of the first period. That lead held until midway through the second period when defenseman Charlie Curti snuck in from the point and banged home a rebound to tie the game.

Cedar Rapids took the lead early in the third on an Alec Marsh goal, but Morelli scored his

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second at 13:09 off a scramble in front of the net to tie it at 2-2. That set the stage for Gernhofer's winner.

"It was great to see that goal go in," Larkin said.

Larkin joined the Riders just before the season and has seen most of the playing time go to Blacker. He was happy with his performance on Saturday.

"I think I played pretty well," Larkin said. "Obviously, I wish I hadn't let in the goals, but it doesn't matter. We won the game."

Larkin doesn't know if it will be him or Blacker starting on Sunday in Bloomington. He knows all the Riders will be a little tired when they take the ice.

"It's the USHL, so you just have to expect it," Larkin said. "We're almost pros now. This is like a pro lifestyle. This is what the guys in the NHL and the AHL have to do. Obviously it's not easy but winning games makes it easier."

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

F - Mason Morelli (power play) (Denis Smirnov, Justin Baudry)
CR - Charlie Curti (Cal Burke, Ross Colton)
CR - Alec Marsh (Derek Daschke, Jiri Fronk)
F - Mason Morelli (Mikey Eyssimont, Brody Stevens)
CR - Tyler Gernhofer (Alec Marsh, Dylan McLaughlin)