

Craggs makes quick impact with Riders

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 10 December 2014 22:30 - Last Updated Wednesday, 10 December 2014 22:48



For his next trick, RoughRiders Coach Mark Carlson will pull a puck out of his pocket and turn it into gold.

The man with the magic touch promoted Sam Craggs to the varsity Wednesday and sure enough the 17-year-old winger scored a goal on his first shot for the RoughRiders in his very first game.

Craggs gave Cedar Rapids a 1-0 lead in the first period and the RoughRiders skated to a 6-3 victory over Green Bay before 2,197 fans at the Cedar Rapids Ice Arena.

The RoughRiders needed replacements Wednesday because four of their top players are in Saskatchewan playing for a U.S. team at the World Junior A Challenge International Tournament.

Craggs, Alec Semandel and Joey Marooney all made their debuts with the RoughRiders Wednesday night. They were so new to the lineup that none of them had their names on the back of their jerseys, but they did not play like no-name guys.

Craggs and Semandel were promoted from a Midget Hockey league in Chicago. Semandel arrived in time for practice Tuesday, but Craggs did not skate with the club until a light workout Wednesday morning in preparation for Wednesday night's game.

Marooney was acquired in a trade last week and has been practicing with the RoughRiders, but had not appeared in a game until Wednesday.

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"I thought they all did a really good job," said Carlson. "They hopped in there and helped us."

Marooney collected an assist on the goal by Andrew Gaus that snapped a 3-3 tie with 5:38 left in the third period.

Andrew Oglevie, Charlie Curti, Adam Gaudette and Mitch Reinke will miss five games with the RoughRiders while competing at the tournament in Canada.

Craggs' father got a phone call from the RoughRiders Sunday night about the club needing help for the next few weeks. His father told him what was happening Monday morning and they made plans to get here as quickly as possible.

"Quick notice," said Craggs. "Got here Tuesday night and skated in the morning and played the game."

Craggs was taking his second shift late in the first period when he jumped on a loose puck in front of the Green Bay goal. He quickly flicked the puck into the net for a 1-0 lead. Gaus picked up the assist.

"It was crazy," said Craggs. "Once it went in it was nuts. It was awesome."

Craggs, who is from Illinois, figured he'd play in the Midget League in Chicago for the entire season, never anticipating a call from the RoughRiders.

"No, I had no idea. It was all of a sudden," he remarked. "That's the biggest crowd I've ever played before in my life."

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The RoughRiders will need help in their next four games and Craggs hopes to keep playing for the RoughRiders as long as possible.

Cedar Rapids jumped to a 3-0 lead in the first period on goals by Craggs, Tyler Gernhofer and Hugh McGing, but Green Bay rallied and pulled into a 3-3 tie in the third period.

It looked like Carlson and the RoughRiders had run out of magic, but they struck again for three quick goals by Gaus, Cal Burke and an empty-netter by Ross Colton for the 6-3 victory.

Cedar Rapids raised its record to 19-3-0 for 38 points for first place in the Eastern Conference. Green Bay fell to 8-12-2.

"It was a really good challenge for us tonight," said Carlson. "I thought it was a good character win. We had the lead and they tied it. We didn't get bothered by that and kind of stayed on an even keel."

Carlson had to mix-and-match his lineup with four of his top players not available.

"We were juggling all night," he said. "It's hard for the guys, but they did a nice job."

Green Bay 0 2 1 - 3

RoughRiders 3 0 3 - 6

RR - Sam Craggs (Andrew Gaus)

RR - Tyler Gernhofer (Matt O'Donnell)

RR - Hugh McGing (unassisted)

GB - Sam Miletic (shorthanded) (unassisted)

GB - Brian Bowen (Brent Gates Jr., Matthew Dawson)

GB - Joe Wegwerth (Brent Gates Jr., Brian Bowen)

RR - Andrew Gaus (Joey Marooney, Hugh McGing)

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RR - Cal Burke (Casey Jerry)

RR - Ross Colton (empty net) (Cal Burke)