The Holy Cross men’s hockey team went into last weekend with an overall record of 0-3-0 and a record of 0-2-0 in league play. The Crusaders knew however that this record was not indicative of how good a team they were, and that a couple of solid performances over the weekend would change the direction they were going in. The team also knew that this was going to be difficult, because the teams that the Crusaders were squaring off against (Canisius and Bentley) were both formidable opponents.

Friday night against the Ice Griffs of Canisius, the Crusaders came out with a defensive mindset in the first period. Despite this defensive style of play, freshman Greg Kealey was able to put Holy Cross on the board when he scored 6:28 into the first period. R.J. Irving and Brandon Doria were credited with assists on this goal. TheIce Griffs began to apply a lot of offensive pressure. Canisius’ offensive style continued to pressure the Holy Cross defense until finally, with seven minutes left in the first period, Tom Pawlak knocked home a rebound, tying the game at two. The remainder of the second was uneventful in terms of scoring, and the teams headed into the locker room tied through two periods of play.

The third period can only be described as chaotic. It involved six goals and seven penalties between the two squads. Irving was the first to get on the board with a goal when he scored on a Holy Cross power play. The goal came only 1:29 into the period, and put the Crusaders up 3-2 in the contest. Five minutes later, senior Matt Rinaldi added to the Crusader lead by scoring on an assist by John Bonanno and Pawlak. This goal now gave HC a two goal cushion.

Two minutes later Canisius left winger Todd Bisson scored on a bouncing puck that hit the back boards, took a strange hop, and beat Cunha. This brought the score to 4-3 with 13:05 left in the contest. Then, with seven minutes left in the game, and with Canisius shorthanded, Paul DiPaguale, in an attempt to clear the puck, shot a slapper from just behind his own blue line that beat Cunha. This tied the game at a 5-5 tie. On Saturday night, the Crusaders traveled to Bentley to take on the Falcons. The Crusaders entered the game hungry for their first league win after they allowed a victory to slip through their fingers on the previous night. In this game, coach Paul Pearl gave freshman Rick Massey the nod to start between the pipes for the Crusaders. He was tested and beat seven of the nine shots he faced. As for the key matchup tonight versus Army, the team is confident. They are not at all deterred by recent losses because they have been so close.

“Holy Cross is very much alive for a road trip against Colgate and Bucknell. This recent victory put the team above .500 in the league. While the race in the Patriot League may be close to call, no recoup is needed to determine that Holy Cross is finally a force in the league, and with the exponential growth of the program, national exposure and respect cannot be far behind. At 12-15 they have tripled their win total from last season, and while they still have not broken through against the toughest teams, they have won the popular vote of their coach Peter Viteritti.

“One thing that makes our team strong is that the players come to play,” said Viteritti. “We don’t have one player who stands out above the rest. We’re a team.”

The breakdown of the league standings actually may boil down to the last game of the season against Army at West Point. Lehigh has a walkover against winless Lafayette which will put them in the tourney over the rest of the game. Falcon Mike Mulligan beat Massey with a shot that trickled through the goaltender’s legs. This was Massey’s only mistake of the game, however, as he played solidly for the rest of the game.

The score remained 1-0 in favor of Army until 3:1-4 late in the second period, when freshman Tim Coskren scored his first career goal on a rebound. This knocked the Crusaders and seemed to be the stimulus that HC needed to get back into the game.

When the third period began, HC was dominating the play. Despite HC’s great play, Bentley took the lead again when Matt Kowal shot a rifle from the point that beat Massey. This lead didn’t last for long however, when, just two minutes later while shorthanded, sophomore stand-out Brandon Doria scored on a break away. Then with just 56 seconds left in the contest Coskren got his second career goal, which was also the game winner.

This game completed the great weekend for Holy Cross men’s hockey. This weekend was 1-3-1 overall, and 1-2-1 in MAAC action. The Crusaders have two big home games this weekend against American International College (Friday) and against Army on Saturday. Face-off is at 7:00 in the Hart Center on both Friday and Saturday.

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