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HIGH SCHOOL

Class 1A Semifinal: A Last-Second Win for the Moose



By [Heather Rule](#) - March 10, 2017

They weren't even supposed to be here. They were unseeded and playing in their first Boys' State High School Hockey Tournament. But now, Monticello/Annandale/Maple Lake will play for a Class 1A state title.

The Moose (23-6-1) beat Northfield (21-6-3) by a 3-2 score in the first Class 1A semifinal Friday at Xcel Energy Center. The game-winner hit the net with just 2.3 seconds left in regulation off Nick Zwack's stick for his third goal of the tournament. It was a shot from the circle that just got by the goaltender.

"We just knew, keep firing pucks on the net and eventually, hopefully, we'll get some to trickle in," Zwack said. "I just got it and put it on net. A little hope and a prayer, I guess."

Zwack said he didn't know how much time was left when he took the shot. His coach, Eric Nelson, was pretty excited about it, like his players. He excitedly grabbed his assistant coach in celebration.

"Oh yeah, I almost fainted," Nelson said. "Time and time again these kids have proven that they don't quite until the buzzer sounds."

But now, MAML will play for a Class 1A state title.

Before the jubilation, the Moose needed a comeback. In hockey, a two-goal lead is talked about like it's the kiss of death. Friday's game could be added to the list.

The Raiders took the 2-0 lead on goals from Jacob Halvorsen and Conner Malecha.

As the second period went on, the Moose put on the offensive pressure looking to get on the board. They had a few solid scoring chances but Northfield goalie Ryan Bielenberg came up with some key saves.

With 59.5 seconds left in the period, Moose junior Ben Ward scored on a rebound to cut the deficit to 2-1 and give the Moose some momentum headed into the second intermission. They probably just wanted to keep playing and not give the Raiders a chance to regroup in the locker room.

"We knew that we needed to put one in before the end of [the second period]," Ward said. "I guess we got a lucky bounce off the goalie and put the rebound home."

Prior to that goal, a bit of frustration started to set in with the players, who got some decent looks at the net. They just weren't falling, Zwack said.

"Eventually, we were going to get a few to go in," Zwack said.

The tying goal came on the power play with 6:28 remaining in the third period. Ward passed it over to Casey Chiado in the slot for the goal.

Oh yeah, and coach Nelson is [still wearing that cat sweatshirt for good luck](#). He's worn it every game since mid-January.

"I got people walking up to me on the street trying to pull my shirt down," Nelson said, with a laugh during the postgame press conference. "All in good fun though, all in good fun."

"Eventually, we were going to get a few to go in," Zwack said.

HEATHER RULE



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