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NHL, PAGE D4

Former Maverick helps
burst Boston's bubble

Sports

Mavericks experiencing identity crisis

To steal a line from "Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid," "Who are those guys?"

I couldn't help but think about that line over and over to myself last weekend as I watched the Minnesota State men's hockey team play to a perplexing series split with Alaska-Anchorage at the Alltel Center.

Who are those Mavericks?

Are they the uninspired, seemingly disinterested team that lost Friday's game 4-2? Or are they the hard-working, quick-skating team that crushed the Seawolves 7-1 on Saturday?



**SHANE
FREDERICK**
Free Press

Are they the team that didn't much feel like fighting through Anchorage's clutch-and-grab, slow-down game (by the way, we're a heck of a long way from college hockey's October rules, aren't we?) on Friday? Or are they the team that carried the play and went to the net on Saturday?

Are they the team that brought a hush over a crowd of 4,300 people on Friday? Or are they team that wore out the "Ole" song for a sold-out audience on Saturday?

Are they the team that skated right with Colorado

College but didn't do the extra things it needed in order to win a tough road game? Or are they the team that finally did show a little grit and do those little things to knock off the 10th-ranked Tigers the next night?

Are they the team that went 8-3-3 in October and November and rose to No. 9 in the national rankings? Or are they the team that's gone 3-8-0 since then, including a winless December, and fell out of the polls?

Are they Dr. Jekyll? Or are they Mr. Hyde?

Who are those guys?

It seemed like coach Troy Jutting was asking himself the same question when he

made some big-time lineup changes for Saturday's game against the Seawolves.

Jutting, who's always been an advocate for the upperclassmen, saying that it's the older players who get you the tough wins, decided to bench three veteran players — no seniors — and a redshirt freshman who's tied for the team lead in goal scoring because of their lackluster performance and replaced them with a group of true freshman, including one who had yet to play this season.

It was only a must-win game in front of a nearly 5,000 home fans, but something tells me Jutting would have made even more

changes had extra players been available.

"I played every healthy kid I had who didn't play (Friday)," Jutting said. "I was a little bit tired of waiting around for some of those older kids to show up. ... The young kids gave us a spark."

So are the Mavericks an old, experienced team now or are they a young team with six true freshmen in the lineup?

There isn't much time left in the season to find an identity.

Only 10 WCHA games remain in the regular season. Six games are against teams that sit ahead of them in the league standing and all of them, as well as a

lone nonconference game against Nebraska-Omaha, are against teams currently ranked in the Pairwise Rankings, which help determine the NCAA tournament field.

There was a time this season when Minnesota State looked like a team that was a lock for home ice in the conference tournament and a favorite to go to the Final Five and the national tournament. Now they look like a team that faces a hard road to get there.

Who are those guys?

Shane Frederick is a Free Press staff writer. Read his blog at www.mankatofreepress.com/hockeyblog.