

## Ice Cats lose in first round of states

### Four goal first ices Bethel/Brookfield

BY JASON TUREK  
Sports Reporter

In the past week, the Bethel/Brookfield ice hockey team has gone on an emotional roller coaster.

The Ice Cats advanced to the SWC Championship game last Monday, defeating New Fairfield. With the win, Bethel/Brookfield ran its record to 6-1-2 after a 4-8 start to the season.

The next day, Coach Granacker had a team meeting with the boys to explain to them that they had to forfeit the win in the semifinals for using an ineligible player.

Steve Amico, a sophomore defenseman who transferred from Immaculate to Bethel, was thought to be eligible after 30 days from his class enrollment rather than from the first day he was in class. His only game was against New Fairfield in the SWC tournament.

"Having that game taken from us took the winds out of our sails," said Ice Cats senior for-

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—WILL SMITH,  
BETHEL/BROOKFIELD  
DEFENSEMAN

ward Chris Morrison. "We worked hard to get to that point and to have it taken away like that is unfortunate."

On Tuesday, the Ice Cats played the Avon-St. Paul Falcons in the first round of the Division II state tournament.

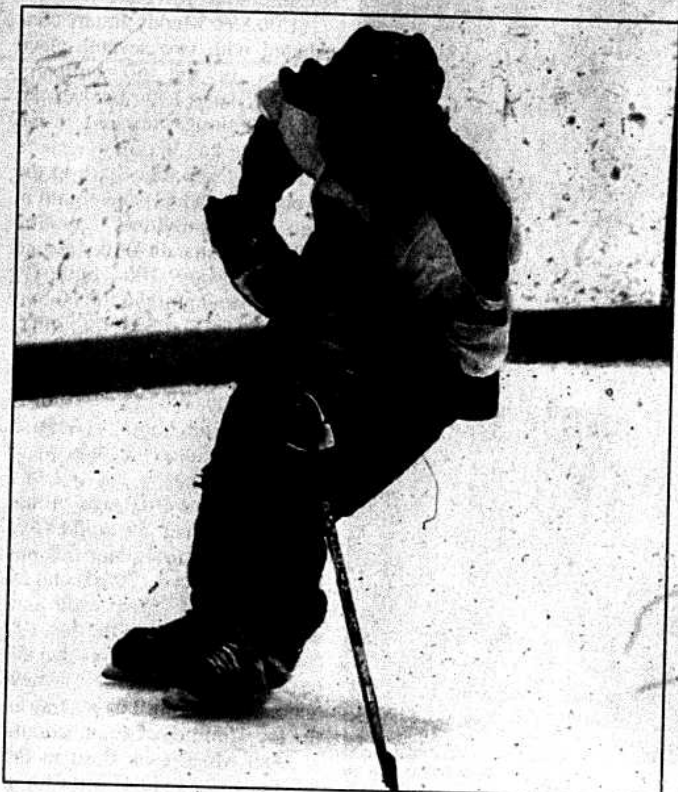
With a long layoff from not playing a game in over a week and the lack of tournament experience, Bethel/Brookfield gave up four goals in the first period as Avon-St. Paul advanced with a 6-1 win in Danbury.

"We used not going to the SWC championship game as an incentive," said Bethel/Brookfield senior defenseman Will Smith. "Unfortunately, it didn't happen for us."

The Ice Cats (10-9-2) outshot the Falcons (11-9-1) 15-8 in the first period as Dan Campbell, Mark Checkosky, and Chris Morrison had good scoring chances in the first few minutes, but were unable to get the puck in the net.

The Falcons capitalized, scoring on three consecutive shots in the period. Nolan Cleary had two goals and an assist and teammate Sam Lerer had a goal and two assists to give the Falcons a 4-0 lead.

"They have three solid lines and passed the puck extremely well, plus they have 11 seniors and 10 juniors on their squad," said Granacker. "Their kids had a lot of tournament experience and we only have four kids that have played in this type of game. It showed in the first period."



Photographs by Melissa Winslow

Bethel/Brookfield defenseman Will Smith skates the puck out of the Ice Cats zone Tuesday night against Avon-St. Paul.

Bethel/Brookfield had a chance to get back in the game as they got a two-man advantage at the beginning of the second period. Morrison got a rebound in front of the net off of a Campbell shot and stuffed the puck home to cut the Falcons' lead to 4-1.

"At the beginning of the period, we thought we would catch them by surprise," said Smith. "The goal lifted our spirits and we still believed we had a chance to come back."

Morrison had another good scoring chance on another power play later in the period, but his shot went just wide of the goal.

Avon-St. Paul received a two-man advantage with 2:10 left in the period on penalties by Scott Skrzpczak and Campbell. Ice Cats goalie Mike Sullinger made key saves to keep the Falcons from scoring, but with 18 seconds remaining, Jared Micheller passed the puck in front to teammate Dennis Loper to give the Falcons back their four-goal

advantage.

Avon-St. Paul added a short-handed goal in the third period by Josh Fischler to end the scoring.

Despite the loss, Granacker says the future looks bright for the Ice Cats going into next season.

"We only have four seniors and the experience in the state tournament this year will help the younger kids," he said. "The kids will also be motivated to win the SWC's next year."

Smith, who played his final game in an Ice Cats uniform, said his team showed a lot of heart this year despite its youth.

"No one expected us to make it as far as we did," said Smith. "The coaches believed in us and we believed in ourselves. We proved everybody wrong."

"I'm proud of my teammates for sticking in there and happy how everything turned out this year," he added.



Mark Checkosky (21) defends against Jared Micheller (9)