

CONTINENTAL HOCKEY ASSOCIATION

Moose clinch second straight Nationals berth by taking first in regular season

By Joshua Boyd

A pair of 5-4 victories over the Massachusetts Maple Leafs kept the Metro Fighting Moose at the top of the Continental Hockey Association.

It was a tenuous lead, just one point over the Frederick Freeze, who already clinched the American Conference. There was so much up for grabs, besides just bragging rights and a regular season championship banner – the winner of the league in the regular season moves on to the USA Jr. National Championships.

“If we won both [against the Leafs] and Frederick lost one to Pittsburgh, we’d have it clinched,” said Moose head coach **Craig Doremus**. However, that didn’t happen, and the Freeze kept the heat on, just one point behind the National Conference-leading Moose, who have a game in hand on the Freeze.

The Moose got the job done instead over the Feb. 27-28 weekend. The Moose needed just four points in those last three games to clinch the Nationals berth, and they got just that.

“I’m really excited and happy for the kids,” said Doremus, on the prospects of returning to the Junior Nationals.

Thirteen Moose players on this year’s team were there last year, when the Moose went 1-2. He has a good idea of what gave the Moose a league-leading 31-4-0 record through 35 (of 36) games.

“I think it’s our work ethic and a lot of it has to do with special teams,” Doremus said. “Our power play is very good as is our penalty kill, which is very aggressive. We’ve been preaching puck pressure all year long. If the guys work hard, we’re tough to beat. We’re not skilled enough,

so a lot of what we do relies on our work ethic.”

Doremus is a very offense-oriented coach, but his team has also done its job on the back end, as they led the league in goals for (245) and had the least goals against (75).

On the front end, **Stephen Kelly** has led the team all year, offensively. Tied for sixth in the league with one game remaining in March, he had 33 goals and 54 points in 33 games.

Also helping out up front have been 1990-born forwards **A.J. Carazo** (47 points) and **Matt Galeano** (45 points) and **William Manchester** (42 points) and 1991-born **Gavin Grogan** (48 points). Doremus has also seen great progress from 1993-born forwards **Keegan Travers** and **Joe Gilhooly**.

“Those two young guys have a lot to bring to the table,” said Doremus. “Joe’s a big, strong physical kid, and with more offensive polishing, he could go far. Keegan’s an offensive guy with a high ceiling and lots of potential.”

On the back end, the team has a strong goaltender in **Steve Laris**, who was third in save percentage at .910.

“He’s an aggressive athlete back there and he just finds ways to make saves,” said Doremus. “He’s technically sound. He and goalie coach **Victor DiRico** are constantly going over fundamentals.”

Top defensemen for the team include **Dan Honovic** and **Patrick Mead**.

“Dan could play anywhere he wants to next year, and Patrick is a great, sound defenseman. Hopefully he tries out [for Jr. A teams] next year,” said Doremus.



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