

HIGH SCHOOL HOCKEY

By Ross Forman

Playoff fever is fervent, with bragging rights on the line throughout the state – and no battle should be better than what’s developed in the Scholastic Hockey League. In the semifinals, no less.

Glenbrook North easily eliminated Barrington, winning 4-0 and 8-2, thus now battles Stevenson, which needed three games (and overtime in game three) to slip past co-op Rockford. The Patriots downed Rockford 7-3 in Game One, then fell 8-1 at Rockford. Senior Matt Heller scored the series-deciding goal in overtime on Feb. 15, as Stevenson won, 2-1.

Heller’s goal capped an emotional roller-coaster for the Stevenson right wing who, on Feb. 10, learned that his grandfather, Dr. Jordan Waxman, died after a five-year battle with prostate cancer. Waxman was buried on Feb. 12, and hours later Heller was skating for Stevenson.

Heller never considered skipping the Feb. 12 game, played in Buffalo Grove. “I wanted to play, but it was hard,” he said. “All of my friends, teammates and coaches came up to me before the game telling me to play this (game) for my grandpa, that he’s watching – and that’s what I did; I left everything out there, out on the ice. I took every stride thinking of him, playing my heart out for him.”

Heller shined when Stevenson most needed it – in overtime. “I got the puck on my stick, and from one of the worst angles possible, I just snapped it in,” he said. “It might have been the best feeling of my life; I certainly never will forget it.”

The Stevenson-GBN best-of-three semifinal is a rematch of last season’s SHL Finals, won by the Spartans.

The other SHL semifinal will be a slugfest as arch-rivals New Trier Green and Loyola Gold battle. Game one is Feb. 19

NORTH CENTRAL DIVISION

The BG/H/W Stampede captured Game One of its semifinal series against Maine Township, winning 5-2. Game Two is Feb. 19 and, if necessary, Game Three is Feb. 22. This rivalry has quickly developed into one of the best in the state.

New Trier White looks to dismantle the offensive powerhouse that is Highland Park, led by powerful forward Noah Pinkus.

I’m not expecting an upset by the starry-eyed Trevians.

CHICAGO CATHOLIC HOCKEY LEAGUE

Will any stop Providence? Can anyone stop Providence?

Mt. Carmel had the first crack at Providence in the battle for the Kennedy Cup. The Caravan could do nothing as the Celtics triumphed 6-2 and 9-1.

Elsewhere, Fenwick stopped St. Rita, while Benet defeated St. Ignatius. In the other quarterfinal, St. Viator and Notre Dame were tied 1-1 after two games as of press time.

Providence faces Fenwick in the semis, but I expect the Celtics to triumph.

WEST

There's Naperville Central, and then everyone else. Or so it seems.

The Redhawks are my pick to claim the West Scholastic Cup, but Waubonsie Valley, Lincoln-Way and Sandburg could put a wrench in Central's path.

Naperville Central is defensive-minded, but also with a power offensive punch.

SUBURBAN HOCKEY LEAGUE:

Joliet Catholic earned the No. 1 seed in the eight-team race for the Cougar Cup, but I'd be surprised if the Hilltoppers skate away with the title.

Watch for good things from the Cobras and Renegades.

PREDICTIONS:

Scholastic Hockey League:

Finals: Glenbrook North defeats New Trier Green in 3 games.

North Central Division:

Finals: Highland Park defeats BG/H/W in 3 games.

Chicago Catholic Hockey League:

Finals: Providence defeats Benet in 2 games.

West:

Finals: Naperville Central over Sandburg.

Suburban Hockey League:

Finals: Renegades over Joliet Catholic