



Montclair Hockey: Mounties grind out 4-3 win over MKA Cougars



MKS junior Ben Wakefield sneaks the puck between the MKA goalie's legs for the game winner in MKS' 4-3 victory.
ANDREW GARDA/STAFF

by Andrew Garda

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The Montclair Kimberley Academy and Montclair High School hockey teams met for the second time this season on Monday night, a game which basically served as a “to be continued” after the teams deadlocked 3-3 earlier this month.

As was the case last time, this one went down to the wire, with MKA pulling the goalie while down 4-3 after junior Ben Wakefeld’s goal put the Mounties ahead with just over two minutes left.

“It’s great because he hasn’t been scoring that much,” Montclair head coach Mark Janifer said of Wakefeld’s game winner. “He puts so much pressure on himself and he feels like should be scoring more. But he does so much for the team regardless of whether he scores or not. It was such a big goal, at a good time for him and it was a fantastic goal.”

The Mounties had stymied the Cougars for much of the third period, and after generating a turnover in their own end, moved the puck down the ice.

Then Mark Rechen crossed the red line and into the Cougars’ end.

Rechen then slipped the puck to Wakefeld, who was coming up the slot. MKA goalie Sebastian Burns set up to block the shot, but Wakefeld was able to slip it through the five-hole for the score.

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“For a kid that goes to MKA or Montclair High School, to score the game winning goal with a couple of minutes to go in the third period of a game against the other team,” Janifer said. “It doesn’t get any better than that.”

Even with six men attackers on the ice, the Cougars just couldn’t find the net, and MHS skated off the ice with possession of a win and the Montclair Cup.

“We were obviously trying to get two guys in front of the net and get them on the puck, and then work our umbrella up top with Schindler going back,” MKA head coach Tim Cook said after the game. “But we couldn’t get control of the puck.”

For Janifer, the third period was key. The two teams battled back and forth for the first 30 minutes, with Montclair slowing the high-powered MKA attack in the first before the Cougars took control in the second, pummeling goalie Lucas Podvey with 14 shots.

Janifer had to admit he was happy to get out of the second period tied at 3.

“We started puck watching, which you can’t do against them, they’re so good off the puck,” Janifer explained. “They move well and they find the open ice and they play unselfishly, so when one guy gets open, they get him the puck. And then they can finish. That’s what they did in the second period.”



Mounties junior Brett Janifer celebrates his third goal during Montclair's 4-3 win over MKA.
ANDREW GARDA/STAFF

A big reason the Mounties came out of the second period even with MKA was because of the head coach’s son, Brett, who scored twice. In fact, the junior Mountie scored both the first and the last goal — that one on a power play — of the second period.

“As a coach, it’s tough to talk about your own son,” Janifer admitted. “I think Brett possesses very good hockey IQ, very good offensive instincts and he had a really good game.”

Getting bigger physically, as well as the hard work to get faster and sharpen his skills, have helped the younger Janifer take a step forward this season, according to his coach. But he’s quick to point out that Brett — who leads the team with 15 goals and 26 points — couldn’t have had the game he had without help from his teammates.

“One of the beautiful things I liked about at least two of his goals, if not all three, was the passing prior to the

goal,” Janifer said. “Eamonn [Thall] hit him with a beautiful pass, in stride [for the first goal in the second period]. And on that power play, it was a tic-tac-toe, boom-boom-boom, and he was there to finish it. So the puck movement, and that’s what I like that I am seeing with the team right now.”

While Montclair was able to score multiple goals, it’s the defense remains the cornerstone of the team and it starts in net.

Lucas Podvey racked up 27 saves during the game, including 14 in the second period.

“We’re built from the goal out. Lucas is a fantastic goalie,” Janifer said of his goaltender. “In terms of his play, I think he’s one of the best goalies certainly in our league and probably the state.”

“Our goal is to contain the first line and attack the second line, to try and create opportunities off of that,” Podvey said. “Those three guys, [David] Chen, [Brian] Schindler and Oscar [Worob], have 120 points in 13 games.”



The MKA Cougars celebrate Alex DiGeronimo's (19) goal during the first period of their game against MHS Monday afternoon.
ANDREW GARDA/STAFF

Podvey and Janifer both credit a lot of his success with the defensive line in front of him, which is anchored by

senior Will Schiffenhaus, who has stepped up his game even more with Jared Topf injured.

He's been able to steady an inexperienced group with sophomore James Kaz and freshman Harry Bylin getting a lot of minutes, and Kellum Foster-Palmer recently back from injury.

"They just have a good goalie and they pack it in and block shots," Cook said. "They're opportunistic when they get the chance, they score. They play to their strengths, right? They're going to play defensive New Jersey Devils-1990s trap."

Cook is right, the Mounties are a team which grinds down the opposition, while MKA — much like Summit — plays a quick, loose and high scoring game. If MHS can keep an opponent from scoring a lot of goals, they have a good shot at taking a game, as they did Monday night.

Getting into a shootout takes them out of their space and forces them to scramble for points.

For the Mounties, this time they were able to slow and trap the Cougars, knocking them off their game, much like in their first meeting.

These two teams might clash again in the McInnis Cup Tournament though, and if that happens, you can expect the Cougars to try and turn the tables and run the Mounties out of the building.

Which means the third game in the series will be more than worth the price of admission.