

Omaha Junior Lancers win high school hockey national championship

Mike Patterson Apr 19, 2021



The Omaha Junior Lancers celebrate after winning the high school hockey national championship. JORDAN MCALPINE

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The Omaha Junior Lancers didn't let a slow start keep them from making hockey history Monday.

The team overcame an early three-goal deficit to defeat the Capistrano (Calif.) Coyotes 5-4 in overtime to capture the USA Hockey National High School Championship. It's the first time the Juniors Lancers have won the title.

"We've been doing this all year," coach Nick Harrahill said. "We're a resilient team that does not quit."

Omaha, which was outshot 47-15, tied it with third-period goals from Karl Grafelman and Connor Szolek before winning the game 2:23 into overtime. Grafelman won a faceoff and drew the puck to Trey Carlson, who fired a quick shot past Coyotes goalie Grayson Zanki.

"Karl got me the puck and I had an open lane," said Carlson, a senior at Elkhorn High. "I shot it as quick as I could and luckily it went in."

Capistrano got off to a strong start in the game played at Ralston Arena, scoring three times in the first period. Brett Phillips made it 1-0 on a shot from the blue line, Merrill Steenari scored shorthanded and Makar Klochkov stuffed in a rebound.

"Even though we were down 3-0, we knew that we could come back," Carlson said.

The Junior Lancers, who were outshot 20-3 in the opening period, replaced starting goalie Nolan Eikerman with Jaden Salado.

"We feel like our goalies are two of the best in the country," Harrahill said. "We didn't give Nolan a lot of defensive help in that first period."

Carlson, the eventual overtime hero, scored his first of the game 36 seconds into the second period. The Junior Lancers closed to 3-2 on a

goal by Tim Johnson but the Coyotes struck back 39 seconds later when Klochkov netted his second of the game.

A power-play goal by Grafelman, who attends Omaha Brownell Talbot, made it 4-3 in the opening minute of the third period. Connor Szolek tied the game five minutes later on a shorthanded goal when Zanki misplayed the puck near his net.

The score remained tied until Carlson ended the game, which triggered an on-ice celebration and cheers from the pro-Junior Lancers crowd.

Carlson finished with two goals and an assist, Grafelman had a goal and three assists and Johnson chipped in a goal and two assists.

Harrahill credited Salado, who attends Omaha Westside, for his performance. He made 26 saves, allowing just one goal.

"He shut the door," the coach said. "He gave us a chance to come back."

Salado kept the game tied in the third period, gloving a wrist shot by Ameen Ghosheh and then making a save after a shot caromed off the glass behind the net and landed near the goal crease.

Harrahill said winning that first national title at the high school level was quite an accomplishment.

"During a season affected by the pandemic, our guys really stuck together," he said. "They did it again today."

Omaha finishes 34-18-1 while capturing the Division II portion of the tourney, which includes teams consisting of players from several schools. The Springfield Cardinals won the Division I title Monday while Premier Prep Forest from Minnesota won the girls title.

The Junior Lancers roster, with high schools: Arlington: Paul Spence. Bellevue West: Zach

Farnsworth. Bennington: Ben Parsons. Blair: Hudson Dilworth. Council Bluffs Abraham Lincoln: Brady Ridnour. Elkhorn: Trey Carlson, Brandon Waldow. Elkhorn South: Victor Knapp. Fremont Bergan: Lucas Parr. Millard South: Tyler Trimborn. Millard West: Gavin Moffett, Connor Szolek. Omaha Brownell Talbot: Karl Grafelman. Omaha Creighton Prep: Will Volenec, Eli Troshynski, Michael Chase, Tim Johnson. Omaha Gross: Ben Barnes. Omaha Skutt: Lachlan Wilmers. Omaha Westside: Jaden Salado, Maksim Buldyk. Papillion-La Vista: Nate Sinnett. Waverly: Nolan Eikerman.

SCORING

Capistrano ... 3 1 0 0-4

Omaha ... 0 2 2 1-5

First period: 1, C, Phillips (McElligott, Ossola), 3:57. 2, C, Steenari (Phillips), shorthanded, 6:32. 3, C, Klochkov (Steenari), 16:46.

Second period: 4, O, Carlson (Johnson, Grafelman), :36. 5, O, Johnson (Grafelman), 15:17. 6, C, Klochkov (Steenari, Coughlin), 15:56.

Third period: 7, O, Grafelman (Johnson, Carlson), power play, :55. 8, O, Szolek (Sinnett), shorthanded, 5:03.

Overtime: 9, O, Carlson (Grafelman), 2:23.

Shots on goal:

Capistrano ... 20 14 13 0-47

Omaha ... 3 6 5 1-15

Goalies: C, Zanki (10 saves). O, Eikerman (17 saves); Salado (26 saves).

Penalties: C, 4 for 8 minutes. O, 3-6.

Power-play conversions: C, 0-3. O, 1-4.

Mike Patterson covers high school sports. Follow him on Twitter @MPattersonOWH. Phone: 402-444-1350.