



Florida JR. Panthers Squirts Major Heat Up the Midwest (November 27, 2001)

The Florida Jr. Panthers Squirt Major ice hockey team traveled to the Hockeytown of Detroit, Michigan to play in the Little Caesars Annual Thanksgiving Tournament. The Panthers were to play the best Detroit had to offer in one of the largest Midwest tournaments with over 100 teams entering. Not knowing how they measured up in an area known for its long tradition of hockey the Jr. Panthers came out shooting with both barrels from the opening face-off.

Their efforts were well rewarded in 5 straight wins and the Squirt AA Championship. The Jr. Panthers outscored their opponents 35-0 in the 5 games. Danny Quinn and Benjamin Kantor shared the goaltending responsibilities and had five straight shutouts.

In the first game the Panthers faced off against the Gross Point Senators. Brody Sutter had two goals, one assisted by Connor Ference in the 5-0 win. To start the second game against the Southfield Warriors, Cody Disbury scored three consecutive goals, all assisted by Doug Beck, for a natural hat trick. Defenseman Casey Ray wristed in a shot from the point and Steven Gutowitz added a goal and an assist in the 9-0 route.

The Michigan Stars were the Panthers opponents in game 3. Logan Romano had a hat trick, Jack Glenn had two goals and an assist and Tyler Wynn had a goal and an assist in an 11-0 blowout.

The fourth game, the last of the preliminary round, the Panthers faced the previously undefeated Gaylord Predators. Doug Beck started off the game with an unassisted goal and added two more for the hat trick. Defenseman Scott Schwartz picked off a clearing pass and scored his first goal of the series while Casey Ray added three assists in the 7-0 game.

The final game would again be against the Gaylord Predators as they finished the round robin portion of the tournament 3-1. Defenseman Joseph Nathan's goal from the slot assisted by Stephen Hamel proved to be the game and ultimately the tournament winner. Danny Derasmo finished the scoring with a wraparound in the 3-0 game in which the Panthers outshot the Predators 25-3. The Predator goalie was spectacular to keep the game as close as it was.

The entire squad played as a team with great defense and tenacious back checking. The Panthers actually scored more goals in the tournament than shots they allowed by their opposition.

The Panthers are presently undefeated with a 12-0 record in the Florida Youth Hockey League. The Panthers travel to the Southeast Regional Tournament in Atlanta in mid December and the Pikes Peak Tournament in Colorado Springs in February.