

Buckley and Degeer pace Junior Panthers' attack in 5-2 win over East Ottawa Stars

Erica Buckley tallied two third period goals and leading scorer Cheyenne Degeer delivered a two-point performance to impel the Central York Junior Panthers to a 5-2 victory over the East Ottawa Stars at SARC on Sunday afternoon.

It was the U22 Elite squad's fourth consecutive win and improved their league record to 14-8-0-0.

The Panthers ran the table in Kitchener-Waterloo last weekend at the US-Canada Cup, winning all five of their games, and the momentum from the international tournament clearly carried over to their performance on Sunday.

Degeer entered Sunday's matinee in third place in the OWSHA scoring race with 18 goals and 14 assists in 20 games. The offensively-productive captain got her team on the scoreboard at 12:17 of the first period on a Panthers' power play. Degeer displayed her goal scorer's patience when she secured a deflected pass from the point, created space for herself in the slot, and wired a wrist shot from the left circle high glove side past Stars' goaltender Anna Rioux.

The talented Panther forward described her first-period marker.

"We were trying to get shots to the net on the power play. I saw the rebound from the point and was able to find open ice, get some space, and was able to take a good shot."

In addition to the team getting off to a quick start against the Stars, the articulate captain explained the reasons for her team's victory versus East Ottawa.

"We did a good job following our coaching staff's game plan. They did a great job with the scouting report and we kept our cool out there this afternoon. There was some rough play, they tried to intimidate us, but we didn't retaliate. We only supported our teammates."

In addition to keeping their composure against an aggressive Stars squad, Degeer also singled out Samantha Whittle's play between the pipes as a key to the win: "She played awesome today. She kept us in the game when it was close. We're really lucky as a team to have two great goaltenders that we can alternate."

Whittle turned aside 30 of the 32 shots she faced to earn the W.

Whittle's big saves in the first and second periods preserved the Panthers' slim one-goal lead until Avery Johnston one-timed Degeer's pass past Rioux at 12:55 of the second period. Johnston's seventh of the season gave the Panthers a 2-0 lead, but Genevieve Bisson's unassisted power play goal at 4:06 narrowed the Stars' deficit to one heading into the second intermission.

Minutes after the Panthers failed to score on a period-opening power play, Buckley fired home what turned out to be the game-winning goal 2:35 into the final frame by directing Amber Esterbrooks's pass behind Rioux to give Central York a two-goal cushion.

Annabella Van Berkel, with assists from Zoe Li and Rhaea Flint, swept a puck past Rioux to give the Panthers a 4-1 lead at 14:38.

Eighteen seconds later, Stars' forward Annabelle McKenzie fired a low wrist shot past Whittle to reduce the Panthers' lead to two, but Buckley's hustle against a pressing East Ottawa squad earned her an empty net goal with 31 seconds left on the clock to seal Central York's decisive victory.

By Jim Stewart