The Weekly Power Play:

Boston Bruins host Blackstone Valley Hockey Champions after emotional title run

LOGO BY ALEXA PAPPAS, STAFF ARTIST/THE DAILY CAMPUS

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The Boston Bruins had a few more skaters on the ice than normal during their practice Monday. The organization hosted the Rhode Island Division II State Champion hockey team, the Blackstone Valley Co-op, at Warrior Ice Arena, giving them the once-in-a-lifetime chance to meet their favorite players and experience the Bruins practice facility.

The team had just won their high school state championship on Wednesday with a late goal to tie the game in regulation and win in not just one overtime, but quadruple.

The win was especially significant for the team as it followed just one month after their Senior Day game took a tragic turn, when one player's father shot and killed several family members including himself.

"It's amazing how the community can rally for us, all the gifts we've gotten, it's so special," team co-captain Camden Governo said Monday. "We're so grateful for everything we've gotten. There's nothing better than the community we have. We're still moving forward. We're still recovering. But we're definitely doing good after that championship win."

The team wore patches on their jerseys during Wednesday's game. A red heart with the initials of each family member killed during the tragedy.

The Blackstone Valley team is still celebrating their victory on the ice, this time, surrounded by support from the Bruins.

"The hockey world is such a tight-knit community, it's a family. Whenever we get an opportunity like this, we really cherish it," said Jeremy Swayman in an interview with NBC 10 Boston. "It's so cool to have these guys in the locker room, and to see their excitement and really enjoy the good things that hockey brings us every day."

This is not the first time the NHL community has rallied around hockey teams across the country when faced with tragedy. In 2018, NHL teams showed support for the Humboldt Broncos, a Canadian junior hockey team that was involved in a bus crash that left 15 people dead and 14 injured.

Coaches and players from the NHL expressed their support for the Broncos with the Toronto Maple Leafs adding the Broncos logo to their backdrop during their morning press briefing the next day. The Philadelphia Flyers held a moment of silence prior to their game against the New York Rangers just days after the tragedy.

Prior to leaving the ice, the Blackstone Valley team and the Bruins posed for a photo to remember this special day where players of different stages of life came to celebrate their love for hockey.

"Just a sad story, but also a wonderful story, the way they responded and winning," Swayman said. "Just to have them here, they were so excited to see David in the training room, maybe get a massage, just little things like that.... That was probably the best moment today."

"This is what I love about hockey, about hockey teams, because we're all the same," Swayman said.

TYLER REDDICK, 23XI MAKES NASCAR HISTORY AGAIN

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Tyler Reddick made history again after his win at Darlington on Sunday, becoming the third driver to win four out of the first six races to open a NASCAR season.

The previous two drivers to do such a feat are Dale Earnhardt Sr in 1987 and Bill Elliott in 1992.

Reddick, who went winless last season, dominated the opening six races with a lowest finish of No. 13 at Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

With Reddick's dominance to start the season, he has skyrocketed up the betting odds charts, going from +1000 to start the season to +600, tied with William Byron and just below Denny Hamlin and Kyle Larson at +500.

Reddick and 23XI Racing as a whole have been in elite form since the lawsuit settlement in early December.

Reddick's teammate, Bubba Wallace, currently sits third in the championship standings, 120 points behind Reddick. But Wallace leads NASCAR in stage points with 60.

Wallace secured another seven stage points in the first stage of the Darlington race but after an unavoidable crash in the middle of the race, Wallace dropped down in the order, finishing No. 34 in Darlington. Before Darlington, Wallace's worst finish was No. 11 at the Circuit of the Americas.

The driver of the day was Brad Keselowski, though. Keselowski led 142 out of the 293 laps completed and won both stage one and stage two. It took a late charge from Reddick to regain the lead from Keselowski, who would finish second for his best finish since the fall Phoenix race at the end of last season.

Ryan Blaney looked fast as well, securing his place as second in the standings and 95 points behind Reddick.

Blaney won at Phoenix just three races ago and after finishing third at Darlington, secured his fourth top 10 finish this season.

Carson Hocevar and Ty Gibbs left a lot of questions on the table after the Darlington race. After starting No. 16 and No. 28, Hocevar would finish fourth and Gibbs would finish sixth. If they had done better in qualifying, we might have seen them competing for the race win alongside Reddick and Hocevar.

Both drivers led a lap with Hocevar leading two and Gibbs leading one.

Austin Cindric rounded out the top five after a solid performance from the veteran Penske Racing driver.

Martinsville and the Cook Out 400 are set to return this weekend. Byron won the fall Martinsville race, while Hamlin won the spring Martinsville race last season.

In the last six races at Martinsville, Larson has the best average finish in the Cup Series with 3.7, including a win in 2023. Both Byron and Blaney each have two wins apiece with Blaney having the better average finish with 4.5.

This year, look out for Connecticut-native Ryan Preece in the front of the pack. The RFK Racing cars have looked fast the past couple of races, and with Preece being especially good at short tracks, a win should be in the cards for him.

You can watch the Cook Out 400 at Martinsville on FS1 or HBOmax at 3:30 p.m. EST this Sunday, March 29.



Tyle Reddick of 23XI poses with the trophy following his fourth win of the season. Reddick is currently on a hot streak and looks for more success throughout the rest of the season.
PHOTO COURTESY OF @TYLER_REDDICK ON INSTAGRAM.

MENS BASKETBALL:

MALACHI SMITH 'SAVED' UCONN IN THE NCAA TOURNAMENT'S OPENING WEEKEND

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UConn entered the NCAA Tournament on Thursday without its starting point guard. In March, that's where seasons usually fall apart.

Malachi Smith made sure it didn't.

The Huskies' starting point guard, Silas Demary Jr., went down in the Big East Tournament Championship game with a low ankle sprain the week before. He was ruled out for the first game, leaving Smith to make his first start in a UConn uniform.

Smith logged 32 minutes in the first-round win over Furman. He finished with seven assists with just one turnover. It was the most minutes Smith had played all season, with his previous high coming on Jan. 4 against Marquette.

"He saved us," Head Coach Dan Hurley said. "32 minutes with the pressure that their guards put on you... that's not easy."

Demary returned for the second-round game against UCLA but was not yet at full strength. Smith remained in the starting lineup and again played 32 minutes. He tallied six more assists while only committing two turnovers.

Hurley applauded Smith's toughness and "will to take care of the ball" for "stabilizing" UConn's offense in the tournament opening weekend.

The word "stabilizing" encapsulates what Smith brought to the floor over the weekend. The Huskies did not need someone to post 20 points; they already had Alex Karaban and Tarris Reed Jr. each putting up monster numbers throughout the weekend.

What UConn needed was a point guard to protect the basketball and make the right plays in its decision-making offense, and that is exactly what he did.

"I didn't really have nerves," Smith said. "I know what I can do when I run the team, and I play with good confidence."

His confidence is rooted in how he has always approached the game. Smith has built his game around being a pass-first point guard, more concerned with creating scoring opportunities for others rather than chasing his own.

"Growing up, I'm always making reads, trying to get my teammates involved... that's my game," Smith said.

While UConn's starting point guard has improved throughout the season as a facilitator, Demary acknowledged that the role comes more naturally to Smith. He said that his backup has helped him develop that part of his game.

Demary finds comfort in having Smith behind him in the backcourt, knowing that the offense remains in steady hands.

"I feel Malachi has been ready for this moment ever since he came on campus," Demary said. "I have the utmost confidence in him...knowing that if I'm out, I know he's going to take care of business."

That trust is shared throughout the locker room. Teammates like Karaban point to the "energy" and "spark" that he brings to both the locker room and on the court.

Freshman center Eric Reibe sees it firsthand every day. While both were new to the program this season, Smith arrived in Storrs with four years of college basketball under his belt. Reibe said that he and Smith are always on the same team in practice, giving him plenty of guidance in navigating the collegiate level.

"Malachi is a great guy on the court and off the court," Reibe said. "He showed me how to be a good teammate... he has a lot of experience, and that helped me a lot."

Smith's final season of college basketball could have looked a lot different. Hurley has said all season that the graduate transfer could have started at a number of major programs and made significantly more money after leaving Dayton last summer. Yet he still chose UConn with a different priority in mind.

"We all sacrifice something to be here. We all could have been somewhere playing major minutes... probably more money," Smith said. "But we decided to come here so we can win...that's the only reason why we came here. That was top of the list."

That has meant embracing his complementary role behind Demary for most of the season. But in the NCAA Tournament, it meant being ready to step up when his number was called.

So that's what he did.