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Christopher Horner | Tribune-Review

Upper St. Clair's George Garces dives for the puck under Pine-Richland's Jack Breisinger during their PIHL Class 3A semifinal on Monday, March 13, 2023, at RMU.

Loss in semifinals to make Pine-Richland hockey team 'stronger as a group'

By Andrew John March 19, 2023



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[Pine-Richland's](#) hockey team entered December with a 2-7-1 record and was riding a two-game losing streak. At that point, the playoffs weren't on the minds of the Rams players and coaches.

They just wanted to bring it back to the basics by doing the little things in order to build positive momentum.

Their ability to come together as a team, focus on winning individual puck battles and winning periods allowed the Rams to string together a nine-game winning streak and earn a spot in the PIHL Penguins



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0 lead with goals from the Peacock twins, Ryan and Shawn. Daniel Mooney made 19 saves in the win.

Pine-Richland then faced another higher-seed team in No. 7 [Upper St. Clair](#), which beat No. 2 [Central Catholic](#), 6-2, to also advance to the semifinal round.

The Rams entered the third period with a 3-2 lead, but the Panthers scored four unanswered goals to beat Pine-Richland, 6-3, on March 13.

“Earning a playoff spot was a huge goal and task that we were able to achieve. Playing a tough [Seneca Valley](#) team and earning the result was a big confidence-builder for everybody. To land in the semifinal round just understanding where we were earlier in the year was a big accomplishment in itself,” Pine-Richland coach Jordan Yoklic said.

“In the game against [Upper St. Clair](#), our team was fighting how they did all season long. Upper St. Clair is a good team. You have credit to those guys and tip your cap. I think our guys weathered the storm really well, but at the end of the day their top guys came ready to go in the third period. They just started making plays for their team.”

Pine-Richland hasn't been a stranger to making deep runs into the playoffs under Yoklic. The Rams won the Penguins Cup and state championship in 2019 and has appeared in the semifinals every year since 2020. However, this year's coaching job could be the most rewarding for Yoklic.

“It puts things in perspective and it makes you appreciate the state championship year because winning cleans a lot of things up. This year, nothing was easy and nothing was given. We had to work for every inch of ice on and off the ice. We were forced to make a decision,” Yoklic said.

“When things were going poorly, it's probably easy to pack it in as a team. But that wasn't the pathway our team wanted to take. We wanted to go the hard route and continue to play for each other and not settle to be an average team.”

The nine-game win streak started with a 7-5 win over Cathedral Prep on Dec. 5. Pine-Richland earned three key wins in a row over [Peters Township](#), [North Allegheny](#) and Seneca Valley. The Rams also beat Upper St. Clair, 8-2, on Jan. 26. The Rams outscored their opponents, 53-23, during the win streak.



"I'm confident in the group moving forward," Yoklic said. "A lot of the guys are going to step up. They will have the confidence with being a year older. We just want to come to the rink, work hard, have fun and play for each other. They aren't going to forget the feeling we felt in the locker room after the loss to Upper St. Clair. It's going to make them stronger as a group."

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