

## **Pee Wee A's Take Another State Title**

The Melrose Youth Hockey Pee Wee A team capped an amazing run to a second consecutive state title on Sunday, March 22 at the Olympia Ice Center in Springfield, MA with an impressive 6-4 win over a very strong Norwood team.

Melrose started their quest for back-to-back titles with an impressive 5-1 win against the Lakers in their first game of the tournament. Melrose was in control for the entire game as a smothering defensive effort limited the Laker scoring opportunities. Goaltender Joe Taglieri picked up where he left off in last year's state tournament by turning in a sharp performance in goal. The line of Jake Witkowski, Jimmy O'Donnell and Aaron Aveni ran roughshod over the Lakers teaming up for a total of 10 points in the game.

In the first of two games to be played on Saturday Melrose lost a heartbreaker to eventual semi-finalist Westwood by a score of 2-1. Jimmy O'Donnell had the lone tally for Melrose as the game was a close checking affair with Melrose dominating play for long stretches of the game. The loss temporarily derailed the team but they picked things up later the same day walloping the Holy Name Stars by a 12-0 score. Sean Foley scored three goals in the rout and Jimmy O'Donnell, Jake Witkowski, Zack Mercer and Jack Hickey had two goals each. Mike DiRaffaele had a goal and three assists while John Morreale had three assists and Ryan Feeney had a goal and an assist. The big offensive output – combined with the fewest goals against in the tournament – provided the margin for Melrose to get to the semi-final round and the opportunity to play for another state championship.

Melrose would meet Martha's Vineyard in one semi-final while Norwood would battle Westwood in the other semi-final contest. Melrose came out flying against the Vineyard again controlling the play and smothering the Vineyard offense with a steady and solid team defense. Sean Foley started the scoring with assists going to Zack Mercer and Alex Burton. Jake Witkowski led the offense with a goal and an assist while Chris Brown also scored for Melrose. The 3-1 victory pushed Melrose into the tournament finals for the second year in a row. It was also their third tournament finals appearance in the last four seasons.

The final obstacle for Melrose would be a talented team from Norwood. In a classic match up of solid defense versus a great offense Melrose came out roaring and scored first. Zack Mercer provided the spark with a sharp wrist shot from the slot to give Melrose a 1-0 lead. Melrose continued to buzz the Norwood net increasing their lead to 3-0 on scores by Jimmy O'Donnell and Jake Witkowski. Norwood would cut the lead to 3-2 early in the second period and appeared to be coming to life. But the Melrose defense clamped down and the offense built a four goal cushion on goals by Chris Brown, Jake Witkowski's second goal of the game and a sizzling wrist shot by Aaron Aveni. Aveni's goal through a screen from the left circle made it 6-2 for Melrose. After Aveni's goal Melrose really started to sense back-to-back state titles and began to take control of the game. But Norwood continued to press despite the deficit and scored two quick goals to make the final few minutes interesting. With their goaltender pulled for an extra attacker Norwood continued to press the Melrose net. Once again Taglieri was stellar in net coming up big at "crunch time" while the Melrose defense of Chris Brown, Steve Lavasseur, Jake Karelak, Brian Senier and John Morreale stifled the Norwood offense and sealed the victory!

As the final seconds ticked off the clock the Melrose bench emptied and a mob scene took place in front of the Melrose net!

The championship title was the fifth of Coach Kevin Crovo's career and his third in the last four seasons! History was also made as the 2008-2009 MYH Pee Wee A team became the first team to win back-to-back state championships in program history! Seven players – Chris Brown, Jake Karelak, Steve Lavasseur, Zack Mercer, Jimmy O'Donnell, Joey Taglieri and Jake Witkowski – have the distinction of being the only players in Melrose Youth Hockey history to take home the state championship two seasons in a row! Congratulations to Coach Crovo, his staff and his players for their impressive victory!