

IIHF World Championships Div.III – Round 1 Results

The Division III World Ice Hockey Championships kicked off in Dunedin on Good Friday with a big win for the New Zealand Ice Blacks against their first opponent, Luxembourg. The Ice Blacks, favoured to win the tournament, were too strong and came away with a 6-2 win.

New Zealand came out of the gate flying and defenseman Hayden Argyle set the early tone with a huge hit that rocked the arena. A rowdy crowd lifted the team right from the opening whistle and the fans were rewarded seven minutes into the game when Adam Soffer scored on an amazing end-to-end rush, beating several players before he rifled a shot over the Luxembourg goaltender's glove. Luxembourg evened the score five minutes later on a lucky shorthanded break, but NZ dominated most of the rest of the period and were unlucky to finish the period only tied 1-1.

Luxembourg thought they scored another goal on a nice pass across the net for a one-time shot, but although some of the Luxembourg players had their sticks in the air to celebrate it was Zak Nothling, the Ice Black goaltender, who had the final say as he stretched across and flashed out his glove to grab the puck.

It took seven minutes into the second period for the Ice Blacks to regain the lead when Brett Speirs tipped a Corey Down shot into the top corner of the net past the Luxembourg goaltender. Although Luxembourg equalized again five minutes later, NZ closed out the period up 3-2 after Mitchell Oak scored on a thunderous one-time shot off a nice feed from KC Ball.

“The team really came together between the second and third periods, and we were determined to put them away. The pressure was on us as the favorites, but we knew if we followed our gameplan and kept working hard the win would come,” said Brett Speirs, NZ's MVP for the game.

The final period was completely dominated by the Ice Blacks, who scored three unanswered goals. The first was a fantastic goal by Danny Smith, who showed quick hands to put the puck in the back of the net after an incredible effort from Brett Speirs, who worked the puck from his own zone down to the offensive zone despite being brutally hacked and harassed by opposing players. Three minutes later Corey Down put one home after a great pass from Adam Soffer, and Brett Speirs sealed the game with ten minutes remaining after receiving an unbelievable no-look behind the back pass from rookie Daniel Nicholls.

“Tonight was a great start and the first step towards the gold medal,” said Jeff Bonazzo, the Ice Blacks Head Coach. “We executed our game plan well and played the whole 60 minutes with intensity and determination. Our next task is to focus on beating Turkey.”

“It was fantastic to get that first win under our belt,” added Corey Down, the Ice Black Captain. “Every time you put on the NZ Ice Black jersey it's a special

thing, and we really want to win gold here in NZ.”

In the only other game of the day, Greece defeated Ireland 7-3. The NZ Ice Blacks play Turkey, Greece, and Ireland to finish out the tournament. More information can be found at www.iceblacks.com or www.nzicehockey.co.nz

Goals: Brett Speirs (2), Adam Soffer (1), Mitchell Oak (1), Danny Smith (1), Corey Down (1)

Assists: Mitchell Oak (1), KC Ball (1), Corey Down (1), Braden Lee (1), Adam Soffer (1), Daniel Nicholls (1)

Saves: Zak Nothling (17)