

Dr. Jekyll or Mr. Hyde?

Sometimes it seems as if the University of South Florida Ice Bulls possess two distinct and separate personalities.

One team plays with burning intensity. They move the puck with precision, bang opposing player and dominate opponents.

The other sleepwalks through games, at times seems disinterested, and struggles to control the puck.

Both Ice Bull manifestations showed up this past weekend.

On Friday night, South Florida journeyed across the state to Daytona and faced the Embry Riddle Eagles.

The Eagle fans make the Arctic Zone Ice Rink one of the most difficult venues for opponents in ACHA D-III hockey. Complete with a pep band perched on top of the visiting locker room, the rink resonates with sound, and when the Embry Riddle fans get going, the rink can be a nightmare for opposing teams.

The Ice Bulls were unfazed by all the ruckus. They came out flying, played three complete periods of hockey, and dominated the Eagles 8-1.

Connor Lyons got the Bulls rolling with a shorthanded goal just six minutes into the game and USF never looked back.

PJ Morales scored three minutes later and then Ricky Nelson used his speed and quick hands to turn passes from Lyons into two more Ice Bull goals.

Embry Riddle managed a late period goal and South Florida went into the locker room with a 4-1 lead after one period.

The Ice Bulls came out in the second determined not to allow their momentum to slip away.

Nelson took up where he left off in the first and celebrated his birthday with a hat trick when he banged in a shorthanded goal at 12:32 in period two.

A minute later, Kyle Baran's hard work in front of the net paid off when he shoved his own rebound between the pads of the Eagle goalie.

Lyons closed out the second period with his second of the night and the Ice Bulls went into the final period completely in control, leading 7-1.

USF maintained their intensity in the third and Alex Ford tacked on one more Bull goal to seal the 8-1 win, quieting the Eagle faithful in the process.

"It was a strong game from start to finish," said Bull coach Jay Jodoin. "We haven't had many complete games like this. We need to have more of them."

The Ice Bulls returned home to the Ice Sports Forum in Brandon on Saturday night hoping to take up where they left off Friday.

They didn't

The Ice Bull alter ego showed up and they were nearly upset on their home ice. The Bulls pulled off a 4-3 win, but they didn't look good doing it.

Give some credit to Embry Riddle goalie Dan Trundle. He played a solid game in net for the Eagles and smothered many of the chances the lethargic Bulls generated.

Initially, it looked like the South Florida would roll again. Jeff Borges took a pass from PJ Morales and beat Trundle just 4:50 into the game, giving USF an early 1-0 lead.

But the Ice Bulls didn't capitalize on their momentum. Embry Riddle outworked the Bulls and cashed in for a goal midway through the first period.

The first frame ended in a 1-1 tie.

Despite the close game, the Bulls appeared to lack any sense of urgency in the second. Still, they managed to take a 2-1 lead two and a half minutes in when Drew Dinzik scored after picking up a loose puck in front of the net.

Once again, the Ice Bulls failed to build any intensity off the goal. The Eagles outplayed the Bulls for most of the period and scored with 6:41 left to tie the game at 2-2.

After the Eagle goal, South Florida momentarily seemed to wake from their slumber. Borges scored his second of the night allowing the Bulls to take a tenuous 3-2 lead into the locker room after two periods.

The Bulls acted content to sit on their one goal lead through most of the third. They didn't play poorly, but they lacked any jump.

Allowing Embry Riddle to hang around proved a mistake.

With only 4:29 left in the game and the Ice Bulls on the power play, Embry Riddle managed a shorthanded breakaway and turned it into a goal, knotting the game at three.

USF finally woke up.

It was almost as if someone flipped a switch. Suddenly, the Ice Bulls were playing with the intensity they'd shown the night before. Just 33 seconds after the Eagles tied it up, Baran banged the puck past Trundle and the Bulls had the lead for good.

The Eagles pulled their goalie for an extra attacker with about a minute left, but USF held on with two key face off wins by Morales.

Borges earned the Checker's player of the game honors with his two goals.

"A W is a W," Jodoin said after the game. "But we need to go out and win from start to finish - three periods of hockey - if not, this is what happens."

"We can dominate teams or we can do it like this, with a nail-biter at the end. It's up to us how we play," Jodoin said.

Lyons had a more concise evaluation of the game.

"I played like garbage," he said.

-Michael Maharrey