

After a sprawling save, the crowd began to chant his name. He looked to his family, then back to the ice. His teammates said Owen Luetkemeyer, junior, played his best game of the season that night. But not without a heavy heart.

Two days earlier, Owen's infant sister, Tierney Grace, only five days old, passed away from a bacterial infection Dec. 10. During the game Owen embraced the support of his family, who had flown in from all over the country, while also accepting his duty as a brother.

"I wanted to show them even though she wasn't here for very long she really affected me," Owen said. "If I didn't play, I would let her down. I wanted to play my hardest even though it was a difficult time."

At a record of 6-6 on the season, Kirkwood was struggling to gain momentum heading into a stretch of difficult division matchups. Owen found motivation from both a rowdy crowd and his sister.

"That was a game I had to dedicate to her to show I'm not only playing for myself and my community but for her," Owen said. "I knew she was up there watching over me making sure I did everything to the best of my ability."

Kirkwood kept the game within two goals until late in the third period. When Sam Smith, junior, thought a win seemed out of reach, goals by seniors Tanner Drake and Eric Eagon made it a 3-2 game with a few minutes remaining. Chants of Owen's name started roaring in the student section.

"I knew the crowd gave him a ton of momentum and strength," Sam said. "We all gave him support the entire game and made sure we appreciate him. We all knew he would lay out his best effort, so we tried to match his effort and get a win against a really strong team."

Despite a furious rally, Kirkwood fell short, 4-2. But few were concerned about the score. According to James Fuszner, junior, the team found a spark to strive for a postseason run.

"He made incredible saves and really kept us in the game," James said. "He stopped breakaways most goalies in high school couldn't save."

With the support of his family and sister, Owen gained the respect of his teammates in a remarkable way. He inspired his teammates to huddle around him after being drained from playing through emotional swings all week.

"It was extremely emotional. After the game my dad came up and gave me the biggest hug in the world and broke down. What happened after the game with my team sealed a great night," Owen said. "They were saying I played on another level I've never really shown them before. I couldn't have asked for a better game to show off what I can do."