

## Facing Elimination, Caps Come Up Big in 5-4 OT Victory

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Pittsburgh, PA - For the third time in the past four games in the hard-fought playoff series between the Capitals and Penguins, a game went to overtime. For the third time in three overtime games, a puck deflected off a Washington player's body or stick into the net.

For the first time, it was Pittsburgh's net.

Six minutes into the first overtime period David Steckel deflected Brooks Laich's waist-high shot between Pittsburgh goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury's legs to give the Capitals a 5-4 victory, and more importantly keep their season alive for at least two more days. Steckel was joined on the score sheet by Viktor Kozlov, who had two goals, as well as Tomas Fleischmann and Brooks Laich. Secondary scoring has been a concern for head coach Bruce Boudreau all season long, with Alexander Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom producing the lion's share of Washington's offense in the playoffs. Monday night Ovechkin and Backstrom were limited to 'only' three assists and one assist, respectively, as ten Capitals registered at least one point and four—Kozlov, Ovechkin, Laich (1 goal, 1 assist) and Alexander Semin (2 assists)—registered multi-point games.

Game 6 was high drama for all parties involved: its three lead changes were the most in a playoff game in three years (though later that night Vancouver and Chicago would exchange leads five times). Pittsburgh took the original lead just six minutes into the game, when Bill Geurin finished a two-on-one with Sidney Crosby into the top left corner. Later in the period, Backstrom and Laich were sent to the penalty box in quick succession but the penalty-killing trio of Steckel, Boyd Gordon and Tom Poti refused to yield, allowing only four shots to reach goaltender Simeon Varlamov, none of which were quality scoring chances.

'Big stage. Big moment. We need[ed] it to stay alive,' said Steckel after the game. Thanks to that kill, the Penguins ended the period with only a one-goal lead, a lead they kept for over a period of game time before Kozlov struck on a similar shot that beat Fleury glove side under the crossbar. Fleischmann gave his team the lead ten minutes later, batting in a loose puck during a scramble in front of the Pittsburgh's net on a delayed penalty against the Pens. Despite Fleischmann's late goal, the Capitals were unable to take a lead into the locker room, as Mark Eaton buried an errant Milan Jurcina clearing attempt at the tail end of a Penguins power play, a mere 34 seconds before intermission. Kris Letang then continued Pittsburgh's onslaught early in the third, giving his team the lead once again with a rebound putback while once again on the power play. Washington answered in quick succession, however. Semin's wrist shot from the left circle deflected off Laich into the net at 5:38 of the period, just 58 seconds after Letang's strike, and then 29 seconds after that Kozlov recovered a dump-in behind Fleury's net, spun around the side and zipped a wrist shot into the top corner as Penguins defenseman Hal Gill impeded his goalie's save attempt, giving the Caps a 4-3 lead. Any one who had followed the series to that point knew a victory would not be so simple for Washington, however. Sidney Crosby, as he has done so many times this series, gave his team new life when, with less than five minutes left in regulation, he fought to the front of Varlamov's crease and knocked in a rebound to knot the score at four each. Once again, this series that has become the darling of national media headed into overtime. After a few quick rushes on each end, all seemed lost for Washington when Penguins defenseman Rob Scuderi unleashed a slap shot that beat Varlamov high blocker side. Except, instead of soundlessly hitting the netting behind Varlamov, the puck loudly clanged off the crossbar and into the corner. Given new life by the near miss, the Capitals rushed down the ice and Ovechkin unleashed a slap shot from the left point that knocked Fleury back with the impact. The Penguins goalie made the save, but the tide appeared to be turning. Fittingly, it was not one of Boudreau's high-scoring, offense-minded lines that authored the game-winning goal, but the same grind line of Steckel, Laich and Matt Bradley that has started most of the games in this series. The goal was a simple play: Steckel won the offensive-zone faceoff (his 11th faceoff win of the night out of 15, a 73% success rate) to Laich, who tapped it to Bradley along the right boards. Bradley fed it back to Laich, who put a wrist shot toward the net. In the meanwhile Steckel had rotated to the front of the net, and the man covering him, Maxime Talbot, was without a stick. A flick of the wrist, and Steckel batted Laich's shot out of the air and into the net.

And with that, the circus continues.