

Ovechkin Returns Victorious as Caps Beat Rangers

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Wednesday, 18 November 2009
Last Updated Wednesday, 18 November 2009

NEW YORK - Marian Gaborik scored two goals for the New York Rangers but could not overcome a complete team effort from the Washington Capitals, who triumphed over New York 4-2 on Tuesday night at Madison Square Garden. Alexander Ovechkin and Brooks Laich scored power play goals in the victory and Matt Bradley had the game winning goal on a third period breakaway.

The game marked the return of Alexander Ovechkin to Washington's lineup. Ovechkin had missed the previous six games with an upper-body injury and was a welcomed addition back to the lineup on the first line alongside Nicklas Backstrom.

Even though Ovechkin returned, Alexander Semin was sent back to see a doctor in Washington D.C. after practice on Monday with an undisclosed injury. Officially, Semin is listed as day-to-day, with what is believed to be a wrist injury sustained two weekend's ago versus Florida when Keith Ballard struck his wrist with a shot. Jay Beagle was called up to replace Semin.

The Rangers dominated the first minutes of the game, taking the action to the Capitals defensive zone. Semyon Varlamov, starting in goal for Washington, denied Vaclav Prospal with a glove save immediately after a Tom Poti turnover directly in front of the net. Less than a minute later, Varlamov could not control a Michael Del Zotto slap shot and Marian Gaborik was waiting on the doorstep and buried the puck behind the goalie for an early 1-0 Rangers lead and his 14th goal of the season.

A few minutes after Gaborik's goal the controversial Sean Avery had a point blank opportunity but Varlamov turned aside his shot with his left pad. The Capitals slowly settled into the first period and after a Sean Avery tripping penalty on Mike Green as he entered the offensive zone, were given a prime power-play opportunity.

Washington moved the puck well and Ovechkin announced himself back to full strength by blasting a slap shot past Henrik Lundqvist to tie the score at 1-1 to notch his 15th goal of the season. Lundqvist was screened by several players, including his own defender, and never really saw the shot. The Capitals outshot the Rangers 15-5 in the first period and controlled the action late even though they could only muster the one goal.

Under coach's orders both teams tightened up defensively in the second period, especially in the neutral zone as the game became less free flowing. Green was able to generate an offensive opportunity ripping a slap shot from the point but Lundqvist made a great glove save to deny him at the three-minute mark. On the next shift, Christopher Higgins missed the net while flying down the right hand side of the. Varlamov did a good job closing down the shooting angles on Higgins as the shot sailed high and wide of the net.

Finally, the Caps were able to break through the tie at the 15:44 mark on the power play behind the extra effort by Laich. Chris Clark took a feed from Ovechkin and threw the puck at the net. The puck was deflected by Green towards the net and Lundqvist made the initial save but Laich jammed at the puck and put it between Lundqvist's legs into the net to give Washington a 2-1 lead. It was Laich's 9th goal of the season and an important goal in the game to give Washington the second intermission lead.

The Rangers had the first great chance of the third period when Aaron Voros jumped off the bench and fed former Capitals enforcer Donald Brashear but the puck jumped over Brashear's stick as he attempted to beat Varlamov to the short side. With the Rangers scrambling in the Capitals offensive end, Quintin Lang mistimed a shot block attempt and was struck in the face. Laing left the game and the Head Coach Bruce Boudreau said after the game that he thought Laing had broken his jaw.

Unfortunately for Washington, the bad penalties reappeared as John Erskine pushed Sean Avery in retaliation and was sent to the penalty box. The Caps were able to keep the Rangers from scoring during the penalty kill but as Erskine left the penalty box Brian Pothier mugged a Rangers play behind the net in the defensive zone resulting in another penalty.

As a result of the Pothier penalty, Gaborik scored his second goal of the game from the right side of the net on a short angle, right after Lundqvist denied Brendan Morrison on a near breakaway on the other end. The angle appeared to be impossible but Gaborik somehow found the back of the net to tie the game at 2-2. Avery was credited with an assist on the Gaborik goal along with P.A. Parenteau.

After Gaborik's second goal the tempo of the game picked up significantly as both teams raced up and down the ice attempting to score the game winning goal. Lundqvist denied Matt Bradley on a near breakaway for Washington and then David Steckel missed a wide open net on the rebound, bouncing the puck off the outside of the net.

Even though Bradley could not convert early in the period, and after missing time after getting bloodied by Aaron Voros

in a first period fight, he had another chance late in the third after he stole the puck from Wade Redden and broke towards goal. Bradley flipped the puck up and over the shoulder of a stunned Henrik Lundqvist and into the back of the net to give Washington a 3-2 lead on his fourth goal of the season. The goal was assisted by Jay Beagle, his first point of the season for the victorious Capitals.

Late in the period Washington withstood a furious rally from the Rangers after pulling their goalie from the net and Brian Pothier flipped the puck down the center of the ice and into an empty net to give the Washington Capitals a 4-2 win. It was Pothier's third goal of the season and was scored unassisted.

The Capitals outshot the Rangers 25-20 on the game and with New York playing without their top two centers in Chris Drury and Brandon Dubinsky, the Caps won the faceoff battle 29-26 and also went 2-for-4 on the power play, an impressive percentage for a team who had been struggling recently on the man advantage.

The Capitals will take on three consecutive Canadian teams in their next three games. They will play the Montreal Canadiens on Friday night at 7 pm at the Verizon Center before venturing to Toronto so the NHL can feature Alexander Ovechkin and the Caps on "Hockey Night in Canada" on Saturday Night. They'll finish the span of three games with a game in Ottawa on Monday night.

Game Notes:

- Jose Theodore returned to Washington, D.C. to deal with a personal matter. Replacing him on the bench was 21-year old Michal Neuvirth, with Semyon Varlamov starting.
- Boyd Gordon (back), Milan Jurcina (lower body) and Tyler Sloan (healthy) were the scratches
- Mike Knuble (broken finger) is expected to miss 3-4 weeks. The injury occurred on Saturday night at New Jersey when he fell over the goal awkwardly.