

New York blanks Montreal

NEW YORK (AP) — Bob Brooke scored a short-handed goal in the first period and goaltender John Vanbiesbroeck collected his first career playoff shutout as the New York Rangers beat the Montreal Canadiens 2-0 Wednesday night and stayed alive in the NHL's Stanley Cup playoffs.

The Rangers' victory was their first after three losses in the best-of-7 Wales Conference final and sent the series back to Montreal for Game 5 Friday night.

Wednesday night's game was a dramatic contrast to Monday night's 4-3 overtime victory by Montreal, with a lot more rough and stop-and-go play. In the second period alone, 17 penalties were called, including 10 for roughing and fighting. There were 40 penalties in the game, including five majors and two misconducts.

The Rangers got all the scoring they needed with Brooke's first-period goal at 16:56.

Montreal was on a power play after New York right wing Bob Crawford was penalized for high-sticking at 15:09. Rangers defenseman Tom Laidlaw dumped the puck behind the Montreal net and Canadiens goaltender Patrick Roy attempted to clear it.

Roy and teammate Chris Chelios, however, were unable to control the puck as Brooke came sailing into the faceoff circle and swept in a 20-foot backhand for his sixth goal of the playoffs.

Don Maloney, who assisted on the goal, broke Rod Gilbert's team record for career playoff assists with his 34th.

With the Rangers' defenders and Vanbiesbroeck stymying the Canadiens time and again, that 1-0 lead stood up until Tomas Sandstrom scored the clincher at 13:28 of the third period.

Flames keep quiet about game plan

ST. LOUIS (AP) — If Calgary has come up with a special formula for beating the St. Louis Blues goaltenders, Flames Coach Bob Johnson — who is forever mixing up new combinations of X's and O's — is not saying what it is.

Johnson was asked whether the Flames consciously adjusted to the radically different styles of Blues goalies Rick Wamsley and Greg Millen.

"I can't answer that," Johnson snapped, not wanting to tip his hand or rile the Blues after they lost to the Flames 5-3 Tuesday night in the third game of the NHL Stanley Cup semifinals.

Asked a similar question later, Johnson acknowledged making some alterations in Calgary's game plan, but was quick to add: "They're both good. I respect them both."

Millen, who was in net Tuesday night, roams freely. He doesn't hesitate to come out to challenge shooters or to clear loose pucks. Wamsley prefers to stay back and let the play come to him.

Throughout the playoffs, Blues Coach Jacques Demers has nudged his goalies, not announcing who would play until game time. And Demers' tack has been successful — first against the Minnesota North Stars and then the Toronto Maple Leafs.

TANK McNAMARA

by Jeff Millar & Bill Hinds



Bucks grab series lead

Milwaukee stymies Philadelphia 113-108

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Paul Pressey scored 13 of his 23 points in the fourth quarter and Terry Cummings converted three free throws in the last 14 seconds, boosting Milwaukee to a 113-108 victory over Philadelphia Wednesday night and giving the Bucks a 3-2 edge in their NBA playoff series.

Game 6 of the best-of-seven Eastern Conference semifinal series is

scheduled for Friday in Philadelphia. If the 76ers win that game, the seventh meeting would be in Milwaukee Sunday.

Wednesday's game was marked by physical play from both teams, and Philadelphia's Charles Barkley and Paul Mokeski had two scuffles in the fourth quarter.

A Bobby Jones basket with 44 seconds to go left the Bucks ahead 110-108, but two Cummings free throws

gave the Bucks a 112-108 lead with 14 seconds remaining.

After a Philadelphia timeout, Julius Erving's turnaround basket fell short and the 76ers fouled Cummings, who converted another free throw to make the score 113-108 with three seconds left.

Cummings finished with 23 points. Barkley led Philadelphia with 29 points, and Maurice Cheeks added 27.

Denver may be without key personnel for crucial game

DENVER (AP) — The Denver Nuggets have fallen behind 3-2 in the NBA best-of-seven series after a humiliating blowout in Houston, and now must try to stave off elimination in Game 6 here Thursday night without, perhaps, the services of two key players.

The situation looks desperate indeed, but for those who have followed the Nuggets' fortunes, one thing is clear: The Nuggets feel they have the Houston Rockets right where they want them.

It is a reflection of the Nuggets' perverse nature that they play best under adverse circumstances. In the first-round series against Portland, the Nuggets split the first two games at home, giving the Trail Blazers an advantage. But Denver, which had played poorly on the road all season, then went to Portland and swept both games there.

"We never do things the easy way," said Denver guard Mike Evans. "We always try to find the hard way. We always seem to have our backs to the wall."

Even the magnitude of Tuesday night's 131-103 loss wasn't expected to bother Denver.

"That's the funny thing about this team," said Coach Doug Moe. "We get killed, and we come back and

play well. It has happened time and again. Losing by a big margin seems to make us play better the next game. Maybe it's an indication of our character, or the fact that these guys are pretty loose."

The Nuggets were pounded 119-101 in Game 2 of this series, and responded with two solid performances in winning both games in Denver.

Can they do it again? All bets are off pending the status of Calvin Natt and Bill Hanzlik.

Natt, Denver's second-leading scorer who has been hobbled by a groin injury, played only 11 minutes of Game 5, hitting only one of eight shots from the floor. "I don't have any strength in my left leg," said Natt. "I had some shots blocked (Tuesday) because I just couldn't push off my leg the way I need to. Hopefully I'll play (Thursday), but I don't know."

Hanzlik, Denver's valuable sixth man who did a superb defensive job on Ralph Sampson in Game 4 despite a nine-inch height disadvantage, said the acute lower back strain that sidelined him for most of the Portland series has worsened.

"I couldn't get loose," he said after

Game 5, when he played just nine minutes, missing all four of his field-goal tries. "If it's this tight, I'm not helping the team by playing."

Doctors prescribed rest for both players, and their availability for Thursday night's game probably won't be known until just before game time.

Regardless of the injured players' status, Moe knows his team can't win if it stands around on offense the way it did Tuesday night.

"That was the worst display of basketball I've ever seen," he said. "It was worse than the second game. We can't beat anybody unless we move the ball offensively. We can't take quick shots every time."

The Rockets, meanwhile, are anxious to put an end to the Nuggets' misery.

"We have to put in our minds that the next game is the last game," said forward Rodney McCray. "I don't look forward to a seventh game anywhere."

Added Sampson, who scored 33 points and grabbed 17 rebounds Tuesday night. "The next game is a must win for Denver, but it's a must win for us, too, because we don't want to extend the series."

Mavericks need fans, free throws

DALLAS (AP) — The Dallas Mavericks get the Los Angeles Lakers back in rowdy Reunion Arena Thursday night but even their frantic fans can't help the Mavericks make the free throws needed to even their NBA playoff series against the defending champions.

Dallas Coach Dick Motta said the Mavericks did everything right in a 116-113 loss in Game 5 on Tuesday night — except hit free throws. They missed 15.

"We just didn't hit our free throws. Period," Motta said.

Motta was bombarded the heavily favored Lakers with a thick dose of psychology since the series started. He wouldn't back off even though his team now trails the best-of-seven series 3-2.

"We are outstunning them and outplaying them. The series should be 4-1 right now, in our favor," Motta said. "I am not playing head games. I'm just telling the truth. They've got a tiger by the tail."

If so, Lakers Coach Pat Riley fig-

ures the tiger has some broken fangs.

"They've got their work cut out for them," he said. "It seems like that ball was getting a little heavy for them at the free-throw line."

He added, "It's going to get heavier."

Mark Aguirre, who hit 3-of-6 free throws, said the missed free throws spread through the whole team.

"It just gets contagious missing free throws," he said. "It gets in your head. We'll make our free throws in Dallas."

The loss meant Motta is 0-16 in the Forum in NBA playoff games during his career.

The Mavs, who defeated the Lakers in nail-biters on Friday and Sunday, shoot better before their usual sellout of 17,007 fans.

"Maybe the home-court advantage means that extra two to three points," said Dallas center James Donaldson. "It's certainly been the case so far. It'll be interesting to see what happens in Dallas."

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