

They Blue It!; Senators play better, but give up four goals in the third period ... Following the Tkachuk connections around the NHL ... Learn how to put on 18 pounds in the summer ... Abramov seeing lots of ice time ... Playing against No. 2 goalies may become a regular thing

Ottawa Sun

October 11, 2019 Friday, Final Edition

Copyright 2019 Ottawa Sun All Rights Reserved

Section: SPORTS; Pg. S30; Senators

Length: 1422 words

Byline: Ken Warren, Ottawa Sun

Body

The Ottawa Senators hung around against the defending Stanley Cup champion St. Louis Blues for almost a full three periods Thursday, but D.J. Smith's first win behind the bench is going to have to wait awhile longer.

After a wild and wacky and third period, the Blues skated out of Canadian Tire Centre with a 6-4 victory, extending the Senators losing streak to three games to start the season.

David Perron's second goal of the game, with 5:06 remaining - a shot that Senators goaltender Anders Nilsson should have had - broke the 4-4 deadlock. Ryan O'Reilly then iced the game with an empty net goal with 1:16 to go.

"Obviously, I'm not happy with my own performance, letting in five goals, you're never satisfied as a goalie," said Nilsson. "I had some moments where I felt good and some moments where I felt I need to improve my game and be a little better...a little up and down."

It was a rough finish in what had been a spirited effort by the Senators. With 5:48 to go, Anthony Duclair had brought the Senators back into a 4-4 tie with his first of the season, an impressive rally after the Senators had yielded a 3-2 lead on earlier third period goals by Jay Bouwmeester and Brayden Schenn. Giving up six is never a good thing and the Senators have yielded 15 goals in only three games, but there were encouraging signs for a team that did respond, in many ways, to Smith's challenge for a better work ethic and a more physical approach.

An experienced squad like the Blues pounced on the errors when they presented themselves, but at least the Senators gave themselves a fighting chance this time around.

The Senators deserve credit for a quick start and not giving in to the Blues's second-period rally, carrying a 3-2 lead into the third period.

Chris Tierney broke the 2-2 deadlock with 2:11 left in the second on a brilliant shorthanded effort, fighting off a Alex Pietrangelo check to roof a shot over Blues goaltender Jake Allen. "I liked our resilience, for sure," Tierney said. "We didn't quit on the game. We were pushing for the full 60 (minutes). When we got down, we would find a way to tie it up again."

Like Nilsson in the Senators net, Allen delivered a mixed bag of a performance, a night littered with superb stops and shaky work around his net.

Allen's misplay of the puck behind the net led directly to Vitaly Abramov's first NHL goal at the 8:10 mark.

They Blue It!; Senators play better, but give up four goals in the third period ... Following the Tkachuk connections around the NHL ... Learn how to put on 18

Abramov, recalled from Belleville of the AHL on Sunday and playing in only his second NHL game, had nothing but net to look at after receiving the Scott Sabourin pass.

Strong forechecking and a fantastic shot from Artem Anisimov padded the lead to 2-0 with 53 seconds remaining in a first period that was interrupted by the repair of a pain of glass.

The first period effort was everything that Smith had asked for since Saturday's 4-1 loss to the New York Rangers, when he was outspoken about the need to work and hit harder in order to have any hope of success.

At times, the Senators had the defending Stanley Cup champions on their heels.

The only thing disappointing for the Senators at the outset were the numerous empty seats in the building. The official attendance was announced at 9,024.

The tide turned in the second after Allen made a ridiculous trapper save off Tyler Ennis, only seconds after he stymied Tkachuk and Colin White on a 2-on-0 break. If the puck went in, the Senators would have been up 3-0.

Instead, nine minutes into the second, Perron started a Blues wave, ripping a shot from the faceoff circle on a power play to make it 2-1, with his first goal of the game. Only 2:25 later, Oskar Sundqvist tied the game off a faceoff.

Meanwhile, Nilsson, making his first start of the season, needed to be sharp to bail to cover up for the miscues in front of him. Abramov, Brady Tkachuk and Bobby Ryan were all guilty of putting their goaltender in bail out mode.

Of course, the Blues were doing what they do so often, leaning on their opponents over and over again, wearing them down with relentless pressure.

"We wanted the guys to play hard," said Smith, who believes his young team will learn from the avoidable turnovers they made in the third period. "That's a very good hockey team over there. I thought we played hard. On another night, maybe we get a better result."

BRADY'S BUNCH

Tkachuk's connection to St. Louis - and the Blues connection to the Tkachuk family - is always an underlying theme when these teams meet.

The links go on and on and on.

Let's begin with Blues forward Robert Thomas, who missed Thursday's game due to an upper body injury. He lives in the basement of the Tkachuk home in St. Louis. Tkachuk's father, Keith, is part of the Blues scouting staff, meaning there are two Stanley Cup rings in the house - neither of them belonging to Brady Tkachuk or his older brother, Matthew, the Calgary Flames star.

Brady calls Thomas a member of the family.

"He's got his territory down there (in the house)," Brady said before the game. "But I'm making sure he's not getting up in my room."

When he was back home for the summer, watching the Blues run to the Cup, he said he did what he could to support the house guest, but at the pressure points, "I tried to stay out of Robbie's way".

THE TORONTO STORY

In the summer, when Brady and brother Matthew were training with former NHL star Gary Roberts in Toronto during the summer, they regularly visited Thomas's family home.

They Blue It!; Senators play better, but give up four goals in the third period ... Following the Tkachuk connections around the NHL ... Learn how to put on 18

"Occasionally, after meals (at the Roberts) we would go over there for a fourth meal," he said. "Mr. Thomas is a fantastic cook. There's always a five-course meal and the occasional dessert once in awhile."

The Senators winger insists he took it easy on the "cheat meals" of sliders and milkshakes. But now you know a secret to how he put on 18 pounds in the summer.

A LITTLE RESPECT

"He's exactly like his brother and exactly like his dad," said Blues captain Alex Pietrangelo. "Those guys are never fun to play against."...

On that subject, D.J. Smith offered up this when asked about Tkachuk's ability to set up shop around the crease: "He's just a big dude who wants to get there. It's hard to stop him. He has an unbelievable will to compete, no matter what the score. He plays right to the buzzer and it's contagious."

PLAYING TO KEEP PLAYING

Asked before the game about how much ice time Abramov might see, Smith said, "if he plays the way he's capable of playing, he could play into the teens (in minutes)." In addition to his goal, Abramov delivered plenty of energy, creating chances due to speed. Of course, he would like to take back the errant pass that set up a Blues chance early in the second and he can thank Tierney for making everyone forget about his penalty late in the second period ... Zaitsev picked up an assist on the Abramov goal, his first point with Ottawa ... Adding to Russian Night at Canadian Tire Centre, Vladislav Namestnikov registered his first point with the Senators on Anisimov's first goal with the Senators.

THE BACK-UP PLAN

Allen was in the Blues net for his first start of the season Thursday, giving Jordan Binnington a rest. It's the second straight an opponent's No. 1 was sitting on the bench and that pattern could be repeated all season long for the rebuilding Senators ... Allen's last 13 starts have come on the road (he saw mop-up duty at home in Game 3 of the Stanley Cup final) and his last start in St. Louis was on Jan. 8. "It's weird how the schedule has worked out, it's interesting, no question. Binnington and I) were always laughing about it last year, the way it's rolling," Allen said.

HOMETOWN PRIDE

The Blues'Enterprise Center home arena is only a long slapshot away from Busch Stadium, home of the Cardinals. Not surprisingly, the Blues are all in on the Cardinals run to the National League championship series. "They're a good team and it's pretty fun, especially when you've got a relationship with the guys over there," said Pietrangelo. "I'm so happy for them. It's a great story, isn't it? We've taken kind of similar paths to get to that point, but I guess they did it in a bit grander fashion."

The Cardinals scored 10 first-inning runs, en route to a 13-1 divisional series win over Atlanta on Wednesday... Congrats to Denis Hamel, inducted Thursday into the AHL Hall of Fame. Hamel, a Blues draft pick in 1995, scored five goals and three assists in 47 games with the Senators from 2005-07...One year ago, rookie Senators defenceman Max Lajoie scored two power play goals in a 7-4 win over Philadelphia. kwarren@postmedia.com
@Citizenkwarren !@COPYRIGHT=© 2019 Sun Media Corporation. All rights reserved.

Graphic

They Blue It!; Senators play better, but give up four goals in the third period ... Following the Tkachuk connections around the NHL ... Learn how to put on 18

Fred Chartrand, The Canadian Press; St. Louis Blues'Brayden Schenn (middle) checks Senators'Tyler Ennis (left) as teammate Brady Tkachuk carries the puck last night.; Fred Chartrand, Canadian Press; Senators goaltender Anders Nilsson controls the puck as the Blues'Sammy Blais closes in last night.;; (See hardcopy for photo);

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Document-Type: Column

Publication-Type: Newspaper

Subject: ICE HOCKEY (90%); SPORTS & RECREATION EVENTS (74%); SPORTS AWARDS (74%)

Organization: OTTAWA SENATORS (94%); ST LOUIS BLUES (94%)

Geographic: OTTAWA, ON, CANADA (59%); CANADA (59%)

Load-Date: October 11, 2019

End of Document