

Overtime victory clinches series win for Whalers

BY SCOTT DANIEL
STAFF WRITER

The Plymouth Whalers proved March Madness isn't limited to the hardwood Sunday at Compuware Arena.

Looking to close out their first round Ontario Hockey League playoff series with Sarnia, the Whalers' Randy Fitzgerald scored 30 seconds into overtime to give his team a 2-1 victory. Yuri Babenko and Julian Smith assisted on the left winger's first goal of the playoffs, which came on his scramble in front of the Sting's net.

"I give the credit to those three guys," coach Peter DeBoer said.

HOCKEY

"It was a great goal."

The Whalers took the best-of-seven series, four games to one. Plymouth will likely face London (Ont.) or Belleville (Ont.) Friday on the road in the second round.

"Whoever we play," DeBoer said, "it'll be a heck of a tough series."

Sunday's game with Sarnia wasn't a picnic, either. The Sting clearly had the jump in the first period. Whalers' goalie Robert Esche turned away 13 Sarnia shots to keep the game scoreless heading into the first break.

"He kept us in the game," DeBoer said. "He made some big saves. Robert's playing like he has to for us to be successful."

While the Whalers did manage 10 shots on net in the first period, the coach said his team wasn't sharp in the first period.

"It was a matter of being a little flat," DeBoer admitted. "We had an emotional win in Sarnia last night. It was the first time we had won there in two years. I think there was bound to be an emotional letdown."

Plymouth showed more energy from the opening face off in the second period. The Whalers applied solid pressure on Sarnia's net. The first 1:30 of the period, but were unable to score.

It was the Sting who broke through first.

Greg Willers drilled a low, hard shot from the left point after a face off deep in Plymouth's zone. Jon Sim and Darryl Knight assisted on the goal, which came at the 15:25 mark.

The Whalers continued to play a strong period despite the tally. Finally, with just more than 10 minutes gone, Sergei Fedotov put Plymouth on the scoreboard, rifling a shot past sting goalie Greg Hewitt from about 30 feet directly in front of the net. Babenko and Steve Wasylko assisted on the power-play goal. Fedotov's second goal of the playoffs.

Plymouth continued to apply pressure. Harold Druken got a good backhand shot off moments after Fedotov's tally, but Hewitt was quick enough to kick it away.

It wasn't until the third period that the 1-1 tie was broken. Both squads played it conservatively, but Plymouth appeared to take things in hand with about 11

minutes gone by when Troy Smith scored unassisted on a soft shot from the right point.

The visitors fought back to tie it less than two minutes later. Jeff Heerema beat Esche on a high shot to the stick side, a shot that Esche appeared to be screened on. That virtually ended all scoring chances. Both teams appeared content to play for overtime.

But it didn't take long to settle the matter in OT. The puck squirted into Sarnia's zone from the opening face off. Thirty seconds later, Fitzgerald became the hero with his clutch goal.

Which didn't come as a huge surprise to DeBoer. "Randy Fitzgerald has been great all playoffs," the coach commented. "We call him the Claude Lemieux of the OHL because he gets under everybody's skin. But those character guys come to the

forefront when you need them."

After 14 games in 24 days, DeBoer said the time between series will help his club. "We're tired," he said. "We need this break. Not starting until Friday will be great for us."

The Whalers will have a different frame of mind going into their second series, he added. "We gained some confidence," he said. "We were mentally fragile coming into the playoffs. Now, I think we're on a good high."

PLYMOUTH 7 SARNIA 2: The two teams met Saturday night in Sarnia with the Whalers picking up where they left off Thursday (a 7-1 Whaler victory). Plymouth took a 3-1 lead after one period on goals by Eric Gooly, Wasylko and Paul Mara and increased it to 5-1 with two second period goals by Druken. Wasylko netted his second of the game, and Andrew Taylor added another in the third.

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KATHRYN A. DORNAN
City Clerk

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Proposals shall be made in the form of a bid price and a site development plan for the purchase and development of City of Farmington Hills owned property located on Orchard Lake Road, south of Rockshire, Sidwell #23-14-178-002; 23-14-178-003; 23-14-178-004; 23-14-178-005; 23-14-178-006; 23-14-178-007; 23-14-178-008; 23-14-178-009; 23-14-178-010; 23-14-178-011; 23-14-178-012; 23-14-178-013; 23-14-178-014; 23-14-178-015; 23-14-178-016; 23-14-178-017; 23-14-178-018; 23-14-178-019; 23-14-178-020; 23-14-178-021; 23-14-178-022; 23-14-178-023; 23-14-178-024; 23-14-178-025; 23-14-178-026; 23-14-178-027; 23-14-178-028; 23-14-178-029; 23-14-178-030; 23-14-178-031; 23-14-178-032; 23-14-178-033; 23-14-178-034; 23-14-178-035; 23-14-178-036; 23-14-178-037; 23-14-178-038; 23-14-178-039; 23-14-178-040; 23-14-178-041; 23-14-178-042; 23-14-178-043; 23-14-178-044; 23-14-178-045; 23-14-178-046; 23-14-178-047; 23-14-178-048; 23-14-178-049; 23-14-178-050; 23-14-178-051; 23-14-178-052; 23-14-178-053; 23-14-178-054; 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