

Whalers from page D1

"We've come from two-goal deficits twice now," said DeBoer. "We had carried the play up to that point. But they got some momentum, and they're a momentum team."

Although the Whalers may have relinquished command for

a short time, they refused to give it up for long.

The first half of the game had all the makings of a defensive struggle, the only goal a power-play blast from the left point by James Wisniewski (from Canton), assisted by Cole Jarrett

and Tomas Kurka, with 11:13 left in the first period.

That 1-0 lead stood up until Windsor found its range in the second period. A defensive lapse by the Whalers led to the Spits first goal; Ahren Nieto took a pass to the right of Plymouth goalie Rob Zopp and skated in unchallenged, knocking the puck past Zopp from right in front of the net to tie it at 1-1 with 8:47 left. Steve Hildenbrand and Jason Spezza assisted.

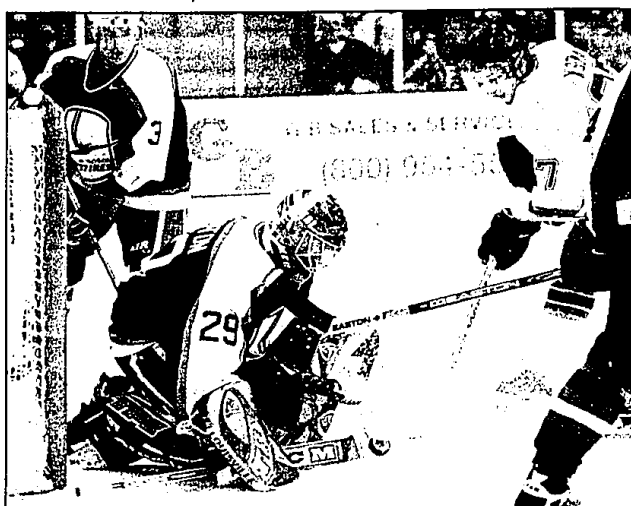
Nineteen seconds later, Spezza — the OHL's second-leading scorer during the regular season — got loose on a breakaway from center ice and made a pretty play to beat Zopp between his pads, giving the Spits a 2-1 lead. Hildenbrand assisted.

With 7:47 left in the period, Mather pounced on a Whalers giveaway in their own end and drilled it past Zopp, increasing Windsor's lead to 3-1. Craig Kennedy and Timo Hebling assisted. Three shots, three goals.

But instead of building something substantial on that surge, it served only to signify Windsor's end. A tripping penalty put the Spits' Tim Gleason in the box with 7:30 left in the second; 33 seconds later, Jarrett's shot from the point eluded Windsor goalie Mike Leighton and it was a 3-2 game. Wisniewski and Kurka assisted on the power-play goal.

With 6:10 remaining in the period, Windsor's Steve Ott went to the box for tripping, giving Plymouth another power-play opportunity. The Whalers cashed it in (they were 3-of-8 with the extra-man; Windsor was 0-for-6), with Kurka carrying the puck from the right point in close before unleashing a shot that found its target, tying it at 3-3 with 4:25 left. Jarrett and Weiss assisted.

The momentum the Spitsfire had gained was gone, Weiss made sure of it, ignoring his



Playoff action: The Whalers' Chad Wiseman tries to push the puck past Spitsfire goalie Mike Leighton during an Ontario Hockey League playoff game.

coach's demands to come off the ice for a shift change while the Whalers were shorthanded with 12 minutes left in the third. Instead, Weiss skated in front of a Windsor pass and broke in free on Leighton, the closest skater to him Wiseman.

Instead of challenging the Spitsfire goalie, Weiss dropped the puck back to Wiseman, who lifted it into the goal to make it 4-3 with 11:53 remaining. And that was good enough.

"We've taken our game to a different level," said DeBoer. "We didn't play well the last week of the season, and I think some people doubted us. They thought Sarnia would take us."

The Sting couldn't do it. And it looks like Windsor won't, either.

Whalers rally to win

It had to happen sometime. For the first time in this season's playoffs, the Plymouth Whalers found themselves trailing.

After one period Sunday at Windsor, the Spitsfires were ahead of Plymouth, 2-0.

That lead didn't stand up for long, however. The Whalers struck for four goals in the second period and that was enough to post a 4-2 triumph, giving them a 2-0 lead in the series.

Although Plymouth outshot Windsor, 11-4 in the opening period, it was the Spitsfires who

found the net as both Shawn Mather and Steve Ott put the puck behind Whaler goalie Rob Zopp.

That all changed in the second period. Chad Wiseman scored twice in a 22-second span for Plymouth, one goal unassisted and the other assisted by Tomas Kurka and Stephen Weiss, to knot it at 2-2.

Weiss, who finished with three points in the game, got the go-ahead goal with 4:51 left in the second (assisted by Karl Stewart). Kris Vernarsky added a power-play goal, assisted by James Wisniewski (from Canton) and Weiss, 1:23 later to make it 4-2.

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