

# Whalers go belly-up, losing OHL championship to 67's

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Sure, four is the key number in a best-of-seven playoff series. Win four games, you win the title.

But two — that proved pretty significant as well in the Plymouth Whalers-vs.-Ottawa 67's series, with the Ontario Hockey League championship at stake.

The 67's pulled off the upset, capturing the title with a 2-1 win Tuesday in front of a crowd of 9,029 at Ottawa's Civic Arena. They won the series, four games to two.

The win allows Ottawa to advance to the Memorial Cup, a tournament featuring the champions of the other two Canadian junior hockey leagues and the host city's team. The Cup begins Saturday in Regina, Saskatchewan, with the 67's facing the host Regina Pats.

Two goals — Ottawa's total in the title-clinching game — was an obvious numerical allusion.

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But both Ottawa goals came in the second period. And the win was also Ottawa's second-straight victory in this series; neither team had managed to win back-to-back games until Tuesday.

The 67's, who finished second in the OHL's East Division behind the Belleville Bulls, scored the game's first two goals and then held off a late Whaler charge.

After a scoreless first period, Ottawa came alive in the second. When Whaler defenseman Libor Utrnul could not clear the puck from his zone, the 67's pounced. A somewhat weak backhand shot by Vadim Sotnikov eluded Whaler goalie Rob Zepp for the game's first goal, scored 6:29 into the second period. Assist went to Joe Talbot and Rodney Bauman.

A little more than four minutes later, Talbot sped into the

Whaler end and unleashed a shot from the right wing that beat Zepp, making it 2-0 with 9:04 remaining in the second. The power-play goal was assisted by Sotnikov and Jon Zion.

The Whalers, who were outshot 18-9 in the period, tried to battle back in the third. They got on the board with 8:11 remaining when Preston Mizzi finished a play that began with defenseman James Wisniewski's forcing an Ottawa turnover. The puck went to Kris Vernarsky, and he got it to Mizzi for the goal.

The Whalers still had time. And they did attack, better than they had throughout the game. But 67's goalie Seamus Kotyk turned them away.

The number two won't be a pleasant memory for the Whalers, who lost in the finals for the second year in a row.

Kotyk, who stopped 30 of 31 shots Tuesday, was named the MVP of the OHL playoffs.

Tuesday's game was the first time in the series Ottawa outshot Plymouth (35-31).

## Farmington Hills bantam champs



**Firehawks take title:** The Firehawks captured the Farmington Hills Hockey Association's Bantam championship by defeating the Cyclone Killer Bees, 4-1. The members of the Firehawks team are (back row, left to right) head coach Bob Mooney, Paul Mix, Emrae Mooney, Kirill Shalagin, Kyle Davis, assistant coach Jack Mix, Mike Rossiter, Paul Montagne, Brandt Williams, assistant coach Dan Davis; (front row, left to right) Yale Miller, Jeff Preuter, Andrew Eaves, Ben Pernia, Jay Gronbach (goalie), Vance Smith, David Treglown and Peter Breuhan, the team captain. Mooney, Davis and Rossiter are the assistant captains.

# Plymouth's collapse in Game 5 was turning point in series

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There was no single major fault in what must be considered one of the greatest disappointments in the Plymouth Whalers' season, their 5-4 loss to the Ottawa 67's Sunday at Compuware Arena in Gampo Five of the best-of-seven Ontario Hockey League playoffs.

Rather, there were a lot of little problems that added up to

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the Whalers blowing a three-goal lead for the first time this season.

"Ottawa has beaten us twice in here," said Whaler coach Pete DeBoer. "And we're a very good home team."

"This is one of the most unbelievable games I've been involved with. I'm sure there are things

we can do differently, but I'm not sure what they are."

This game would be a turning point for Plymouth. Simply put, it shouldn't have happened. Sixteen times during the regular season, the Whalers scored at least four goals in a game; they never lost one of them. They led after one period 37 times during the season, and lost just once (tying twice).

But against the 67's, they've gained early leads twice and lost.

"We knew they were going to come out hard, and they did," said Ottawa captain Joe Talbot, who scored the game-winning goal with 2:22 left in the third period. "We went into the (locker) room between periods and just talked it over. We said just do the simple things."

As for any emotional input, Talbot said, "I tried to get them

moving, get them a little pumped up."

Things started slipping for the Whalers in the closing minutes of the opening period. For the first 15 minutes, they played as well as they ever have, completely dominating Ottawa. It was vintage Whaler hockey.

Including their score-first-and-early approach. Just 3:12 into the game, George Nistas shot from the left of goalie Seamus Kotyk dribbled through, giving Plymouth a 1-0 lead. Rob McBride and Ryan O'Keefe assisted.

Just 41 seconds later, the Whalers made it 2-0 when Stephen Weiss skated in alone on Kotyk after wingman Tomas Kurka forced an Ottawa turnover in its own end and dished the puck to him. Weiss' shot got between Kotyk's pads;

James Wisniewski (from Canton) also assisted.

One of the few mistakes Plymouth made in the early going was a failure to score with a two-man advantage. Not that they didn't challenge, Wisniewski in particular banging a couple of shots right on net, but Kotyk was equal to task.

The opening period was more than half over before the 67's got their first shot on goal — and that came when they had the power play. Indeed, in their two man-advantage situations in the first period, they totaled just two shots on goal.

The Whalers made it 3-0 with 6:23 to go in the first period when Kris Vernarsky passed back to Chad LaRose, who had kept the puck in Ottawa's zone, for the finish.

The 67's second shot on goal

(compared to Plymouth's 14) didn't come until 3:20 remained in the period, but less than a minute later Sean Scully — who had not scored a goal in the playoffs — flipped a shot over Whaler goalie Rob Zepp's left shoulder; it deflected in off the crossbar, making it 3-1 with 2:32 left. Rodney Bauman and Bryan Rodney assisted.

Ottawa pulled to within a goal with a power-play goal by Talbot, who knocked in a rebound with 14:59 left in the second period.

But Wisniewski re-established the Whalers' two-goal advantage with a hard slapshot from the point on the power play, making it 4-2 with 8:59 to go in the second.

After that, things went south for the Whalers. "That's the second time we had an early lead in a game and, to Ottawa's credit, they found a way to beat us," said DeBoer. "I thought we had good legs, but we had a meltdown."

The "meltdown" began in earnest just 43 seconds after Wisniewski's goal. For the second time in the game, Zepp couldn't contain a rebound; the 67's Sebastian Savage knocked this one past him to make it 4-3 with 8:16 left in the second period.

Two minutes later, Ottawa drew even when Scully scored for the second time in the game tipping a shot past Zepp.

Although both goalies had given up four scores, it seemed Kotyk was a bit sharper, making several big saves while Zepp, who had shutout Ottawa two days earlier, was struggling. Through two periods, Plymouth had a 26-17 shot advantage.

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KATHRYN A. DORNAN  
City Clerk

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No. 1 doubles: Shamik Trivedi-Hernan Hernandez (F) def. Chris Chou-Tim D'Onofrio, 6-3, 6-3; No. 2: Robert Savich-Mike Bloom (W) def. Raj Beni-Mike Schuyler, 6-0, 6-0; No. 3: Mike Jones-Ruben Avery (W) def. Adam Lidger-Harinder Gill, 6-2, 6-3; No. 4: Kate Meyer-Stephen Wayne (F) def. Bryan Foster-David Naps, 6-3, 6-3.

Dismal record: Farmington, 5-0-3 overall, 4-4-3 WLAA.

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