

# Whalers even series with OT win Home ice no advantage for Whalers

This will not be a series for the weak at heart. If the first three games didn't prove it, Game No. 4 of the Plymouth Whalers vs. London Knights best-of-seven Ontario Hockey League playoff set sure did. After peppering London goalie Chris Houle throughout the overtime period, Karl Stewart finally knocked the rebound of a Cole Jarrett shot past Houle to give Plymouth a 3-2 OT win at London's John Labatt Centre.

The win evened the series at two wins apiece and kept a few other oddities in place. All four games have been decided by a single goal, both teams having scored 10 goals. Neither team

has won on its home ice, and the team that has scored first in each game has emerged with the victory.

Game No. 5 will be at 7:30 p.m. Friday at Plymouth's Compuware Arena.

The Whalers were playing without their top two scorers. Chad LaRose was issued a three-game suspension mid-way through the second game in the series for a high-stick penalty; Ryan Ramsay is out with a hip-pointer. Ramsay could return Friday; LaRose will be back Sunday in London.

Defenceman Cole Jarrett, who led Plymouth with a goal and two assists, got the

Whalers started with a power-play goal (from Chris Thorburn and James Wisniewski) at 7:37 of the first period. London tied it on Corey Perry's power-play score at 11:14 of the first.

Plymouth regained the lead on John Vigilante's power-play goal 10:51 into the second (assists to Thorburn and Jarrett), but the Knights tied it again on Jimmy Hall's goal 2:25 into the third.

Stewart's game-winner came following a Jarrett shot 10:01 into the OT. Thorburn also assisted.

The Whalers had a 41-26 shot advantage, including an 8-4 edge in OT.

It seems any advantage the Plymouth Whalers may have had coming into their series against the London Knights are slowly melting away.

Home ice is no advantage, for certain. On Tuesday at Plymouth's Compuware Arena, the Whalers surrendered three third-period goals to the Knights and lost this second-round Ontario Hockey League game, 4-1. It was their second home game of the series and their second loss at home.

Corey Perry proved to be the difference for London. Playing with the man advantage, something the Knights enjoyed quite often (six penalties were called against Plymouth, three against London), Perry got his stick on a shot from the point by Mike Stathopoulos and dribbled it through the pads of Whaler goalie Paul Drew for what proved to be the game-winning goal with 5:16 left in the third period.

Perry finished with two goals and an assist, while Stathopoulos contributed a goal and two assists.

The Whalers were scored by Chris Thorburn, who scored their first two goals. Cole Jarrett and Sean Thompson had two assists apiece.

In addition, the Whalers were without the services of second-leading scorer Ryan Ramsay, suffering from a hip-pointer. Ramsay may be ready to return for Friday's game.

"That was a horrible, horrible decision by the league," said Whaler assistant coach Greg Stefan. "We'll be missing the MVP of the league for three games. It's obvious we're not going to get any calls."

"We're going to have to play over it. We have to get the momentum back."

Going into the series, Whalers' coach Mike Vellucci had preached discipline, noting Plymouth's first-round exit last season was caused by excessive penalties as much as anything else. That, apparently, is hurting the Whalers again.

In their two wins, the Knights have converted 4-of-11 power-play chances (36 percent), including 2-of-5 Tuesday. But the goal that hurt the Whalers the most came with them on the power play, at the start of the third period.

Ahead 2-1 with 1:09 remaining in a penalty to London's Kyle Piwowarczyk, Perry got possession of the puck following the face-off to open the period and found Stathopoulos open at center ice, between the Whaler defencemen. Stathopoulos went in on Drew alone, beating him over his right shoulder for the game-winning goal. Dennis Wideman also assisted on the Knights' goal.

Until then, the Whalers had dominated play. They had an 18-10 advantage in shots on goal and had, for the most part, controlled the puck. Indeed, their lead should have been something more than a single goal heading into the third.

A shot from the right-side of the slot by John Mitchell with 2:53 left in the first period appeared to get past Knights' goalie Chris Houle and into the corner of the net. The goal judge signalled a goal, but the lead official — with no apparent conversation with the goal judge — overruled and waved it off.

Asked why the goal was disallowed, Stefan could only

answer, "I don't know."

London had taken the early lead on a power-play goal by Perry at 9:51 of the opening period. With possession of the puck, no Whaler defender challenged him and Perry scored. Stathopoulos and David Bolland assisted.

The Whalers tied it just 1:23 later on a superb individual play by Thorburn. With the Knights trying to carry the puck out of their zone, Thorburn knocked it away inside their blue line, carried it to the goal and beat Houle to knot it at 1-1. Thompson and Jarrett assisted.

The go-ahead goal for Plymouth came on a break of their own, with Thompson centering the puck from behind the Knights' net to Thorburn, who seemingly managed to hit the puck off Houle and into the goal with 15:10 left in the second period. Jarrett also assisted.

In the third period, the goals came in bunches. After Stathopoulos tied it with his short-handed score, the Knights took the lead on a goal by Piwowarczyk as he and his London teammates battled in front of the Whaler goal until the puck slid past Drew with 7:23 left in the final period. Matt Weir and Marc Methot assisted.

The Whalers quickly answered once again, tying it on a pretty 3-on-2 break from their own end. Nick Vernelli sliding a pass from the right wing across to Tim Scattono on the left for the finish. Scattono's first playoff goal made it 3-3 with 6:21 remaining.

And set the stage for Perry's game-winner.

"A game like that, a one-goal game like all of these have been, there's not one turning point," said London coach Dale Hunter. "They've got a good team over there. Whoever executes is going to win this series."

If the first three games, all decided by a single goal with the visiting team winning, are any indication, whoever does win won't win by much.

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