

RANGERS RUIN CHICAGO'S STANLEY CUP PARTY

CHICAGO: Oscar Lindberg, Kevin Klein and Derek Stepan scored in the first period, and the New York Rangers ruined Chicago's Stanley Cup party with a 3-2 victory over the Blackhawks on Wednesday on the first night of the NHL season. JT Miller had two assists and Henrik Lundqvist made 32 saves for New York. Cheered on by a sellout crowd of 22,104, with many dressed in their usual red jerseys, the Blackhawks raised the banner for the franchise's sixth NHL title during a colorful pregame ceremony.

Fluorescent balls bounced around the seats and LED wristbands for the fans provided a synchronized lightshow during player introductions and highlight presentations. All-Star winger Patrick Kane, the subject of a sexual assault investigation in western New York, heard loud cheers when he skated onto the ice for the Cup celebration. Kane hasn't been charged. Artemi Panarin scored in his first NHL game for Chicago, which is trying to become the first team to successfully defend the title since Detroit in 1997-98. Teuvo Teravainen also scored, and Corey Crawford made 24 saves.

CANADIENS 3, MAPLE LEAFS 1

Carey Price made 36 saves and Montreal beat Toronto, spoiling Mike Babcock's coaching debut with the Maple Leafs. Canadiens captain Max Pacioretty scored on Montreal's first shot against Jonathan Bernier a few minutes in for the first goal of the NHL season. Alex Galchenyuk broke a tie midway through the third period, and Pacioretty added an empty-netter. James van Riemsdyk had a power-play goal for Toronto early in the second period. Babcock made the first coach's challenge in NHL history and was successful in overturning a goal. He challenged Jeff Petry's apparent goal in the second period, arguing that Tomas Plekanec interfered with Bernier.

SHARKS 5, KINGS 1

Captain Joe Pavelski had a goal and two assists, and Joonas Donskoi scored in his NHL debut for San Jose. Joe Thornton and Brent Burns had a goal and an assist apiece, and Tomas Hertl also scored as the Sharks thoroughly dominated their California rivals in Coach Peter DeBoer's successful debut. Pavelski was outstanding in his first game since being named the permanent captain of the Sharks, who won a season opener at Staples Center for the second straight year. Martin Jones made 19 saves in his own debut for the Sharks against his former team, stopping everything after the



CALGARY: Alex Burrows #14 of the Vancouver Canucks crashes the net of Karri Ramo #31 of the Calgary Flames in the NHL season opener at Scotiabank Saddledome on October 7, 2015 in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. — AFP

Kings' first shot. Nick Shore scored 1:49 into the first period.

CANUCKS 5, FLAMES 1

Daniel Sedin had a goal and two assists to lead Vancouver. Jannik Hansen, Brandon Sutter, Alex Burrows and Henrik Sedin also scored for the Canucks in a rematch of last April's Western

Conference quarterfinals. The Flames won that series in six games to advance to the second round, where they lost in five to Anaheim. Vancouver defenseman Ben Hutton recorded his first point in his NHL debut with an assist on Hansen's goal. Canucks goalie Ryan Miller made 29 saves. Jiri Hudler scored for Calgary and Karri Ramo finished with 39 saves. — AP

ENGLAND OPPORTUNITIES KNOCK FOR ALLI, WALCOTT

LONDON: Tottenham Hotspur teenager Dele Alli is one of several players hoping to make an impression when England begin their preparations for next year's European Championships against Estonia yesterday. England secured their place at Euro 2016 by beating Switzerland 2-0 last month, when Wayne Rooney became his country's all-time leading scorer, and they will be looking to record a ninth win in nine Group E games in the encounter at Wembley. With nothing riding on the game, manager Roy Hodgson may use it to test Arsenal forward Theo Walcott in a central role and could also give 19-year-old central midfielder Alli a first taste of senior international football.

"He's really pushed on," said goalkeeper Joe Hart of Alli, who signed for Spurs from Milton Keynes Dons for an initial fee of £5 million (\$7.6 million, 6.8 million euros) in February and has made four Premier League starts to date this season, scoring once. "He had a good season last season and Tottenham look like they've given him confidence by putting him in their very good side. "It's good to get him in and he's going to be in and around the England squad for a very long time." Rooney scored a late free-kick to give England a 1-0 win when the teams last met a year ago in Tallinn; a game overshadowed by the fall-out from Hodgson's claim that Raheem Sterling had told him he was too tired to play.

Sterling, who is in the squad to face Estonia, revisited the incident in a recent interview with The Guardian in which the Manchester City forward denied saying that he had not wanted to

play. Rooney is a major doubt for Friday's game after sitting out two training sessions with an ankle injury sustained during Manchester United's 3-0 defeat at Arsenal last weekend. But he is due to attend the match even if unfit in order to receive a commemorative golden boot from Bobby Charlton, whose record of 49 goals he surpassed with a penalty against Switzerland.

'There's an opportunity'

Charlton, emblem of England's 1966 World Cup-winning team, will present Rooney with the memento before kick-off, while a giant flag bearing a picture of the England captain will be passed around by supporters. Liverpool striker Danny Ings—who, like Alli, is uncapped—is nursing an ankle injury of his own, but Hodgson also has Harry Kane, Jamie Vardy and Walcott at his disposal. Walcott has impressed in a central striking role in recent weeks and Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger described his display against United as one of the best the 26-year-old has produced during his nine years at the club.

With club-mate Danny Welbeck injured and Liverpool's Daniel Sturridge easing his way back to full fitness following a long lay-off with a hip problem, Walcott is eager to seize a chance to prove himself as a potential long-term partner for Rooney. "Playing there (up front) for England, that's what I want to do," he told a press conference on Wednesday. "You want to represent your country and I know everyone would like to see me up front, but whether it's on the left or right... There's an opportunity there, definitely." — AFP

UNCONVINCING SPAIN EYE QUALIFICATION FOR EUROS

MADRID: Defending champions Spain can seal their place at next year's European Championships in France when they host minnows Luxembourg in Logrono today. However, Vicente del Bosque's men are under pressure to produce plenty of goals as well as the three points after an unconvincing campaign that has failed to dispel the doubts that his golden generation may be past its prime.

Del Bosque has been fiercely loyal to players who were a part of Spain's historic three consecutive major tournament wins between 2008 and 2012 with the country's first World Cup sandwiched between back-to-back European Championships. Yet, even the former Real Madrid boss was fiercely critical of his side's sluggish display in a 1-0 win over Macedonia last month that took them to the verge of automatic qualification.

Spain have won seven of their eight matches to lead Group C, but have managed just five goals in their last four qualifiers. "We have the responsibility to play two games, the first to ensure that we qualify and if we win the second it would be a complete week," Del Bosque told Spanish radio station Cadena SER. In the quest for goals La Roja should be boosted by the return of on-form Juventus striker Alvaro Morata in place of the suspended Diego Costa. However, despite Chelsea's poor start to the season, Costa's club team-mate Cesc Fabregas is set to keep his place in the side.

Should Fabregas feature both against Luxembourg and away to Ukraine on Monday he will become just the 10th Spanish player to reach 100 international caps, eight of which were part of the World Cup winning squad in 2010. "It would give me great satisfaction to reach that figure," he told Radio Marca. "To play 100 games in the 10 years since I made my debut is a lot. It says a lot about my contribution and the coaches that have had faith in me." Yet, Fabregas rejected that the number of centuries in the squad is a sign that more fresh blood is needed to take Spain back to the heights of recent years.

"Now we have a different team because some important players have gone, but the youngsters and those of us still here provide an important base for the team to build on. "It would be good if we can continue to be successful and in France win a third consecutive Euros." Del Bosque will be forced into naming a patched up starting line-up as two of the 100-cap brigade, Sergio Ramos and Andres Iniesta, are missing through injury. Captain Iker Casillas is expected to keep his place in goal despite David de Gea's fine form since returning to action with Manchester United. And Gerard Pique will marshal the defence despite being booed by some of the Spain support in recent matches at home for mocking Real Madrid during Barcelona's treble-winning celebrations at the end of last season. —AFP