

Sports

Blues KO Sharks in Game 6, reach first Final since '70

Blues dominated undermanned Sharks in the clincher

ST LOUIS: The worst team in the entire NHL, a few days into the new year completed an astounding turnaround Tuesday as the St. Louis Blues advanced to the Stanley Cup Final for the first time since 1970.

The team that fired its coach in November and sat dead last in the NHL when the sun rose on Jan. 3 dispatched the San Jose Sharks in a six-game Western Conference final, capped by a 5-1 home-ice victory on Tuesday. The Blues will meet the Boston Bruins in the championship round.

"A lot of us felt we were in games and close and couldn't find a way to win them," captain Alex Pietrangolo said. "We had some good honest conversations and knew we had to be better. We looked each other in the eye and we did it."

The Blues dominated the undermanned Sharks in the clincher. They now will open the Stanley Cup Final on Monday in Boston, and face the Bruins team they met the last time they went this far. That series was memorialized by Bobby Orr's winning overtime goal that he celebrated by going airborne.

David Perron collected a goal and an assist Tuesday, and Ryan O'Reilly posted three assists in the victory. "It was a special moment for all of us," said goalie Jordan Binnington, who stopped 25 shots. "We're excited and looking forward to the next round."

The Sharks, who are potentially facing major turnover before next season, were without a trio of key players. Forwards Joe Pavelski and Tomas Hertl were injured in Game 5, while defenseman Erik Karlsson was sidelined due to an apparent groin injury, and the hosts took advantage.

Perron opened the scoring just 92 seconds into the

clash and Vladimir Tarasenko netted a power-play goal with 3:44 remaining in the opening frame to stake St. Louis to a 2-0 lead. Dylan Gambrell—who drew into the San Jose lineup due to the injuries—scored his first NHL goal at the 6:40 mark of the second period to put the Sharks on the board and give them life.

However, St. Louis' Brayden Schenn quashed those hopes six minutes later when he buried a rebound for the power-play goal that snapped his goal drought at 13 games. Tyler Bozak and Ivan Barbashev iced the game with third-period goals.

St. Louis won the last three games in the series, all coming after their controversial Game 3 overtime loss in which the winning goal was scored despite an obvious hand-pass. That game appeared to galvanize the team, even if they outwardly shrugged it off at the time.

"My feeling was if we're going to win the next game we were going to win the series because we took that road," Perron said. "I'm glad we approached it that way." The Blues outscored the Sharks 12-2 in the final three games. "Their team is a hard team. I think the two hardest, heaviest teams are in the final," Sharks head coach Pete DeBoer said. "Everyone talks about skill and all the small players, and there is room for that, but I don't think it's an accident. They're heavy, hard and organized. There wasn't any room out there."

Certainly not any room for a Sharks comeback. "I was proud of our group tonight," DeBoer added. "I don't think the score reflected the work we put in. I know what the scoreboard said at the end of the night, but I felt we made them earn it. We showed up in tough circumstances and got efforts from everybody. That's all you can ask." — Reuters



ST LOUIS: Colton Parayko #55 of the St Louis Blues falls to the ice against the San Jose Sharks during the second period in Game Six of the Western Conference Finals during the 2019 NHL Stanley Cup Playoffs at Enterprise Center in St Louis, Missouri. — AFP

Bader Al-Mutawa wins best soccer player for '18-19

KUWAIT: Qadsiya SC player Bader Al-Mutawa won the Golden One award on Tuesday as the best local player for the 2018/2019 sports season, which was held under the patronage of First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Nasser Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah. Bader Al-Mutawa, in a speech after receiving the award expressed his appreciation for the recognition. He stressed that this award is an incentive for the players to provide distinctive levels in the coming seasons, thanking everyone who nominated him whether the trainers, the public, or media figures. He believed that this win represents a win for all players and wished the award continued to promote local athletes in football. — KUNA



Bader Al-Mutawa (right) receives the Golden One award.

US Embassy holds free youth soccer clinic by professional coaches

By Faten Omar

KUWAIT: The Public Affairs Section at the US Embassy in Kuwait held a free youth soccer clinic by professional US coaches at East Jahra football field on Tuesday. The clinic, for boys and girls between the ages of 8-21, featured three coaches from the United States who are visiting Kuwait as part of a Sports Diplomacy Program sponsored by the US Embassy in Kuwait.

Cultural Attache at the US Embassy Nelson Wen said: "The US Embassy offers a range of academic and cultural exchange programs to create bonds and understanding between the people of Kuwait and the United States. So we bring musicians, artists and others to share their experiences, including in the sports field, which promotes a healthy lifestyle and develops leadership and teamwork."

He added that the Sports Diplomacy Program is one of the exchange programs offered by the US Department of State that brings top athletes and coaches from the United States to share their knowledge and experiences with coaches

and players from around the world. "We have organized a panel discussion on sports marketing at Kuwait Club which is open to the public, and anyone who has a sports business can join. We have another clinic at Kuwait Sports Club with Basma Al-Ayoub. Also, we will be participating in the women's football tournament today," Wen said.

Lisa Berg, who is a US soccer scout for the US women's youth national teams and coaching with Club Atletico Zacatepec and Academia Satelite Futsat in Mexico, said: "This one-week program is about connecting Americans with Kuwaiti coaches, where we came from the United States to share knowledge and experiences with coaches and players of Kuwait."

Sarah Huffman, former US women's national team player and a test analyst for Nike, affirmed that the program allows them to play football with boys and girls and talk with them about empowering women and the different opportunities that they may have. Huffman expressed her happiness to visit Kuwait, saying: "This is my first time in Kuwait. The people are very nice, welcoming and have a lot of energy."

"We have a two-year scholarship by the US embassy including entertainment and educational activities for students, in addition to learning English and cultural exchanges between the two countries. I see the students benefiting from the program, where they practice English with native speakers," said Khalid, an English teacher at Atlas Training Institute who is in charge of the program for Jahra students. Captain Suhail, Technical



A group photo. — Photos by Yasser Al Zayyat



Sarah Huffman training the boys.

Manager at Sporty Academy, revealed 18 boys are participating in the program. "We hope in the future to include girls," he added.

The athletes and coaches who visit other countries under the Sports Diplomacy Program are called sports

envoys. These envoys represent a variety of sports, from Olympic sports to adventure sports and sports for people with disabilities. Last year, the US Embassy brought a gold medal coach to train the wheelchair basketball team at the Kuwait Disabled Sports Club.

Kroos, Ter Stegen sit out Germany qualifiers

BERLIN: Injured La Liga pair Toni Kroos and Marc-Andre ter Stegen are the biggest names missing from the 22-man Germany squad named yesterday for next month's Euro 2020 qualifiers. Midfielder Kroos, who has just signed a new Real Madrid contract keeping him at the club until 2023, and Barcelona goalkeeper Ter Stegen sit out the qualifiers, away to Belarus on June 8 and then home to Estonia three days later in

Mainz, with leg injuries.

Germany are unbeaten in Group C and sit second behind leaders Northern Ireland after a 3-2 away win in their opening game against the Netherlands in March. Captain Manuel Neuer has been included "for now", say the German Football Association (DFB), but the Bayern Munich goalkeeper has been carrying a calf injury and missed the last five games of the German league season.

The Bavarians are hoping Neuer can play in the German Cup final in Berlin on Saturday against RB Leipzig with the newly-crowned Bundesliga champions hoping to clinch the domestic double.

Germany's 22-man squad for Euro 2020 qualifiers against Belarus and Estonia in June:

Goalkeepers: Manuel Neuer (Bayern Munich),

Bernd Leno (Arsenal/ENG), Kevin Trapp (Eintracht Frankfurt)

Defenders: Matthias Ginter (Borussia Moenchengladbach), Marcel Halstenberg (RB Leipzig), Jonas Hector (Cologne), Thilo Kehrer (Paris SG/FRA), Lukas Klostermann (RB Leipzig), Nico Schulz (Hoffenheim), Niklas Stark (Hertha Berlin), Niklas Sule (Bayern Munich), Jonathan Tah (Bayer Leverkusen)

Midfielders: Julian Brandt (Bayer Leverkusen), Julian Draxler (Paris SG/FRA), Serge Gnabry (Bayern Munich), Leon Goretzka (Bayern Munich), Ilkay Gundogan (Manchester City/ENG), Kai Havertz (Bayer Leverkusen), Joshua Kimmich (Bayern Munich), Marco Reus (Borussia Dortmund), Leroy Sane (Manchester City/ENG)

Forward: Timo Werner (RB Leipzig). — AFP

FIFA faces fan backlash over seating at women's WCup

PARIS: World soccer governing body FIFA is facing a backlash on social media from fans who bought multiple tickets for next month's women's World Cup in France only to discover that their seats were not together.

Supporters with tickets for the June 7-July 7 showpiece were allowed to download and print them on Monday and a number of parents have since complained that seats have been allocated in such a way that they cannot sit with their children.

The tournament organisers initially released a statement saying they could not change seat allocations except for parents with children under the age of 18 who were not seated together.

In a subsequent statement organisers said less than 1% of fans with tickets for the semi-finals and final were facing seat-allocation issues.

"The previous tweets regarding FIFA Women's World Cup tickets allocation were published without a full understanding of the situation and we apologise for that," organisers said in a statement <https://twitter.com/FIFAWWC/status/1130624973247328256> on Twitter.

"The issues were faced by less than 1% of fans requesting tickets for the semi-finals and the final. FIFA and the local organising committee are confident the problems will be solved and fans will be able to enjoy the matches as they envisaged."

The assurances did not calm supporters on social media, who suggested the problem was far more widespread and demanded organisers resolve the issue. Twitter user Gareth James complained he would have to sit separately from his two daughters and would not attend the game if their seats were not reallocated.

"How will (the problems) be solved? Me and my daughters aged 11 and 13 have tickets that are not together, so will not be able to attend," he tweeted <https://twitter.com/gisjames25/status/1130658364243886080>. A fan named Mike Swanson said he had been crushed to discover that his family of five, which includes three children, would be spread over three different rows.

"This was to be a family trip and we can't even sit together as a family," he said in a tweet. "What a disappointment. Not a happy customer."

FIFA released a statement later on Tuesday saying they were still working on a solution. "FIFA and the local organising committee are... doing everything they can to ensure that families will always be seated together at each and every match," the statement said.

"Of the 1.3 million tickets on sale for the tournament it is estimated that not having side-by-side seats will affect only a very small number of fans." The women's World Cup semi-finals and final will be held in Lyon. — Reuters