

Graceful Swede Gradin joins ring of honour

By Gordon McIntyre, The Province January 24, 2011

There was a buzz in the air at Canucks training camp in the fall of 1978.

A new coach, wise-cracking Harry Neale, was running the bench, Ron Sedlbauer was gearing up to score 40 goals that season and sophomore Jere Gillis, the fourth overall pick in the 1977 NHL entry draft, was expected to improve upon his impressive 23-goal rookie campaign.

No one paid much attention to a line of rookies thrown together in Duncan as camp got underway, not until they lined up against the Canucks' top line during scrimmage play and began putting pucks in the net.

Thomas Gradin, between Curt Fraser and Stan Smyl, formed as unlikely a trio as you'll find. They played as a unit for 4½ years, leading the Canucks in point production the whole way, before Fraser was traded to Chicago.

Stan Smyl's No. 12 has been hanging from the rafters for almost 20 years and tonight Gradin's likeness will be etched onto the Canucks' ring of honour.

"Frazzi" was the cop, making opponents pay for the liberties they took with Gradin.

"Steamer" dug pucks out of the corner, whacked away at them in front of the net, made the hits along the boards.

Gradin was the graceful one, a Swedish Jean Beliveau-type who epitomized Hemingway's definition of guts: Grace under pressure.

Fraser remembers, with a laugh, a line by The Province's Tony Gallagher back in the day, that Gradin would be a superstar if he didn't have to play with those two plumbers.

"The dynamics worked," Fraser said a couple days ago, before heading out to run practice for Detroit's farm team.

Training camp in those days was a world removed from what goes on in September now, and that camp in Duncan was particularly thuggish, with so many players fighting to gain a roster spot.

"But it didn't bother Thomas at all," Fraser, now head coach of the AHL's Grand Rapids Griffins, said. "He was a good, good player and he must kept getting better and better.

"Suddenly, four years later we were in the Stanley Cup and Thomas was a key piece of that."

A moment from Game 1 of the 1982 Stanley Cup final against the Islanders stands out as a metaphor for Gradin's career.

He'd already scored the Canucks' first goal and was skating the puck into the Isles zone when defenceman Gordie Lane gave him a vicious hook to the throat.

Gradin scored on the ensuing power play to even the game 2-2.

That's the way it was with the gentle Swede, opponents in that goon era doing all they could to get him off his game and none succeeding.

Lord knows what he thought as he left the Swedish game behind for the NHL's world of bench-clearing brawls. It was simple back then: If you were intimidated, you didn't last.

"I knew when I came here that would be the case," said Gradin, now the Canucks' associate chief amateur scout. "I was warned."

So when Bob "Battleship" Kelly challenged a rookie Gradin to drop the gloves, he did.

"I was told to at least try," the 5-foot-11, 175-pound 54-year-old said. "No one would respect me unless I dropped my gloves and tried."

It's too bad YouTube wasn't around back then because the Canucks were hidden away on the Wet Coast, as far as the rest of Canada was concerned, and there isn't enough footage of the talented centre that survives today.

He went on to be instrumental in the Canucks signing the Sedins and, in particular, Alex Edler.

He now makes his home in Vancouver and the Canucks flew several members of his family from Sweden for tonight's ceremony.

"It's an honour and I'm very proud," Gradin said.

Shirokov down but certainly not out

Winger feels good about his game despite being sent back to AHL Manitoba

By Ben Kuzma, The Province January 24, 2011

Sergei Shirokov has gone from looking like a pretender to a contender for full-time NHL duty.

After two strong games, it appeared the improving winger might get a long look from the Canucks after six shots and scoring Tuesday in Denver before making a pair of nifty forays Thursday against San Jose. But he was benched in the third period against the Sharks, didn't play Saturday against Calgary and is on his way back to the Manitoba Moose.

You would think this has a lot to do with getting wingers Mikael Samuelsson, Mason Raymond and Jeff Tambellini going than being riled at the 25-year-old Russian. Samuelsson hasn't scored in 14 games, Tambellini in 13 and Raymond in 11 games. Raymond had six shots in a 4-3 shootout loss to the Flames on Saturday. But it also has a lot to do with the salary cap and using the space to recall Moose defenceman Lee Sweatt in case the injured Kevin Bieksa (swollen eye) can't go tonight against Dallas.

Asked if he thinks he now has an NHL game after poor training camp test results placed him in coach Alain Vigneault's doghouse, Shirokov was refreshingly frank.

"Yeah, for sure," said Shirokov, who has 33 points (16-17) in 39 games with the Moose. "I feel pretty good right now about my game and my shape. It has improved a lot for me because I know what I need to do on the ice, offensively and defensively and how the system works. We play exactly the same in Manitoba."

What has been impressive is Shirokov's improved fitness level and willingness to get to the tough scoring areas and exhibit patience. Against the Sharks, he twice went to the high slot and drew a crowd before directing wrists that were blocked.

"I work all the time on playing the left side and it's easier for me to be offensive," added Shirokov. "Sometimes I play the right side and it's more difficult, but I like to go to the middle because I think I've got a little bit more of a quicker shot than before."

So, what about not playing? Surprised?

"No," he shrugged. "They are moving around the guys, so I'm not surprised. It's a normal process. I just have to wait and work."

Big time banged-up back end blues

Blueline turns into thin line; Sweatt gets call for injured Bieksa

By Ben Kuzma, The Province January 24, 2011

Keith Ballard wasn't taking the bait.

Asked if it took a banged-up back end and an eye injury to Kevin Bieksa to add four additional minutes to his average ice time Saturday, the Canucks defenceman didn't pour fuel on the fiery debate that he warrants more ice time -- injuries or no injuries.

"I'm not looking to think I have to prove anything," Ballard said after logging a strong 19:11 in a 4-3 shootout loss to Calgary. "I'm fully capable of playing minutes and my role right now or in the past was to play a good, solid 15 minutes and be reliable back there. I'll take that.

"On a successful team, you have to take a back seat a little bit and you've got to kind of put the personal things aside and help the team. I think I've been playing better."

Especially with Aaron Rome (knee) and Andrew Alberts (shoulder) having missed the last four and three games respectively, Ballard has been at his best. But it started early.

Ballard took ownership when offseason hip surgery slowed his stride. He took proper time to recover from a concussion and then took four successive lineup scratches in November without complaining.

And whether or not Bieksa returns tonight against Dallas after having an eye swollen shut by a Tom Kostopoulos punch Saturday -- the blueliner was improving Sunday -- Ballard is paying dividends, even though he's in a third pairing with a hefty \$4.2-million salary. Lee Sweatt has been recalled from the AHL's Manitoba Moose in case Bieksa can't go, but Ballard's worth is showing in meshing with rookie Chris Tanev.

Every player wants to play more minutes, but it's a double-edged sword. Ballard was better Saturday. Christian Ehrhoff wasn't. He had two key giveaways in 33:08 of ice time, a whopping 10 more minutes than his average.

"You've got to play through those things," said Ehrhoff. "A couple of times, the puck was bouncing pretty bad and I couldn't settle it down."

Being down to five defencemen in three of their last four games has taxed the Canucks. They miss Bieksa's vastly improved play -- 17 points and a team-best plus-20 rating -- and are missing cohesiveness to reverse four losses in their last five games.

"We've seen what a little bit of inconsistency can do from guy to guy," said Ballard. "And all of a sudden, it happens to a few and we're not winning games like we were."

Sweatt, 25, has 15 points (5-9) in 41 games with the Moose. The diminutive blueliner was an offseason free-agent signing and patterns his game after Brian Rafalski.

After four years at Colorado College and four seasons overseas -- Finland, Austria and the Kontinental Hockey League -- Sweatt is ready to possibly make his NHL regular-season debut.

"I firmly believe I can play here," Sweatt said Sunday. "I've been doing well in Manitoba, especially on the defensive part of the game. And I wanted to make sure that's what I developed

the most to adapt to the North American style and not be as free-roaming. I'm responsible and a quick-transition game is something I really pride myself on."

But at 5-foot-9 and 195 pounds, can he hit?

"I've always played bigger than my size," said Sweatt. "I've never shied away from contact, I've always tried to initiate."

Canucks Gameday has Vancouver seeing Stars

By Jim Jamieson, The Province January 24, 2011 7:08 AM

STARS (29-14-5) at canucks (29-10-9), 7 p.m., ROGERS ARENA

TV : Sportsnet Pacific Radio: TEAM 1040 AM

THE SETUP

CANUCKS:

Vancouver is coming off a 4-3 shootout loss to Calgary on Saturday, as they stagger into the all-star break. The Canucks are 1-2-3 in their last six and that 14-0-3 streak seems like a distant memory.

STARS:

Dallas must be licking its chops at the floundering Canucks. The Marc Crawford-coached Stars lost 7-4 in Calgary on Friday, but were undefeated in eight (7-0-1) prior to that.

THREE THINGS TO WATCH

1 The Canucks defence. Who's in, who's out. After Kevin Bieksa was cold-cocked by Tom Kostopoulos early Saturday, the Canucks had to scramble. They've already got Aaron Rome and Andrew Alberts out with injuries.

2 The slumpers. Mikael Samuelsson: 14 games without a goal. Jeff Tambellini: 13 games without a point. Manny Malhotra: 13 games without a goal. Raffi Torres: 12 games without a goal. Mason Raymond: 11 games without a goal.

3 Stars goaltender Kari Lehtonen, who's quietly having an excellent year in Dallas after being acquired last February in a deal that was a precursor to letting free agent Marty Turco walk.

BY THE NUMBERS

33:08:

The number of minutes defenceman Christian Ehrhoff played Saturday due to the early loss of Bieksa. You don't want to see this again.

INJURIES

CANUCKS:

D Salo (Achilles); D Alberts (shoulder); D Rome (knee); C Bolduc (shoulder).

Ballard pays dividends on defence Premiums are expensive, but his positive attitude as a role player has paid off

By Iain MacIntyre, Vancouver Sun January 24, 2011

The most impressive thing so far about Keith Ballard is his attitude.

That's not as harsh a backhanded compliment as it sounds. The 28-year-old who started the season badly, then got worse before playing his way into steady duty as the Vancouver Canucks' fifth or sixth defenceman, unselfishly accepted his diminished role and has not complained -- even when he was a \$4.2-million healthy scratch.

Seven months after Canuck general manager Mike Gillis acquired him at the National Hockey League draft and declared Ballard a top-four defenceman, the Minnesotan finally got to be one Saturday when Kevin Bieksa suffered an eye injury in the first period of the Canucks' 4-3 shootout loss to the Calgary Flames.

Even then, Ballard said he'd rather play 15 minutes with Bieksa in the lineup than 20 minutes without him because Bieksa makes the Canucks a better team.

Bieksa, whose eye swelled shut when socked by Tom Kostopoulos in a first-period fight, may play tonight against the Dallas Stars. In case he doesn't, the Canucks have recalled minor-league defenceman Lee Sweatt.

But whether Bieksa is out injured tonight, or Dan Hamhuis next week or Alex Edler next month, Ballard is more likely to make an impact in relief than anyone the Canucks could bring in.

"Mentally, you have to be very strong," Ballard said late Saturday, conceding there has been a challenging adjustment to playing in Vancouver.

"Everybody here at one point has come from somewhere where they were 'the guy.' That group of people gets smaller and smaller the higher up you go, and now I'm seeing what it's like for the first time to play on a successful team. I was a go-to guy on other teams, but they weren't as good.

"My role right now ... is to play a good, solid 15 [minutes] and be reliable. I'll take that on a successful team. You've got to take a back seat a little bit and put the personal things aside."

Yet, it's hard to put aside the personal issue of Ballard's salary, awarded him by former Florida general manager Jacques Martin and accepted by Gillis when the Canucks sent prospect Michael Grabner and a first-round pick to the Panthers in June.

Ballard arrived in Vancouver with five years and \$21 million left on his contract. He also arrived behind in his conditioning, due to off-season hip surgery, then suffered a concussion in October.

When he returned, Ballard played so poorly coach Alain Vigneault removed him from the lineup for four games in November.

"Sitting out was the best thing for me -- conditioning and skating and shooting pucks," he said. "It made me feel good again. I was disappointed how bad I felt at the beginning of the year. Before the concussion, I was slowly starting to feel better. After the concussion, I had two or three practices then played four games in six nights and felt terrible."

Ballard's 19:11 of ice time Saturday was the most he has logged in 19 games. He is averaging 15:38 per night. Last season, Ballard averaged 22:24 TOI and surpassed the 25-minute mark in 13 of Florida's final 17 games.

He is a solid third-pairing defenceman on the Canucks. And if he were making \$2.2 million this season, that would be fine. But at \$4.2 million, his salary is grossly out of proportion with his role.

"I understand it," Ballard said. "If you look at it strictly from the numbers, it doesn't make sense. In the salary-cap world, it's probably not the ideal situation. But they're trying to build a deep team, build a team for a long haul. So that kind of stuff, I try to just put it aside and not worry about it."

Although the premiums are ridiculously expensive, the insurance Ballard provides will be awfully valuable should Vancouver encounter some genuine, dispiriting adversity.

Saturday's controversial shootout loss -- the NHL's Toronto war room awarded Alex Tanguay the shootout winner, ruling Vancouver goalie Roberto Luongo's backward momentum carried the unseen puck across the goal-line -- the temporary loss of Biekse, other recent injuries at depth positions and the Canucks' mini-slump aren't so much "adversity" as a market correction after the best 22-game stretch in franchise history.

It was a terrific game Saturday.

Edler scored twice and Canuck Ryan Kesler sent the game to overtime with a shorthanded goal halfway through the third period. Still, it was the Canucks' fourth straight loss. They have one outright win in eight games, but lead the Detroit Red Wings by three points atop the Western Conference. The Stars are four behind.

Vigneault refused to discuss the call on Tanguay's winner.

Luongo said: "I had no idea where [the puck] was. I didn't see it. Shootouts are shootouts. Maybe I'll start working at it a little more in practice."

Maybe he should have started before now. Vancouver is 2-5 in shootouts and Luongo's .444 save rate (10 goals on 18 shots) is the worst among starting goalies.

"Stuff like this happens," Hamhuis said. "We're not playing as well as we'd like to right now, and that happens over the course of a season. That might be a good thing, too. If we just cruised through the season, there wouldn't be many lessons in it for us. It's a good experience for us to learn how to come out of this and be better as a team."

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Next Game

Tonight vs Dallas Stars

7 p.m.

at Rogers Arena

SNP/TEAM 1040

Canucks look to end skid as they host Dallas

Sportsnet- January 24, 2011

The Vancouver Canucks are at least accumulating points during their four-game slide. They appear to be in position to avoid their longest losing streak in two years against the Dallas Stars.

After having their skid extended due to video assistance, the Canucks attempt to continue their dominance of the Stars on Monday night.

Vancouver (29-10-9) has lost four in a row following an outstanding 15-1-3 stretch. However, the last three defeats have come after regulation to give the Canucks valuable points in the standings. They lead the Western Conference by three points on Central Division-leading Detroit.

Roberto Luongo isn't concerned.

"We're fine," said Luongo, who hasn't lost in regulation in 15 games (10-0-5) while posting a 2.06 goals-against average. "When you go through a stretch of games like we did the last couple months there's always bound to be a little correction."

A visit from the Stars (29-14-5) would usually mean a good chance to get untracked, but a loss Monday would give the Canucks their longest slide since dropping eight in a row from Jan. 9-31, 2009.

Vancouver has won six of seven against Dallas, including all three meetings at Rogers Arena in that stretch. The Canucks extended their overall winning streak in the series to three after a 4-1 road victory Dec. 31 as backup Cory Schneider made 44 saves.

Luongo, who will likely be in net, has won six in a row with a 2.30 GAA against the Stars, who lead the Pacific Division.

Continuing that success will likely be much more challenging against the Stars, who are 7-1-1 this month and have won eight of nine on the road.

The Canucks' recent funk continued in controversial fashion during Saturday's 4-3 shootout loss to Calgary. Luongo appeared to stop Alex Tanguay in the tiebreaker, but officials used video review to declare he slid into the net with the puck hidden in his pads.

Fantasy notes: Jamie Benn will be looking to extend his point streak to seven games tonight - a stretch which has already included 4-5-9. Alexander Edler has potted four goals in his past five starts, but has never scored against Dallas in 14 prior tries. He has four helpers in those games. | Follow Chris Nichols on Twitter

"All we knew was you couldn't see the puck," coach Alain Vigneault said.

Dallas saw plenty of the puck in its net during Friday's 7-4 loss to the Flames, matching a season high for goals allowed while seeing its franchise-record road winning streak halted at eight games. Andrew Raycroft faced only 19 shots and will likely return to the bench in favor of Kari Lehtonen, who is 6-0-1 with a 1.56 GAA in his last seven road starts.

"We didn't get a very good performance from our goaltender tonight," coach Marc Crawford said of Raycroft. "We know our goalie has been terrific all year and he probably feels worse than anyone else."

Mike Ribeiro is looking to extend the longest active scoring streak in the NHL to 12 games, after getting three assists Friday. The center has four goals and 11 assists during his career-high run, giving him 10 and 34, respectively, on the season.

Ribeiro has at least one point in each of the last five visits to Vancouver, accumulating two goals and five assists.

Dallas could also get a boost if Loui Eriksson is able to return from the flu, which sidelined him for the first time since the 2007-08 season Friday. The right wing leads the Stars with 49 points, and has 11 in 15 games against the Canucks.

Replacing Bieksa

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

VANCOUVER -- The Vancouver Canucks called up defenceman Lee Sweatt from Manitoba of the American Hockey League on Sunday after losing Kevin Bieksa to injury against Calgary on Saturday night.

Bieksa's eye swelled shut during the 4-3 shootout loss after he was caught by a hard right hand during a first-period fight with Tom Kostoploulos.

The Canucks cancelled practice Sunday, so there was no update on Bieksa, who leads the team at plus-20 and is third in scoring among defencemen with 17 points. Vancouver is already missing defencemen Aaron Rome (knee) and Andrew Alberts (shoulder) for the next two to three weeks.

The 25-year-old Sweatt spent the last three seasons in Europe before signing as a free agent. He has five goals, 14 points and a plus-15 rating in 41 games for Manitoba.

Vancouver also sent forward Sergei Shirokov to Manitoba. The Russian rookie scored his first NHL goal in his season debut three games ago, but was a healthy scratch Saturday.

Bieksa out with eye injury Punched by Kostopoulos, seriousness not known

By Gordon McIntyre, The Province
Suddenly, Canucks defencemen are falling like flies.

The Canucks lost their third defender in four games after Kevin Bieksa left Saturday's game midway through the first period, not to return.

He was punched in the eye by Flames forward Tom Kostopoulos in a fight, his eye swelling shut.

He did not suffer a concussion, Alain Vigneault said.

"I don't know how serious Kevin's injury is," said Dan Hamhuis, Biekse's defence partner, "but he's been playing with a real physical edge, he's been great at both ends of the ice and I've really enjoyed being partnered up with him.

"I've been impressed with his ability to put aside all the distractions he's been dealing with, all the criticism and the trade rumours."

As is often the case, Biekse was fighting above his weight class; Kostopoulos was playing his first game after serving a six-game suspension for breaking the jaw of Detroit's Brad Stuart with a head shot.

Christian Ehrhoff played 33:08 in Biekse's absence, followed by Alex Edler's 29 minutes. Hamhuis played 26 and Keith Ballard 19:11.

"Seeing how Chris Tanev's come in and played, he's done really well, that's a real positive for us," Hamhuis said.

Tanev, who just turned 21 and averaged about 16 minutes a game with the Manitoba Moose, played 12 minutes last night.

"Every shift I'm feeling more and more comfortable," Tanev said. "The guys are great, they're helping me out.

"And the coaches are helping me through the whole process, too."

Biekse was also handed a crosschecking minor on the play, which took place at 11:26 of the first period.

After a slow start to the season, Biekse had been playing some of the best hockey of his career, going 6-8-14 over his past 26 games. He missed 75 games over two of the past three seasons after suffering two serious skate cuts to his legs.

The Canucks had been relatively lucky so far, outside of Sami Salo rupturing an Achilles tendon over the summer.

Salo is no closer to playing and Andrew Alberts has missed three games after he was hit awkwardly into the boards at Minnesota on Jan. 16. He could be out for a couple of more weeks, at least, with a bad shoulder.

Aaron Rome sprained a knee at Washington on Jan. 14 and has missed four games. He's on injured reserve.

With Tanev already called up from the Manitoba Moose, the Canucks could call up Ryan Parent. But Parent, who has 102 NHL games under his belt, would have to clear recall waivers. A team could claim him and the salary cap-challenged Canucks would still be on the hook for half of it.

Veteran Nolan Baumgartner would also need to clear recall waivers.

Kevin Connauton might be one option. He needs more seasoning, especially in his own end, but has played better than the disappointing Evan Oberg and the roaming Lee Sweatt.

But Sweatt, at 25, is a lot more mature than Connauton, who turns 21 in a month. It would be a big risk to have both Sweatt and Tanev in the same lineup.

One thing can be guaranteed if Biekša is out for a significant period: Keith Ballard's ice time will go up -- if he doesn't break something blocking a shot.

Flames beat Canucks in shootout

By **RANDY SPORTAK**, QMI Agency

VANCOUVER — Maybe the Calgary Flames aren't quite dead yet.

You certainly may have to hold off on those obits after they rattled off wins on consecutive nights against two of the NHL's three Western Conference leaders.

One sleep removed from beating the Dallas Stars, the Flames came up with another victory, a 4-3 shootout win over the Vancouver Canucks Saturday night.

There were plenty of odds against the Flames, but they managed to overcome them all of them for the win decided by Alex Tanguay's winner in the shootout.

Tanguay shot as tried to deke, and Canucks goalie Roberto Luongo made the save but slid into his cage.

At first, it was ruled no goal, but video review called it a goal, and the Flames improve to 22-21-6, which leaves them still in 14th place but five points back of the No. 8 spot.

The Canucks remain atop the Western Conference with a 29-10-9 mark but have lost four straight, including three in extra time.

It was a thrilling finish to an entertaining game.

For the third time this season against the Canucks, the Flames fell behind early, and it was on a goal Miikka Kiprusoff would like back.

Alex Edler scored his first of two on the night with his team's first shot.

Henrik Sedin dropped the pass high in the slot for the trailing defenceman, and he fired a long slapper that went through Kiprusoff's legs.

However, the Flames stormed back with two goals 20 seconds apart in the middle of the opening frame to serve notice they were going to make a game of it against the West's best team.

First, Calgary's deservedly maligned powerplay unit struck pay dirt with former Canucks fan favourite Brendan Morrison doing the honours.

While causing all kinds of chaos in front of the net, gritty fourth-liner Tim Jackman had the presence to chip a short pass to Morrison instead of just shovelling a rebound chance, and Morrison fired home a top-shelf, sharp-angled shot.

Before the Rogers Arena sellout crowd of 18,860 fans could digest what had happened, Curtis Glencross gave the visitors a 2-1 lead.

Matt Stajan managed to hold off the defender at the side of the net while slipping a pass to Glencross in the slot, and the winger fired a perfect backhand inside the far post.

It's the first time since Nov. 15 the Canucks have allowed more than one first-period goal, a span of 30 games.

It's also the only first-period goal surrendered at home by the Canucks since Dec. 11, an eight-game spell of home-ice defensive dominance.

However, Edler tied the contest with just the latest in the string of goofy goals that have gone by Kiprusoff during the past few weeks.

Kiprusoff slid too far to his left for a potential shot, but the puck didn't go to the net, and the netminder became tangled with his defenceman when the pass went to the other side.

Edler made no mistake with a wide-open net.

The see-saw battle continued in the third period, too.

Tim Jackman pounced on a rebound before the seven-minute mark to again put the Flames ahead, but Ryan Kesler's shorthanded goal, which the netminder got a piece of, evened the count yet again.

For his part, Kiprusoff did a great job gritting out a performance.

On one hand, the goals he surrendered are the type he's so often stopped.

However, when the night was over he had made 41 saves despite battling many of the shots which came his way.

Rest assured, the Canucks were firing from everywhere, too.

Kiprusoff stood tall in the shootout, too. After Jeff Tambellini scored, Mason Raymond and Kesler were denied.

Rene Bourque scored as Calgary's first shooter, and Olli Jokinen hit the post.

The Flames have two home games, Monday versus Nashville and Wednesday against St. Louis, before the all-star break.

Flames edge Canucks in shootout

Vancouver— The Canadian Press

Alex Tanguay didn't know where the puck was.

And the referees didn't think his backhanded shootout attempt crossed the goal-line until a video review revealed Roberto Luongo slid into the net with the puck caught in his pads.

That controversial goal gave the Calgary Flames a 4-3 win on Saturday, and sent the Vancouver Canucks to their fourth consecutive loss.

"I had no idea," Tanguay said. "I've made that move a couple of times before and when I put it on my backhand I have no idea where ... I can't see the puck go in."

The shootout was tied 1-1 when Tanguay skated in on Luongo and got him to sprawl as he went to the backhand.

"He's a goalie I've had some breakaways against," Tanguay said. "He knows some of my tendencies so I was trying to throw something different at him."

The goal was waved off at first but the video review showed the puck caught up on Luongo's thigh as his body slid into the net.

"I'll say they made the right decision but I ... didn't see it," said Tanguay who is looking to surpass 50 points for the first time since he last played for the Flames in 2006-07.

"It's always a tough call to make but for us it's the right one tonight."

Luongo didn't know he'd been scored upon.

"I didn't even see them take the puck out of my pads, so I don't know," said the netminder who has not lost in regulation time in 15 consecutive games, going 10-0-5 over that span.

Brendan Morrison, Curtis Glencross and Tim Jackman scored for the Flames in regulation time. Alex Edler, with two goals, and Ryan Kesler replied for the Canucks.

It was the second win in as many nights for the Flames, who are seeking to challenge for a Western Conference playoff berth.

Calgary improved to 22-21-6 with their fourth win in six games while the conference-leading Canucks dropped to 29-10-9.

Vancouver picked up a single point for the third consecutive game to move three ahead of second-place Detroit.

Calgary's wins came after a 6-0 home loss to Minnesota and Morrison, who signed with the Flames after he couldn't crack the Vancouver roster at training camp, said they came at the right time.

"We've been battling at .500 off and on for four or five weeks," said Morrison who erased a 1-0 Vancouver lead with a power-play goal .

"We keep talking about making a move up in the standings and if we want to do it we've got to beat good teams and we did that tonight."

Morrison said he feels Calgary is poised to move up the closely packed West standings and into a playoff position.

"A lot of people still don't believe we can do it but the guys in the room aren't going to give up until the numbers actually say we can't get in [the playoffs]."

Calgary goalie Miikka Kiprusoff, who had surrendered 10 goals on 57 shots in two previous losses to the Canucks, gave up another on Vancouver's first shot.

Then he found his game as the Canucks peppered him with 44 shots.

"It's a big challenge, pretty good team here and they have some offensive talents but I felt pretty good and just tried to do my job," he said after being beaten by Edler's long shot.

The Canuck defenceman's second goal was his eighth of the season and fourth in five games.

Both goalies had anxious moments in overtime as the two teams had power-play time. Kiprusoff was especially sharp with his glove.

"I felt he would come in and be rock solid and he was," said Flames coach Brent Sutter.

"He made some big saves, especially early. The puck was hitting him in the logo and he was very under control in his game."

Kesler, who tied a career high when he scored his 26th goal of the season when his shot hit Tanguay's stick on a short-handed rush, said the Canucks haven't pushed the panic button.

"We're getting points," Kesler said. "We had a power play to win it in overtime and that just didn't happen."

“You're going to have cycles like this and the main thing is we got the point.”

He said the Canucks will have to work more on shootouts and rekindle the power play that sparked a 17-1-2 run from Nov. 24 to Jan. 8.

“We took the momentum [after the tying goal], generated a lot in the third and had a lot of good opportunities in overtime.” said Kesler who missed the net in the shootout.

“The power play has to get the job done and it didn't. It's a shootout loss — something for the fans. Obviously we're not very good at it right now and it's something to work on.”

Notes: Canuck defenceman Kevin Bieksa left the game with a swollen eye after a brief first-period scrap with Tom Kostopoulos and did not return. The Flames winger returned to the lineup after serving a six-game suspension for the hit that broke the jaw of Detroit's Brad Stuart ... Sergei Shirokov, benched in the third period of Thursday's 2-1 shootout loss to San Jose, was a healthy scratch from the Canucks' lineup ... he scored his first NHL goal in his season debut Tuesday, a 4-3 overtime loss to Colorado ... The grittier Aaron Volpatti returned to the lineup instead

Gameday Preview: Dallas Stars @ Vancouver Canucks (9:00pm CST)

By: Brad Gardner on Jan 24th 2011

The Dallas Stars and the Vancouver Canucks have a lot in common these days.

They're both leading their divisions. They've both experienced great success this season. They both lost to the Calgary Flames this weekend, and they're both trying to figure out just exactly how the heck *that* happened.

The Stars can pull within two points of the conference leading Canucks with a regulation victory here tonight, or risk drifting back toward the pack that's charging hard to claim the Stars spot. Phoenix and Anaheim have provided relentless pursuit in January and 8th place is just eight points back. As good as Dallas has been, the breathing room is practically non-existent. A win tonight would be the definition of a "statement game."

Vancouver, unfortunately, is looking for a statement game of their own and home ice is a good place to do it. They've dropped five of their last six games but boast a 15-3-5 record at Rogers Arena this year. The conference's best team is even the best at losing, having picked up OTL points in their last three losing efforts.

Dallas will see a healthier lineup return tonight, Kari Lehtonen back in net, and a slightly banged up Vancouver blue line as they attempt to get revenge on a 4-1 loss on New Years Even in Dallas.

Stay up late with us tonight and visit the GDT as this one gets started at 7:00pm local time, which I think is like 2:00am Central...

The Stars:

Dallas used a plethora of lineups in their last game while trying to make up for the absence of Loui Eriksson (flu) and Brian Sutherby while at the same time protecting Francis Wathier and Aaron Gagnon from volatile situations as they visited from the Dallas Stars. The result made for some interesting shift tracking and the players needed to be extra alert on the bench to avoid confusion.

Tonight things will return back to normal with Loui back with Richards and Neal, which allows Benn to play full time with Ott and Burish and the fourth line will probably include Wandell, Sutherby and Barch. Francis Wathier is still with the team for insurance and Aaron Gagnon was sent back to Texas on Saturday in an effort to make sure he doesn't pass the "10 games or 30 days" barrier and need to be sent through waivers again.

Kari Lehtonen will be back in net, of course, after Andrew Raycroft started the back to back in Calgary on Friday.

Stars PR says "Jamie Benn is riding a career-high six game point streak (four goals, five assists) and has multiple point games in three of his last six games."

You'll recall the young Star scored the first goal of his NHL career in Vancouver last season.

Mark Fistric, Jeff Woywitka and Matt Niskanen all appear to be options for Monday, so we'll see who gets to sit there.

The Canucks:

NHL.com has a scary note about the Canucks entering play tonight...

Six Canucks forwards are suffering from personal scoring droughts: Mikael Samuelsson (14 games), Mason Raymond (11), Manny Malhotra (12), Jannik Hansen (10), Jeff Tambellini (13) and Raffi Torres (12).

That's a lot of guys who are "due", plus the Sedins and all the usual Vancouver favorites.

They've scored only 11 goals in their last six games and it's been an "all or nothing" kind of thing. They've been shutout twice but have put up 3 and 4 goals at a time in that stretch as well. So do the Stars get the all, or the nothing?

We've seen time and again this season that when the Stars struggle on faceoffs, their offensive production suffers accordingly. The Canucks are #1 in the league with a gaudy 55.8% on the dot, so keep an eye on that if you're wondering why things are heading south at some point.

It's not surprising that the Canucks have the edge in every major statistical category coming into this one including PP%, PK%, G/G, GA/G, S/G, SA/G, FAC%, and so on and so on...

The only question is: Is this the end of the Canucks funk, or will the Stars drop their second in a row and start a funk of their own?

Dallas netminder KOs Chuck Norris- themed mask

Lehtonen trades in fan favourite for Tombstone- inspired design featuring Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday ahead of Vancouver visit

When Chuck Norris crosses the street, cars have to look both ways.

When the Boogeyman goes to bed at night, he checks his closet for Chuck Norris.

Dallas Stars goalie Kari Lehtonen doesn't wear his Chuck Norris mask, it wears him.

Okay, okay, that last one isn't true. Well, not any more, anyway.

Lehtonen retired his Chuck Norris-inspired mask last week, opting for a new Tombstonethemed number, complete with Kurt Russell as Wyatt Earp on one side and Val Kilmer as Doc Holliday on the other.

Still, with Dallas making its first trip to Vancouver this season, there will never be a better chance to share some of the best Chuck Norris "facts."

The absurdly hyperbolic claims about the martial artist and actor's toughness, attitude, virility and masculinity have grown to be an Internet phenomenon and, as a result, are widespread in pop culture.

In other words, chances are good they've never been used in a hockey story.

"I get a couple of new [masks] every year and I was trying to figure something new out," said Lehtonen, who unveiled the new Dave Gunnarsson design in a 4-2 win over the Edmonton Oilers

at Rexall Place on Thursday. “ I saw the movie Tombstone and they show some parts of it on the big screen at our home games so that’s how.”

Lehtonen has become famous throughout the NHL for his goalie masks.

The 27-year-old native of Helsinki, Finland, was sporting the Clint Eastwood character from *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* when he first arrived in Dallas from the Atlanta Thrashers last February.

Previous masks of note include the Joker from *The Dark Knight*, Optimus Prime from *Transformers*, Uma Thurman and Lucy Liu’s characters from *Kill Bill* as well as Yuna and Rikku from the video game *Final Fantasy X-2*.

He even had a depiction of Atlanta-based rapper Lil Jon on his skullcap at one point.

“ It’s more for the fans,” said Lehtonen, whose 21 wins this season ties him with Canucks’ Roberto Luongo for sixth most in the league heading into tonight’s game between the two Western Conference rivals at Rogers Arena. “ They get excited wondering what is going to be on my mask. It’s something I like to do, but don’t think about it too much.”

The Thrashers took Lehtonen second overall in 2002 to make him the highest-selected Finnish player in NHL draft history. Pretty impressive stuff when you consider Jari Kurri, Teemu Selanne, Saku Koivu, Jere Lehtinen and Olli Jokinen all came before him.

Injuries and erratic play cost Lehtonen the starter’s job in Atlanta, but in Dallas he seems to have found his game. Stars general manager Joe Nieuwendyk let Marty Turco walk in order to sign Lehtonen to a three-year, \$ 10.65-million extension this past summer.

“ I feel like it’s a new beginning and that’s exciting,” said Lehtonen. “ I’m feeling more comfortable and feeling good about what we’re doing. Letting the pucks come to me ... Before, I don’t know if I was ready to be a starter in the NHL.”

The Heath Ledger-inspired mask is Lehtonen’s all-time favourite — his former team in Finland was called the Jokers — but if there’s one he wishes he could have back it’s the one he wore as a member of the AHL’s Chicago Wolves in 2003-04.

As the story goes, Lehtonen had just arrived in North America from Finland and was a big fan of McDonalds. Long story short, his teammates nicknamed him the Hamburglar, so he put the pint-sized thief on his skullcap, unaware the joke was on him.

“ He’s at a point in his career where he’s recognized that what he was doing to this point — if he wants to have the success that he is enjoying — that he had to raise the bar in other areas like conditioning,” said former Canucks and current Stars head coach Marc Crawford. “ You’re seeing the bar raised right now in terms of the attention to detail ... and conditioning is one of those areas.”

Kari keeps cool, calm and collected

Dallas goaltender finally plays up to expectations after trade, back surgeries

By Jim Jamieson, The Province January 24, 2011 7:08 AM

Kari Lehtonen has justified the faith Dallas Stars GM Joe Nieuwendyk showed in him when he traded a No. 1 draft pick for him last February.

Lehtonen had just come off back surgery the previous summer and another back procedure in November and didn't have a great rep for conditioning.

But the acquisition of Lehtonen -- the highest-ever drafted European goaltender (No. 2 overall in 2002 by Atlanta) -- has paid off in spades for the Stars. His work, combined with former Canuck Andrew Raycroft as his backup, is probably the single most significant reason for the Stars' excellent season so far.

"You start the season like we did and Kari played pretty well for the first nine games," said Dallas head coach Marc Crawford. "It's allowed us to get our feet on the ground. The biggest factor was probably Kari's goaltending in at least three or four of those games. That allows you to build some confidence.

"Since then our team has really played well defensively and when he stops as many pucks as he has been, it just helps build confidence."

Lehtonen, 27, has an impressive 21-10-5 record, with a GAA of 2.49 and a save percentage of .919. He's become the primo stopper that was predicted when the Thrashers drafted the 6-foot-4, 205-pound Helsinki native. There's no coincidence the Stars have reduced their goals against from 23rd last season to 10th overall currently.

Lehtonen admits that he wasn't quite prepared for the pressure of being a No. 1 NHL goalie those early years in Atlanta.

"I know I maybe wasn't ready my first couple of years," said Lehtonen, who's expected to start against the Canucks tonight. "They were telling me I was going to be the best goalie in the league and I wasn't ready for that as a 21-year-old.

"I think here in Dallas we are more of a hard-working team. There's no huge superstars here. We have some very good players, but we're doing this for each other and that's the key to our success."

Crawford said Lehtonen's raised the bar on his dedication to fitness and it's showing.

"I don't want people to think he was Krutov-like, but he was coming off major back surgery," said Crawford." That's a big factor for him. Now your preparation has to become a big factor.

"I think it comes down to maturity. There's certain guys that the light turns on. I think he's always been pretty dedicated, but his timing with the injury, the new team -- it all came together."