

Big guns blanked, Mason on target

Sedins, Burrows kept off the scoresheet, but Raymond nets two

By Ben Kuzma, The Province January 28, 2010

In anticipation of extending his points streak to 13 games and the Vancouver Canucks extending their win streak to six games, Alex Burrows was asked how tough those tasks were going to be Wednesday.

After all, the pesky St. Louis Blues had done a masterful job shutting down the top line and limiting the high-scoring trio to six points in three previous meetings. But Burrows sounded like a prophet long before a 3-2 victory at GM Place that gave the club sole possession of the Northwest Division lead.

"Offensively, we've never felt this way knowing everybody can chip in," said the Canucks winger, who had his pursuit of the club-record 15-game points streak held by Petr Nedved and Todd Bertuzzi halted.

As for predicting that somebody would pick up the slack, Burrows was bang on.

On a night when it looked like the Canucks simply weren't ready -- they took a pair of delay-of-game penalties in the first period on two casual flips of the puck over the Plexiglas by Alex Edler and Shane O'Brien -- they rallied on a pair of goals by Mason Raymond and the power-play winner by Christian Ehrhoff.

Once again, Henrik and Daniel Sedin were shut down by the defensive pairing of Barret Jackman and Roman Polak, despite a game-high seven shots by Daniel. However, the Blues couldn't shut down Raymond, who wasn't rewarded for a string of superlative outings.

That all changed Wednesday.

"It's not by accident," said Canucks coach Alain Vigneault. "If there's one player on our team right now who's going the extra mile as far as trying to improve himself as a player, it's Mason. He's spending a lot of time with our skills coach before practice, working on his skills. He's even coming in on his days off. There's a reason why he's having the success, he's putting in the extra time."

With the game tied 1-1 early in the third period, Raymond took a pass from Ryan Kesler and displayed the patience and poise that disappeared last season. Raymond streaked across the blueline, faked a slapshot and then whipped a wrister past goalie Ty Conklin on the short side at 3:37.

"I was just kind of waiting to see what was going to happen," said Raymond, who finished with three points and five shots.

"I made a fake and [Ty] Conklin thought I was going to pass it across, but I saw the blocker side. It was one of those nights where for me it feels that bounces are going your way and you're getting a few opportunities. We created a little with our speed to open up the ice."

Even though T.J. Oshie would flip a backhand feed from David Backes over a sprawled Luongo to make it 2-2 midway through the final frame, it was if the Canucks knew what was coming. Somebody would score the decisive goal. That's what happens when you're riding a wave of confidence, even during an uneven outing.

It was Ehrhoff's wrister from the sideboards, with Kyle Wellwood providing the screen, that somehow snuck past Conklin at 12:12 to seal the deal after Paul Kariya was called for a slash on Henrik Sedin.

"I tried to get it to Welly in front and he was all alone," said Ehrhoff. "I got a lucky bounce sometimes, you've got to take an ugly goal to get the two points."

There was nothing ugly about Raymond's game. After tipping home a Kesler shot in the first period to erase a 1-0 deficit on a Keith Tkachuk power-play goal, Raymond was thwarted on a short-handed chance before giving the Canucks a 2-1 lead with his confident fake-and-wrister effort.

"He probably wouldn't have done that last year or the year before that," said Kesler, who had three assists to hit a career-high of 34 helpers. "He's very shifty. He fakes a shot at it freezes Conklin and goes high blocker. That's only a shot that a handful of guys in this league can make and he's one of them."

The last time the Canucks won six straight was in February 2007 during a run toward 105 points and advancing to the second round of the playoffs.

Wednesday was another indication that the Canucks might be headed down that same road in winning despite missing injured blue-liners Willie Mitchell, Kevin Bieksa and Sami Salo.

"We're in every game and when you're in them it makes it easier for sure and we've got guys in here who can score on any given night," said Henrik Sedin.

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Defence still like game of Jenga

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BY JASON BOTCHFORD

Who woulda thought?: Unlikely D-men step up to help depleted backline

It may have taken several unforeseen circumstances to get Shane O'Brien on the ice with a minute left in a one-goal game.

But he didn't care. He'll take the glory when he can get it. And, in this case, it's earned.

"I've been wanting that since I got here," O'Brien said. "I want to be that D-man the coach can trust to put you out there in a one-goal game with under a minute to go. That's huge.

"Even though we have some injuries, it still feels good."

The Canucks defence remains a delicate game of Jenga. The tower is balancing on fewer and fewer blocks. Without Willie Mitchell, Kevin Bieksa and Sami Salo, it's hard not to hold your breath waiting for the whole thing to come crumbling down.

It could still happen. On the road, opponents will be more empowered to take accurate shots at the Canucks soft blueline underbelly which right now is counting on Nolan Baumgartner to play 12 to 15 minutes a game.

If it does come apart at the seams, the Canucks better hope Roberto Luongo is playing better than he was Wednesday. The captain was battling both the puck and his positioning for much of the game. He nearly gifted the St. Louis Blues a bad tying goal when Erik Johnson ripped along, unscreened slapper which rang off the crossbar.

After Wednesday's game, when asked about the defence in front of him, Luongo said:

"Do you want me to give you the same quote as last game?"

That's a good thing. The mixed-and-matched unit has scraped together to limit scoring chances for two games, most importantly odd-man rushes. A big part of it is O'Brien, who has earned a couple sandwiches after playing at least 20 minutes for five straight.

"People used to question my conditioning," O'Brien said. "But I feel great out there. The more I get out there, the better I feel. I'm enjoying this opportunity."

It shows. O'Brien has made some significant strides this season, learning to play physical while staying out of the penalty box. His biggest improvement may have been biting his tongue earlier in the season when he was a regular healthy scratch.

"I believed it all along," said O'Brien. "There's been some ups and downs this year. I hope I'm proving to people I can play and I can take more ice time and do well last year.

"It stung earlier this year when I wasn't playing. But I learned a lot last season. I matured. I realized you have to continue to work hard.

"There were some days this season when I wondered if I'd ever get back in. I tried to stay as positive as I could."

Head coach Alain Vigneault said a late icing was the real reason O'Brien was on the ice in the last minute. But he doesn't need to know that.

"Still, you have to admit, since those three guys have gone down, he's stepped up his play," Vigneault said. "He's playing smart and physical and he's doing a real good job for us."

Now, he has to keep it going.

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Canucks, CBC make peace in Burrows-MacLean affair after conference call

By Ben Kuzma, The Province January 27, 2010

VANCOUVER — Peace has been reached in the public-relations war between the Vancouver Canucks and the CBC.

During a Wednesday morning conference call, the NHL club and the national broadcaster patched up their differences. To what degree is a matter of interpretation.

Upset over commentator Ron MacLean's one-sided summation of the Alex Burrows-Stephane Auger affair — a rambling Jan. 16 rant on Hockey Night in Canada that infuriated the Canucks and coach Alain Vigneault — the Canucks did not make their players available for interviews last Saturday, even though Roberto Luongo, Henrik Sedin and Ryan Kesler were named stars. It's customary for the CBC to do post-game interviews with a game star.

The Canucks are in Toronto on Saturday to face the Maple Leafs as part of a Hockey Day in Canada triple-header and an extended boycott could have caused a further problem for CBC to corner Canuck interviews and features for its extended telecast.

"We talked and came to an agreement and I don't want to get into a discussion," said CBC Sports executive director Scott Moore, who declined to say whether the Canucks received an apology. "A viewpoint was expressed and I understand there was a perception about it, but my issue with Ron's point of view is to defend his ability to have that point of view.

"They [Canucks] expressed that they wanted to be treated fairly in the future and I have no problem with that. Vancouver is obviously a good story and hopefully we'll be talking about them well into the spring. We expect our highest numbers of the season [Saturday]."

Canucks general manager Mike Gillis and media relations director T.C. Carling were also on the conference call along with CBC executive producer Sherali Najak.

"It's business as usual," said Carling. "There will be no further comment and we are not answering any more questions. The conversation will remain confidential."

Vigneault was adamant that the right message was sent to CBC during the disagreement.

"Any time we feel that one of our players has not been treated fairly, as an organization we have to take a stand and we did," he said recently.

Ryan Kesler went one better. The Canucks centre applauded the organization's willingness to back one of its players by boycotting CBC until the issue was resolved.

"I think it's good," said Kesler. "We're a big family in here and we stick together. For one of our players to be treated like that, it's not only attacking him but they're attacking all of us. Teams out east get more respect than us and we'll fly under the radar all year long."

Adding to the Canucks' angst was NHL commissioner Gary Bettman saying last Wednesday that he was satisfied with the investigation that led to Burrows being fined \$2,500 US for criticizing the officiating of Auger. Bettman added he's more concerned about players using the [criticizing] tactic in future games.

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Blues showing league how to rein in Sedins, Burrows

By Tony Gallagher, The Province January 28, 2010

You knew that after all those picturesque goals they've been scoring lately the cute play would get into their heads a little bit.

That's what happened to the Vancouver Canucks on Wednesday night as they seemed determined not to shoot the puck, preferring to paint a masterpiece on almost every opportunity in the first two periods, with shooting the absolute last consideration.

When early in the third period Mason Raymond decided they weren't playing against Terry Sawchuk in goal after all and decided to wire it, things changed for the better.

And in the end, St. Louis general manager John Davidson might have been well advised to don the pads himself and flash the great form he always showed in Vancouver as a goalie rather than use Ty Conklin on this night.

What was interesting about this game, however, was how the Blues were able to limit the Sedin twins along with their trusty sidekick Alex Burrows.

Against Trail's Barret Jackman and Czech Olympic team member Roman Polak, the league's hottest line found themselves with less room than a sumo wrestling team in a European hotel room.

The Blues now have held the Sedins to just five points in four games this year, and if you include Burrows in the addition it still only gets to six.

"It's not just those two, their whole team plays us really tight," said the league's scoring leader, Henrik Sedin.

"They really took away all our time and space, but on the other hand we didn't make the plays we had to make, either.

"But it's been that way against them."

Not surprisingly, when that top line did get their opportunities -- and it's virtually impossible to hold this group without chances, at least -- they were the worst offenders at steering clear of the shot in favour of the perfect play.

And given what they've been doing late, that's hardly surprising.

If coaches in this league have their wits about them, and some of them actually do, there will be a lot of teams poring over the game tapes of these St. Louis-Vancouver games to get some idea of how to address the Sedins as they come in on this pending 14-game trip.

"We cut off the back of the net," said Jackman, who has had a terrific year for the Blues. "If you can take away the back of the net and disrupt them, they can't use the net to get that separation they often do.

"And then you've got to stay with them. If you try to play them too aggressive, which a lot of teams do, then that's when they seem to find their openings."

Obviously this pairing has had perhaps the most experience at shutting down the twins line, given all the playoff games last year, and it certainly manifested itself Wednesday night.

But as has been the case lately, Vancouver found another way to win as Davidson smouldered about the officiating, particularly the crucial slashing call against Paul Kariya in the third period.

At the other end, the Canucks continue to get away with the game they've been playing most successfully at home, which has been 'hide the defenceman.'

Although Nolan Baumgartner finally showed why, despite the fact everyone loves the guy, he's never been able to hang on to an NHL job, it was Alex Edler who appeared to be having the most brain cramps.

To go through them all would take much of this space, and while he also made some outstanding plays, the Canucks' big Swede, who has been so very good of late, seemed to be playing giveaway, Roberto Luongo bailing him out a couple of times.

You could go on about how difficult it's going to be to play this 'hide the shortcomings' game on the road, but suffice it to say Sami Salo can't get back into the lineup quickly enough, and neither can Willie Mitchell.

In the end another win came against a team that needed it more.

When that happens even on nights when the A game is far away, you've got yourself a pretty-decent hockey club.

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Henrik's big assist buries Blues

Sedin's penalty gamble helps Canucks stuff big win streak into their luggage

By Cam Cole, Vancouver Sun January 28, 2010

The game turned on a curious piece of business, more or less erasing the last whisper of suspicion that there might be leftover hard feelings in the refereeing community over the Alex Burrows-Stephane Auger two-step.

Midway through the third period of a 2-2 game, slashed on the hands by St. Louis's Paul Kariya in the circle to Roberto Luongo's left, Henrik Sedin shook his injured paw and simply skated away from the puck, leaving it in the lap of the gods, or to whomever might recover it -- and more curiously, trusting that the officials would see the slash, and call it, before the Blues could make a scoring chance out of the abandoned biscuit.

A crazy gamble, no? In these uncertain times?

The referee nearest Sedin, Chris Lee, made no call. Henrik, in disbelief, looked up ice to centre, where from at least 80 feet away, the other ref, Tom Kowal, dutifully whistled the foul.

Kariya skated to the box, and Henrik to the Canucks bench, chirping as he went at Lee, who responded by pointing a finger at the NHL's leading scorer, a non-verbal warning that probably didn't mean: "Show me up like that again, and I'll get you."

And 32 seconds later, on a power play the Canucks almost didn't receive, Christian Ehrhoff's centring pass from deep in the right-wing corner squeezed between the leaky pads of St. Louis net-minder Ty Conklin and delivered a 3-2 Vancouver victory to send them off on their 45-day journey to the ends of the earth and back while the Olympics uses their home rink.

"I don't know. He slashed my hand, that's the bottom line," said Henrik, "and the guy [Lee] told me he didn't think so, but the guy that was furthest away made the call. That's what happens sometimes."

Henrik's honorary assist on the game-winner -- which Blues GM John Davidson was lighting up supervisor Bob Hall about, post-game -- won't count in the scoring race, but it counts in the standings, at the end of a wildly successful month for Vancouver's heroes.

It didn't seem to matter much that it was the end, too, of the Sedins twins' scoring streak and that of their line-mate, Burrows, as the three of them were hounded at every turn by the diligent, unlucky Blues.

And when they weren't being hounded, they were overpassing, being too cute by half, and misfiring on shots that, a week ago or a month, were finding the back of the net as if they had eyes.

Anyway, by midnight, it had already ceased to be General Motors Place. Within a couple of hours of the Canucks' fitful farewell for the next six-plus weeks, the Olympic setup crew had moved in and begun reconfiguring the interior to turn it into Canada Hockey Place for the Games.

First order of business, right after fumigating the place of the unfamiliar odour of Sedin frustration, was removing all the logos.

No company names here, bubba. All that signage, all the evidence of the killing the Canucks make from each of their sold-out games, has to go. It'll take miles of masking material to cover all the corporate insignia in a building that Canucks' ownership is turning over to Vanoc for a mere \$18.5 million up front, and another \$110,000 a day in rent.

Call it \$23 million, give or take a few quid, or roughly 41 per cent of the National Hockey League club's 2009-10 payroll. Nice piece of pocket change for the Aquilinis, who don't even actually lose any hockey dates in the deal, just get them moved around.

But before they left, the Canucks' parting gift to the Blues was further confirmation that the visitors' formula is still sound: stop the Sedins, and the Canucks struggle.

This isn't exactly a scoop, but for weeks, no one else has had a hot clue how to accomplish it. The Blues have.

In four starts against St. Louis this season, the Sedin-Sedin-Burrows trio -- which had accounted for an average of 4.67 points per game since Daniel returned from his broken leg 30 games ago - has managed a total of six against the Blues. Five of the six were in one game.

Still, that's not much of a dark spot, considering the Canucks' logic-defying level of play while without their top three defencemen, and the perch they occupy as they prepare to hit the road.

Not that it's the highest of compliments, given the Flames' free-fall in Calgary and the general air of hopelessness in Edmonton, but the Canucks are now atop the Northwest Division, having finally overtaken those early-season phenoms, the Colorado Avalanche.

They are also third in the West, and leapfrogged the Stanley Cup-champion Pittsburgh Penguins into sixth place overall Wednesday night.

You could get used to this, but for now, they're going away.

The next time a Canuck touches a puck in anger on this ice surface, it will be Ryan Kesler for Team USA against Switzerland at noon on Feb. 16. Four-and-a-half hours later, Canada will open its quest for the gold medal against Norway -- with Roberto Luongo either between the pipes or, more likely, watching Martin Brodeur from the bench.

As consolations prizes go, the Olympic hockey tournament will have to do.

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Vancouver Canucks beat St. Louis 3-2, continue winning streak

By Brad Ziemer, Vancouver Sun January 28, 2010

Their bags are packed and they're ready to go. And when the Vancouver Canucks get around to leaving on their jet plane this morning, they will have a little extra carry-on baggage accompanying them on their long journey.

The Canucks will be taking a six-game winning streak with them after beating the St. Louis Blues 3-2 Wednesday night in their final appearance at General Motors Place until March 13.

Now it's 14 straight games on the road, eight before the Winter Olympics and six after. They seem to have momentum on their side

Defenceman Christian Ehrhoff scored the winner at 12:12 of the third period on a Vancouver power play, beating St. Louis goalie Ty Conklin from a sharp angle.

"I tried to get it to Wellie (Kyle Wellwood) in front, he was alone, and got a lucky bounce," Ehrhoff said. "That's the way the game kind of went for us tonight."

The Blues accomplished what few other teams have managed this season. They kept the Sedin twins and linemate Alex Burrows off the score sheet.

But the Canucks had an answer for that and it came in the form of Mason Raymond and Ryan Kesler, who each had three-point nights. Raymond scored Vancouver's first two goals and now has 20 on the season.

"I think that has been a big key to our success the last little while, we have had all lines firing," Raymond said. "Roberto (Luongo) has made big saves at big times and we are finding ways to win."

Canuck coach Alain Vigneault heaped praise on Raymond after the game.

"I thought Mason Raymond again tonight played a real strong game and it's not by accident," Vigneault said. "If there is one player right now that is going the extra mile as far as trying to improve himself as a player, it's Mason. He's spending a lot of time with our skill coach, Glen Carnegie, before practice. He's even coming in on days off, so there is a reason why he's having this success right now. When you do deliberate practice and work on certain skills the right way, you get rewarded for it and that's what's going on for him right now."

The Canucks have accomplished exactly what they needed to the last month or so, when they played the bulk of their games at home. Wednesday night's win improved their record at GM Place this season to 23-7-1.

"We have done very well at home here in the last little stretch and these points we got will be crucial heading down the final stretch," Raymond said. "It's definitely nice to end on a win before we head out for six weeks."

Raymond's first goal came at 6:21 of the first when he tipped a weak shot by Kesler past Conklin. The goal came after a brutal turnover in his own end by St. Louis forward David Perron.

The Blues had opened scoring at 4:24 of the first when Keith Tkachuk converted an Andy McDonald back-door pass on a St. Louis power play.

Raymond's second of the night at 3:37 of the third put Vancouver up 2-1. He beat Conklin short side with a wrist shot from the left faceoff circle.

T.J. Oshie tied the game at 10:07 of the third when he converted a pass from David Backes and beat Luongo with knuckle-ball shot from the deep slot.

The win moved Vancouver, now 33-18-2, into sole possession of first place in the Northwest Division with 68 points. That's two more than Colorado, but the Avs have two games in hand.

Now it's off to Toronto, where the Canucks kick off their eight-game trip on Saturday night. After that, the Canucks make stops in Montreal, Ottawa, Boston, Tampa, Florida, Columbus and Minnesota. That's followed by the Olympic break and then a six-game trip with stops in Columbus, Detroit, Chicago, Nashville, Colorado and Phoenix. With their confidence level sky-high, the Canucks figure to collect more than frequent flier miles on the two trips.

"We looked at the schedule and we knew with this road trip coming up we had to win games," said Henrik Sedin. "And we're very pleased with the amount of points we have and wins we took at home. We have to put this behind us, be proud of what we did and move on."

ICE CHIPS: Tanner Glass was a healthy scratch as Darcy Hordichuk returned to the Vancouver lineup. Jannik Hansen was Vancouver's other scratch. . .NBC Olympic host Bob Costas took in the game. . .The Canucks' last six-game winning streak came in March of 2007.

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Game within game

By Elliott Pap, Vancouver Sun January 27, 2010

Three stars

1. Mason Raymond, Canucks. Two goals, one assist, five shots, plus-1. Easy choice.
2. Ryan Kesler, Canucks. Three assists, 9-for-13 on faceoffs, plus-1.
3. T.J. Oshie, Blues. One goal, two shots, three hits.

PIVOTAL POINT: Just 1:33 after T.J. Oshie tied the game in the third period, Paul Kariya slashed Henrik Sedin on the hand in the Canuck zone. Thirty-two seconds later, Christian Ehrhoff flung a bad-angle shot at Ty Conklin that found its way home. “It got deflected on the way to me, went off the post and off my back,” sighed Conklin.

BY THE NUMBERS: Alex Burrows's scoring streak came to an end after 12 games while the Sedin twins were held off the scoresheet for the first time in six games ...Official hits were again hard to come by Wednesday as the Canucks were credited with just seven – three in the first, two in the second and two in the third. Rick Rypien was the only Canuck with more than one hit. The Blues had 11 hits on the night....Canucks won the faceoff battle 32-23.

SAVE(S) OF THE NIGHT: In the third, Roberto Luongo stopped Andy McDonald, who came in cold after an Alex Edler turnover, while Ty Conklin was superb stopping Pavol Demitra on a 2-on-1 chance with Kyle Wellwood.

QUOTABLE: “Well, yeah, we did stop the Sedin line but, I mean, they have good guys throughout their lineup, not just the Sedins. It's not like they're without secondary scoring.” -- Blues goalie Ty Conklin.

DID YOU NOTICE? Canuck defencemen Alex Edler and Shane O'Brien took identical puck-over-the-glass penalties in the first period less than five minutes apart. Both times, the Canucks' fourth line was on the ice and both times the puck went over the left-wing boards.

DOWN ON THE FARM: The Canucks' Manitoba Moose farm team is in a freefall and has lost five straight American League games, the latest a 3-1 defeat Wednesday to the Worcester Sharks. The Moose were coming off back-to-back poundings in Hershey where they lost 8-2 and 8-3.

Canucks, Hockey Night kiss, make up over Alex Burrows controversy

By Elliott Pap, Vancouver Sun January 27, 2010

VANCOUVER — The Vancouver Canucks and CBC resolved their differences in a conference call Wednesday and Canuck players will again be doing interviews Saturday on *Hockey Night In Canada*.

The conference call involved Canucks president-GM Mike Gillis, *HNIC* executive producer Sherali Najak, CBC sports executive director Scott Moore and Canucks media relations director T.C. Carling.

“It will be business as usual,” said Carling. “The conversation will remain confidential and there will be no further comment from the club on this matter.”

The spat began Jan. 16 when *Hockey Night* host Ron MacLean presented a one-sided piece on the Alex Burrows-Stephane Auger affair. When MacLean refused to offer an apology to either Burrows or the Canucks, Gillis told his players to decline all interview requests during *Hockey Night's* Jan. 23 telecast of the Vancouver-Chicago game.

Najak confirmed the issue has been resolved.

“We did have a meeting and we have both decided to move on,” Najak explained. “People expect impact through opinion on *Hockey Night In Canada* and that's what we will continue to do. It's business as usual and we're moving on.”

Burrows said that Canuck players had already put the incident behind them and that he was more than willing to do interviews with *Hockey Night* people when the Canucks play Saturday in Toronto.

The controversy erupted Jan. 11 when referee Auger spoke to Burrows prior to the faceoff of the Nashville-Canuck game. According to both sides, Auger told Burrows he was unhappy the Canuck player had embellished a hit by Predator Jerred Smithson on Dec. 8. (Auger gave Smithson a major and game misconduct but the game misconduct was later rescinded by the league.)

Burrows claimed Auger also said he would get him back and then called two questionable penalties on Burrows — for diving and interference — in the third period of a 2-2 game. Nashville eventually won 3-2 with both Burrows and Henrik Sedin sitting in the box during the Predators' game-winning 4-on-3 power-play goal.

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Canucks win, pack for trip

By STEVE KEATING, Reuters

VANCOUVER - The Vancouver Canucks beat the St. Louis Blues 3-2 to post their sixth straight win on Wednesday before packing their bags and heading off on an Olympic-sized road trip.

The Canucks received a rousing send-off from the capacity crowd of 18,810 that will not see their team again for six weeks as Olympic organisers take over their home for the Vancouver Winter Games which open on Feb. 12.

Mason Raymond scored a pair for Vancouver while Christian Ehrhoff converted a power play chance with just over seven minutes to play in the third to make sure the Canucks departed on winning note.

With the victory the Canucks moved to the top of the Northwest division but will be challenged to stay there as they embark on an NHL record 14-game road trip sandwiched around the Olympic break.

They do not return to Vancouver until a March 13 date with the Ottawa Senators.

Even before the Canucks had checked out of GM Place Olympic organisers had moved in as they race to prepare the facility that will host the men's hockey tournament.

Among the many alterations the venue will have to undergo is a name change from General Motors Place to Canada Hockey Place.

"We've got to take it one game at a time," Canucks Henrik Sedin, the NHL's leading scorer, told reporters. "We can't look ahead. It's a lot of games.

"We looked at the schedule and with this road trip coming up we knew we had to win games and we're very pleased with the amount of wins we took at home."

With a brutal road trip looming the Canucks took full advantage of their heavily weighted home schedule, five of their six wins coming at GM Place.

Canucks 23 home wins are the most in the NHL and they hit the road riding their longest winning run since a seven-game streak from between December 2006 and January 2007.

"You want to finish off on the right note because we won't be playing here for a while," said Canucks netminder Roberto Luongo, who will be back in action on home ice in February as a member of Canada's Olympic team.

"It was important for us. We're looking forward to it (road trip), it's a good challenge for our team."

Canucks win sixth straight

Vancouver — The Canadian Press Published on Thursday, Jan. 28, 2010

The St. Louis Blues shut down the [Vancouver Canucks](#)' dangerous top line, but Mason Raymond and Ryan Kesler were there to pick up the slack.

Raymond had two goals and an assist and Kesler added three helpers as Vancouver beat the Blues 3-2 on Wednesday.

The Canucks (33-18-2) posted a season-high sixth straight victory in their final home game before a 14-game road trip surrounding the 2010 Winter Olympics.

"It's definitely nice to end on a win before we head out for six weeks," said Raymond, who now has a career-high 20 goals on the season.

The Blues (23-22-8) held Henrik and Daniel Sedin and Alex Burrows in check as they all went pointless for one of the few times this season. Burrows' 12-game points streak, the third-longest in the [NHL](#) so far in 2009-10, came to an end while both Sedins had five-game point streaks terminated.

"It's not just the Sedins," said Blues goaltender Ty Conklin of Vancouver's firepower. "They carry the bulk of the offence but it's not like they're without secondary scoring."

Raymond, who has three goals in four games after being blanked in 10 straight, and Kesler assisted on Christian Ehrhoff's winning power-play goal at 12:12 of the third. Ehrhoff's shot from the side boards deflected off St. Louis defenceman Barrett Jackman and snuck between Conklin's pad and the post.

"It's one of those nights where for me it feels like bounces start to go your way and you're getting a few opportunities," said Raymond. "We created a little bit with our speed to open up the ice and were lucky enough to pop three home."

Keith Tkachuk and T.J. Oshie replied for the Blues.

"We didn't get the shots on net we wanted," said Oshie. "We ended up coming back. Unfortunately we just got into a bit of penalty trouble."

"We were in position but they found a way to get the extra one on the power play," added St. Louis interim coach Davis Payne.

Ehrhoff's winning goal came 32 seconds after Paul Kariya was penalized for slashing Henrik Sedin.

"(Kariya) slashed my hand – that's the bottom line – and the (referee) closest didn't think so," said Henrik Sedin. "But the guy that was furthest away made the call – that's what happens sometimes."

Payne was less sure about the referee's call.

"As far as that play, I'm disappointed it came down to that (power play)," he said.

Vancouver outshot the Blues 34-27 but struggled to score against Conklin, who recorded 31 saves.

In their previous meeting on New Year's Eve, the Canucks overcame a 3-0 lead to beat St. Louis 4-3 in overtime, costing former St. Louis coach [Andy Murray](#) his job. This time, the Blues almost turned the tables for their new coach as they staged a comeback attempt after taking an early lead.

Tkachuk's power-play goal gave the Blues a 1-0 lead on their first shot of the game at 4:24 of the opening period. But Raymond tied the game 1:17 later when he deflected in Kesler's shot after David Perron turned the puck over in the Blues' zone.

After a scoreless second period, Raymond put the Canucks ahead 2-1 at 3:37 of the third as he faked a slapshot and then put home a wrist shot.

But Oshie tied the game 2-2 midway through the third, converting a pass from David Backes – setting the stage for Raymond and Kesler to shine in a supporting role.

“That’s a part of winning consistently, you need secondary scoring and guys to chip in,” said Vancouver coach Alain Vigneault. “I thought Mason Raymond again tonight played a real strong game – and it’s not by accident. If there’s one player on our team right now that is going the extra mile as far as trying to improve himself as a player it’s Mason.”

Vigneault downplayed the significance of the additional mileage that the Canucks will rack up on their lengthy road trip, which includes eight outings before the Games and six afterwards. But Vancouver goaltender Roberto Luongo, whose next game at [General Motors](#) Place will be in a Team Canada uniform during the Olympics, said the Canucks needed to deliver a fond farewell to their fans.

We definitely wanted to finish off on a winning note,” said Luongo. “We’re not going to be playing here for a while, so it was important for us, especially going into the third tied 1-1. We really wanted to put together a good 20 minutes there and we got some big goals, and it’s obviously a huge win for us before we head out.”

Vancouver went one-for-five on the power play while the Blues converted one of two man-advantage opportunities. Henrik Sedin praised the Raymond and Kesler’s second line for producing a power play goal at the right time.

True to form, Henrik Sedin, the NHL’s leading scorer, was more concerned about the Canucks’ win than his line’s lack of offence.

“We have to put this behind us and be proud of what we did and move on,” he said.

The Canucks start their road trip Saturday in Toronto.

Notes: A pre-game ceremony saluted Olympians from both teams. ... Backes, who has been the subject of a rumoured trade to Vancouver, returned to action after missing three games with an upper-body injury. ... Canucks defencemen Willie Mitchell (concussion) and Sami Salo (groin) remained out with injuries. Mitchell will not travel for the start of the road trip but might suit up somewhere along the way. ... Barring unforeseen circumstances, Henrik Sedin will play his 700th career game Saturday. ... Daniel Sedin has 23 more games to go to reach 700 after missing 18 earlier this season because of a fractured foot.

NHL to crack down on headshots, Bettman says

Eric Duhatschek

Calgary — From Thursday’s Globe and Mail

Before next season begins, the National Hockey League wants to crack down on headshots that leave unsuspecting players exposed to serious injury, commissioner Gary Bettman says.

“We want to develop a standard that is clear; that the players know what to expect; that the officials know exactly what to call,” Mr. Bettman said in a telephone interview yesterday.

According to Mr. Bettman, an [NHL](#) game averages 40 to 42 hits, or roughly 50,000 total in the regular season. He believes egregious headshots amount to about a dozen over the course of an entire season. The challenge, he says, is to develop a standard in order to impose discipline – without fundamentally changing the physical aspect of the game.

“What is an otherwise normal, hard physical check where the shoulder hits the head – is there something we can do about that when a player is vulnerable and unsuspecting?” Mr. Bettman said. “If a player loses the puck on his stick and bends down to look for it, or turns the wrong way at the boards at the last second – what do you do about it?”

The league is currently studying high hits on vulnerable and unsuspecting players, with an aim of making preliminary rule recommendations to general managers at their March meeting in Florida. Those recommendations would be refined at another meeting in June, then moved to the competition committee and board of governors for approval.

"We know this is important," Mr. Bettman said. "We are not taking it lightly. But we are trying to do this in a professional, thoughtful, workmanlike way."

Meanwhile, Hockey Canada president Bob Nicholson said Wednesday that a proposed Open Ice Summit in August would focus on a number of issues related to the player, including safety. Mr. Nicholson is planning to unveil a full summit agenda at the Vancouver 2010 Games, in partnership with the International Ice Hockey Federation.

"Player safety, player skills, player movement ... the player is the focus and safety is the major component of that with all level of players," said Mr. Nicholson, who will invite the NHL, the NHL Players Association and the Canadian Hockey League to participate.

The long-term damage caused by concussions is one factor motivating the hockey community. The Globe revealed in December that the Boston University School of Medicine determined former NHL player Reggie Fleming suffered from degenerative brain disease at the time of his death – the consequence of multiple concussions suffered during his 13-year career.

Buffalo Sabres' general manager Darcy Regier began studying the effects of concussions on players in the mid-1990s during his time with the New York Islanders, when the career of Brett Lindros ended after 51 NHL games.

"I really think the issue isn't hits to the head, it's protecting the brain," Mr. Regier said Wednesday. "But I'm not sure how to do that because outside of scoring, I don't know what's more exciting than a big hit."

In an interview with the Globe this week, NHL Hall of Famer Ken Dryden, now a Liberal MP, proposed that the referees automatically declare a headshot as an intent to injure, rather than leave any margin to interpret the check as inadvertent. Finance Minister Jim Flaherty, like Mr. Dryden speaking personally rather than as a representative of government, urged the NHL to enact stricter safeguards before civil lawsuits force the league's hand.

Mr. Dryden said the NHL, as the most influential body in the sport, should lead by example. Mr. Flaherty concurred.

While the NHL does not have a rule specifically addressing hits to the head, Mr. Bettman pointed out that the existing rulebook covers off the majority of such hits anyway.

"Hits to the head – where the head is targeted by an elbow or a stick or where you charge or where you leave your feet – we have punished those acts for years," he said. "If you think back to [Marty] McSorley or [Todd] Bertuzzi, those hits were severely punished. In McSorley's case, he never played again. In Bertuzzi's case, he was basically away from playing hockey for a year-and-a-half. So we've always punished that.

"What we're going to do with the managers is to see if we can refine the standard on what would otherwise historically have been a legal hit, but where the head is implicated through a hit on the shoulder."

At last November's quarterly GM meetings in Toronto, some of the league's most hawkish general managers conceded that a change is necessary. A blind but otherwise legal hit to the head by the [Philadelphia Flyers](#) Mike Richards on the Florida Panthers' David Booth earlier this season had kick-

started the debate. Mr. Booth has missed the better part of two months convalescing; Mr. Richards received no penalty on the play because his hit wasn't against the rules as written.

Patrice Cormier, the captain of the Team Canada at the world junior tournament earlier this month, was suspended for the rest of the season by the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League for delivering an ugly elbow to the head of an opponent recently. He also delivered dubious hits at the junior tournament.

"Personally, I thought there could have been some further suspensions at the world juniors," said Mr. Nicholson, speaking generally. "I know they will emphasize in the coaches meetings at the Olympics that they're going to call penalties on hits to the head."

Mr. Bettman defended the NHL's record on dealing with head trauma, noting that the league put a concussion study group in place in 1997 at the All-Star Game in San Jose. "We were the first professional sports league to do baseline testing. We do an educational video. We won an award last year from the association of neuropsychology for all of our work in the field.

"The professionals know we take this seriously."

• **Canucks bury Burrows hatchet with HNIC**

January 28, 2010

THE CANADIAN PRESS

TORONTO -- It appears the [Vancouver Canucks](#) have ended their boycott of Hockey Night in Canada after meeting with officials from the CBC, extinguishing a feud that began when the program was highly critical of winger [Alex Burrows](#).

Vancouver players refused interview requests from Hockey Night in Canada during last weekend's 5-1 win over the [Chicago Blackhawks](#) after host Ron MacLean rallied against Burrows for declaring NHL referee Stephane Auger was out to get him.

"Both the Canucks and ourselves have gone on record as saying we have put this incident behind us," Hockey Night in Canada executive director Scott Moore said in an email to The Canadian Press Thursday. "We met on the phone yesterday and had a good discussion and agreed to move forward as partners."

Burrows was fined US\$2,500 by the NHL after he criticized Auger, alleging the on-ice official had admitted he was on a personal vendetta before a game on Jan. 11, telling the player: "you made me look bad so I'm going to get you back tonight."

According to Burrows, Auger was upset at the player for embellishing to draw a penalty during a game in December. Burrows was called for diving, interference and unsportsmanlike conduct on Jan. 11, a 3-2 loss to Nashville.

MacLean drew the ire of Vancouver players during a segment with Colin Campbell, the NHL's senior executive vice-president, in which he declared of Auger: "I can't imagine he said, 'I'll get you,' we all agree on that."

The league did not discipline Auger.

Burrows, 28, had a 12-game point streak snapped Wednesday night against the [St. Louis Blues](#). The Canucks won 3-2, earning their sixth straight win heading into Saturday's game against the Maple Leafs in Toronto, which will be part of the CBC's annual Hockey Day in Canada broadcast.

"It will be business as usual with Canucks/CBC beginning this weekend with HDIC," Canucks media relations director T.C. Carling published on Twitter.

- ## Fantastic voyage

[Mark Spector](#) | January 28, 2010

- ### The next 20,743 kilometres will make or break the season in Vancouver.

Toronto. Montreal. Ottawa. Boston ...

You never know what the turning point is until your season is over. Then, only when you look back, can you identify it as something that took the team north or south. Once hindsight kicks in.

But as the [Vancouver Canucks](#) step out for what is, technically, the longest road trip in National Hockey League history, it couldn't possibly be in a better position to turn this Olympian road trip into a positive. With six straight wins the Canucks aren't just leaving Vancouver today for Toronto on charter aircraft. It's like they are being shot out of a cannon.

Tampa Bay. Florida. Columbus. Minnesota...

The only scary thing for Canucks fans however, is this:

Can it get any better for a team that has gone 17-4-2 since Dec. 10? Can the Canucks keep this up, or like any team that has been winning for nearly two months, is the swoon just around the corner?

And if the swoon begins on a 14-game road trip, can all that good work be erased in a span of 14 games?

Columbus. Detroit. Chicago. Nashville. Colorado. Phoenix.

What lies ahead of the sixth place team in the entire NHL is a journey that spans 12,889 miles — 20,743 km — stops in eight different NHL cities, and features a long trek back to Vancouver at the midway point of the Olympic break.

Many players will likely fly from Minnesota on Feb. 15 directly to their vacation hot spots, then gather in Vancouver near the end of the Olympics. The team will hold a mini-camp prior to re-starting the season in Columbus on March 2.

A host of others will be playing in the Winter Olympics, of course, and they are obviously the most crucial Canucks: the Sedin brothers, [Roberto Luongo](#), [Ryan Kesler](#), [Pavol Demitra](#), [Christian Ehrhoff](#). Injuries could swell even that number by a couple, but the question is, will fatigue set in for the Canucks' leaders?

With 14 road games and a highly charged Olympic tournament between now and its last game of the trip on March 10, can the Canucks maintain what just may be the highest level of consistency they have shown us in years?

"We're in every game," said the NHL's leading scorer [Henrik Sedin](#). "When you're in them it makes it easier for sure, and we've got guys in here who can score on any given night."

The 12,889 miles is longer than a return flight to Beijing and is split up into 16 flight segments. It is 13,557 chairlift trips to the top of Whistler mountain.

If you travelled Canada from coast to coast four times, you would cover almost as much ground as the Canucks.

But it's not a surprise. The team has known about the road trip since the schedule was released last summer. So already, the Canucks have played 31 home games — more than any team in the league — and 22 road games, less than any team in the league. But the disparity you might expect does not actually exist.

Five other clubs have played 28 home games, just three less than the Canucks, and five teams have road game totals within two of the Canucks. The Canucks advantage will come late in the schedule, when they play 10 of its final 15 games of the season at GM Place.

Of course, it will have earned that cushy schedule down the home stretch.

As for the state of the team heading into this hellacious road trip, well, the good news is that it couldn't be better.

The Canucks have continued racking up the points despite the loss of three starting defencemen — [Sami Salo](#), [Willie Mitchell](#) and Kevin Bieksa. With the leadership they're getting from the Sedins' line, the depth from the Kesler line, and the goaltending Luongo gives them, there aren't many holes in Vancouver's game right now.

[Mason Raymond](#) is playing wonderfully and had two goals and an assist in a 3-2 win over St. Louis last night. He has been the best Canuck in more than one game of late. Now [Kyle Wellwood](#)'s game is shoring up, and perhaps he will wake up that regular season demon Demitra.

This team plus-26 on third period goal differential, which means they get stronger as the games go on.

If Vancouver can extrapolate that strength on to its season, the Canucks might just look back at this 14-gamer as the best thing that ever happened to them.