



Kesler's overtime winner caps great road trip in style

Brad Ziemer – The Vancouver Sun (Saturday October 26, 2013)

Improbable victory allows team to take 11 of 14 points

ST. LOUIS — Ryan Kesler knew he had something to prove, both to himself and to others who needed to be convinced he could be that player again.

You know, the one that won the Selke Trophy and scored 41 goals.

Well, with the help of a couple of guys named Hank and Danny, and a new coach who seems to be pushing all the right buttons, the old Kesler seems to be re-emerging.

Kesler finished off a wonderful road trip for both his team and himself Friday night when he scored two goals, including the overtime winner, as the Canucks finished off their seven-game marathon with an improbable 3-2 win over the St. Louis Blues at the Scottrade Center.

“We all know my year last year wasn’t spectacular by any means,” Kesler said. “It took me some games to get my feet under me again and really get my confidence back up there. This trip definitely helped me a lot.”

Kesler scored six goals and added a pair of assists on the trip and is one of the big reasons why the Canucks finished it with a record of 5-1-1, earning 11 of a possible 14 points.

No one gave the Canucks much of a chance Friday night. They limped into St. Louis in the wee hours of Friday morning missing several injured forwards and iced a depleted lineup against a wellrested Blues team that hadn’t played in a week.

Vancouver’s third line consisted of Jeremy Welsh, Zack Kassian and Tom Sestito. The fourth was comprised of Darren Archibald, who was making his NHL debut, fellow Utica call-up Pascal Pelletier and defenceman Yannick Weber.

And oh yeah, the Canucks started their backup goalie, Eddie Lack.

The game had blowout written all over it. But this, boys and girls, is why you never bet on sports.

“We could have just threw our skates out there and made excuses but for us as a team this was a statement game and we wanted to go out and put our best foot forward and I thought we did that,” Kesler said.

The decision by coach John Tortorella to put Kesler on right wing with the Sedin twins seems to have worked wonders for Kesler.

“I just look at him as a winger,” Tortorella said after the game. “I like to have that big body on the boards, I think it forces him to play in the areas that he needs to play in. I think he gets more shots off the wing, I think it takes away some of the one- on- one stuff that is out of our game and he has really concentrated on that and not try to do it himself. So right now we will keep him there and see where it goes.” Kesler is enjoying the ride. “I have never played with them,” he said of the Sedins. “I have played with them on the power play but that’s a lot different. I have my role there and it’s fun. They are always looking to get you the puck and they are so good with it. They open up the ice a lot for me. and we have been successful so far.”

Kesler’s first goal midway through the second period gave the Canucks a 2- 0 lead and it came on one of his vintage wrist shots that we haven’t seen a whole lot of the past couple of seasons. Mike Santorelli delivered him a perfect pass and Kesler whipped a quick shot from the slot past Blues goalie Jaroslav Halak.

“It felt good,” Kesler said. “It was a great pass from Santo, perfect placement on my blade and I was able to get it away quick.”

His winner came with 14.7 seconds left in overtime when he flipped a backhand from in close past Halak.

“It’s coming,” said Kesler, who now has seven goals on the season. “I feel like I have been playing well. You always think you can improve. I am just going to keep riding this.”

Henrik Sedin thinks the sevensgame trip, which finished with a gruelling stretch of five games in seven nights, helped bring the team together.

“I liked out resilience and the way we battled in a lot of games,” he said. “Guys stepping up and our Ds are doing a great job. They battle for every puck and that makes a huge difference. A lot of time those battles are the difference from losing or winning. They have done a great job, our top six.”

Tortorella was obviously pleased with his team’s gritty play Friday and liked the chemistry that developed on the trip.

“Throughout the whole trip I just liked our composure,” Tortorella said. “We won games in different ways.”

But he won’t allow the players to feel too good about themselves.

“Day by day,” he said. “That’s one thing we have to understand. It’s a really good trip but you just need to flatline it here and stay within ourselves and just keep on working as a team.”

The trip, by the way, was the best long road trip in team history. It was the 14th trip of seven games or longer for the Canucks and the first one in which they have finished with a record of better than .500.

No backup blues for weary Canucks

Brad Ziemer – The Vancouver Sun (Saturday October 26, 2013)

[Lack has ‘a nice arrogance,’ says Torts](#)

ST. LOUIS — Eddie Lack now has more wins this season than Cory Schneider.

Backup goalie was one of the question marks heading into this season for the Vancouver Canucks. It hasn’t been a problem so far, thanks to Lack.

The 25- year- old Swedish rookie has been solid in all three of his starts and has won two of them.

He stopped 22 of 24 shots Friday night to help the Canucks beat the St, Louis Blues 3- 2 in overtime at the Scottrade Center.

“It is huge for me,” said Lack, whose perpetual smile was wider than normal after the game. “It’s the best team I have played so far, so it builds the confidence and I am happy I can help the team get some points.”

Coach John Tortorella didn’t know much about Lack when he took the job. He did know that he had no NHL experience and that, of course, made him nervous. But Tortorella has been delighted with what he has seen so far.

“He has not only played well, I just think he has a nice arrogance about himself, too,” Tortorella said. “I think teams play off their goalie, especially their backup. It’s not like he is flopping around and making a save and not sure if it’s going to go in. He is steady. I think our team feeds off of that. It’s really encouraging. It’s still very early, but it’s really encouraging right now how he is handling himself.”

Many thought Lack was being thrown to the wolves Friday night. The odds seemed stacked against the Canucks, who were playing their fifth game in seven nights and dressing a depleted lineup against a wellrested Blues team.

“It was a huge game and a battle for everyone,” Lack said. “We knew it was going to be tough. I know everyone is talking about our injuries and stuff, but we have a lot of guys in Utica that are

capable of coming up and playing and I think the two guys that came up for this game did a good job for us.”

Those two guys Lack was referring to were forwards Darren Archibald and Pascal Pelletier. The two Utica call-ups skated with defenceman Yannick Weber on Vancouver’s makeshift fourth line.

It was the first NHL game for Archibald, a 23-year-old who has toiled the past two years in the ECHL and AHL.

“It’s all still pretty surreal right now, pretty exciting,” Archibald said.

Archibald and Pelletier, a minor league veteran with 13 previous NHL games on his resume, got the call late Thursday from the Canucks.

“I was just sitting there watching TV, getting ready for our game down there that I was supposed to play tonight,” Archibald said. “I got the call and flew out this morning. I called my mom and let her know. I don’t think she really believed me at first.”

Archibald and Pelletier each logged more than eight minutes and Tortorella was happy with their work.

“They played well, they gave us some good forechecking, didn’t hurt us defensively and tonight we had the mindset of getting everyone in the game,” Tortorella said. “We know how long the trip has been, the travel last night. And I thought the new guys came in and gave us some good shifts throughout the game.”

Archibald got two shots on goal.

“We got a number of shifts there in each period and just tried to keep it simple and keep the feet moving,” he said.

Archibald and Pelletier were called up after the Canucks lost David Booth and Dale Weise to injuries Thursday night in New Jersey. Weise was spotted on crutches in the Vancouver dressing room after Friday night’s game.

The Canucks are also missing forwards Alex Burrows, Jannik Hansen and Jordan Schroeder, so Pelletier and Archibald both accompanied the team back to Vancouver, where the Canucks begin a three-game homestand on Monday night against Washington.

Canucks ask gov’t for better access to beer at Rogers Arena

Michael Smyth – The Province (Sunday October 27, 2013)

Plan could be one of many big changes resulting from liquor policy review

One of the great pleasures of a typical man cave — apart from the 60 glorious inches of high-definition plasma hanging from the wall of mine — is the lack of waiting time to grab a wobbly pop during a game.

I figure it takes me less than 10 seconds to snag and uncap a brewski from my beer fridge during a Vancouver Canucks game. No muss, no fuss. Sadly, that's not the case for fans attending a game in person at Rogers Arena. There's nothing more frustrating than hearing the roar of the crowd greeting a Canucks goal while you're cooling your heels in the concourse beer line.

The Canucks want to change all that, according to the team's official submission to the B.C. government liquor-policy review.

“Beer purchases at licensed stadium venues are concentrated during intermissions of the games,” the Canucks wrote to John Yap, parliamentary secretary for liquor reform.

“This results in long lineups and significant congestion of the concourse area. Congestion creates a frustrating experience for patrons in addition to possible safety concerns.”

The team's solution: Let fans buy bigger beers in more places for longer hours at Rogers Arena.

Under the province's current rules, patrons can't order more than 24 ounces of beer at a time, limiting fans to two 12-ounce beers during one typical beer run.

The team wants the government to raise that serving limit to 40 ounces, so fans can purchase two full pints of beer at once.

They also want the government to allow mobile beer hawkers to sling suds on the concourse levels, allow sales from two hours before the game until two hours after, and allow sales of hard liquor throughout the arena.

This wouldn't just be for the Canucks and Rogers Arena, by the way.

“Based on our dialogue with at least 10 other stadium and arena operators across the province of British Columbia, we believe there is very strong support for these recommendations,” the Canucks wrote.

The B.C. Pavilion Corp., which operates B.C. Place Stadium, is also asking for hard-liquor sales, roving alcohol sales throughout the stadium, the ability to change drink prices throughout the day and the right to sell booze after midnight.

What will the government do? Judging by Premier Christy Clark's determination on the file, I have a feeling thirsty sports fans will have a reason to smile in 2014.

As for the rest of the government's sprawling liquor review — read all the submissions at engage.gov.bc.ca/liquorpolicyreview — many important decisions hang in the balance.

Yap, the government's liquor point man, said one of the hottest irons in the fire is whether the government should allow beer and wine sales in grocery stores.

Letting drinkers pick up a six-pack along with their milk and bread could be a popular move for Clark, a populist politician always looking for a cause. But the province's liquor establishment is fighting hard against the idea.

“In our view, it would be a really bad model,” said Ian Baillie, executive director of the Alliance of Beverage Licensees of B.C., representing 1,200 pubs and private liquor stores.

It's easy to understand why private liquor retailers wouldn't want more competition from the likes of Safeway, but Baillie wants people to think about the bigger picture.

Consider that in 2001, when the governing Liberals began expanding the number of private liquor stores, B.C. had only 60 wineries and few independent craft breweries and distilleries.

Now the province has 260 wineries, more than 60 breweries and 17 craft distilleries.

Baillie argues the expansion is because the network of small private liquor retailers opened the market for local boutique products — something the big grocery-store chains wouldn't be interested in selling.

“These are huge stores looking to buy the big brands in bulk orders,” he said. “They wouldn't be going out and sourcing small, local products like the existing system does.”

Baillie's group is also fighting a bid by the province's restaurant sector to loosen liquor licensing for what's now called “food-primary” establishments. “The risk is you license a business that bills itself as a restaurant that subsequently morphs into a nightclub holding raging parties until 2 a.m.,” he said.

My guesses: I'll be surprised if the Clark government allows beer and wine in grocery stores, but I won't be surprised if restaurants get a break on booze sales.

But one thing I'm pretty sure about: Happy hour is coming to British Columbia.

This province is apparently the only jurisdiction in North America that doesn't allow bars to cut the price of drinks at certain hours of the day, typically from 3 to 6 p.m. to bring in the after-work crowd.

“We support flexibility in pricing, of course, but we're asking the government not to set the hours in stone — let the establishments themselves decide when their happy hour should be,” Baillie said.

“And they should put in minimum pricing, too. You don’t want bars selling 10-cent JellO shots.”

No, you don’t. Though I’m willing to bet a round of watermelon Jell-O rum jiggers that in 2014 this province will emerge from the dark ages, and happy hour will finally dawn.

On the wing, he’s a slayer

Jason Botchford – The Province (Sunday October 27, 2013)

[Ryan Kesler’s production has skyrocketed playing on the side with the Sedins](#)

ST. LOUIS — Something Mike Gillis has got with his new coach is bold moves.

Well, that and the most successful road trip in team history.

On it, John Tortorella allowed Kevin Bieksa to do just about anything his heart desired, scratched David Booth and lined Ryan Kesler with the Sedins.

All of it worked on a 5-1-1 milk run through the East. A record that near perfect is impressive regardless of the quality of opposition, which, to be honest, wasn’t the NHL’s cream.

So, it hasn’t vaulted the Canucks back to nibbling grapes, lounging on their former glory perch of Stanley Cup contenders quite yet. The next road trip, to Phoenix, L.A., San Jose and Anaheim, will be far more revealing.

But it has managed to give an old, stagnant core a ‘new-car’ smell, and that is achievement.

The Canucks needed a good start to get Tortified, and buy into the cult of Tortorella. Consider it done.

“Most of all, it’s in the way we play,” Henrik Sedin said when asked if this team has come together in three weeks.

“We have every player playing in every situation, including offensive zone faceoffs, defensive zone faceoffs.

“It gives you more of a team feeling where everyone does a bit of everything. You get that from four lines and six Ds and, well, we showed a lot of good things this trip.”

The improbable win in St. Louis Friday was Tortorella’s best team-building exercise yet, given the number of injuries and road games played.

Win a game like the Canucks did, 3-2 in overtime with Eddie Lack starting along with two call-ups from Utica, and a new coach will have his players lapping up every course he can slop down on their plates.

And Tortorella has been serving them plenty of new dishes.

The main focus for change right now is Kesler.

He is playing the wing and hasn't publicly bristled. That's progress. He may want to settle in and get used to it too, depending on how seriously he took Tortorella's post-game sermon.

In it, Tortorella declared Mr. Selke a better winger than centre, which is the most controversial item to pass by his lips this season.

"I've always thought Kes was going to be a ... I just look at Kes like a winger," Tortorella said. "Even from afar.

"I like to have that big body on the boards. I think it forces him to play in the area he needs to play. I think he gets more shots on the wing.

"I think it takes away some of the one-on-one stuff that really is out of our game.

"Right now, we'll keep him there and we'll see where it goes."

For years, Kesler has been so good winning faceoffs, and defending the middle of the ice, no coach even considered saddling him up with the Sedins outside of the power play. Though, to be fair, Alain Vigneault did dabble with playing him on the wing last year.

"It's fun, they are so good at getting you the puck and they open the ice for me," Kesler said.

"That's why (Tortorella) is the coach and that's why we were 5-11 on this trip.

"I haven't played with them in 10 years, so, yeah (I did raise my eyebrows). But it worked out."

Tortorella's commitment to a Kesler career transition to wing will get a stiff test when Alex Burrows returns, which could happen as soon as Monday.

But there is no denying it's worked. In six games centring the second line, Kesler's stat line read one goal, no assists, and a minus-5.

In the past seven, mostly on the wing with the Sedins, he's had six goals, three assists and he's been a plus-3.

If the Sedins' agent JP Barry hasn't already included those stats in his negotiations with the Canucks, he soon will. Or should, anyway.

Because Kesler's production says more about the Sedins than it does Kesler. They have had this quietly remarkable start to life with Tortorella and are deserving of credit for the fact Kesler was churning on the road trip in a way he hasn't for two seasons.

They continue to make everyone they play with better.

It's true, Daniel isn't scoring like he once did. But he's no less a player. It just means they need a sniper on their wing more than ever. Kesler, albeit with a couple of lucky goals, has done it nicely.

It wasn't that long ago people were wondering if Kesler would score 20 goals this season. Friday he scored two goals and pushed his season total to seven which left him tied for sixth in the NHL.

"We all know my year last year wasn't spectacular by any means," Kesler said. "

"It took me some games to get my feet under me again and really get my confidence back up there. This trip definitely helped me a lot."

He could have replaced "this trip" with the Sedins.

Capitals captain gets back on track

Steve Ewen – The Province

[After a couple of dud seasons, Ovechkin now has 32 goals in his past 32 games](#)

Maybe it will take an Alex Ovechkin autobiography for all of us to figure out what truly happened to his game for the better part of 2010-12. The Great 8 comes to Rogers Arena Monday night with the Washington Capitals to take on the Vancouver Canucks in the midst of the best start of his NHL career, with 10 goals in 11 games. Put that together with the way he ended last year, and Ovechkin has 32 goals in his past 32 regular season encounters.

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, the last player to score more than 30 times in 30 regular season contests was former Canuck Pavel Bure, who pulled it off over two seasons in 2001 while playing for the Florida Panthers.

Numbers-wise, this Ovechkin, who just turned 28 years of age, matches up with the Ovechkin who averaged 54 goals his first five years in the NHL.

He doesn't mesh with the guy who was wearing his jersey and scored 32 goals for the Capitals in 2010-11 and then 38 the following year.

That guy put up 65 points in 2011-12, which was good enough for 37th in league scoring.

That was in the Valteri Filppula, Max Pacioretty and Teddy Purcell neighbourhood of the NHL points list that season. Don't get us wrong, those are all solid players. They just haven't ended up in too many paragraphs alongside Ovechkin.

Those guys didn't sign a 13-year, \$124-million US contract in January 2008.

Ovechkin was duelling Sidney Crosby for greatest player in the world for five seasons.

He finished last season in such a fashion that he won his third Hart Trophy as the league's most valuable player and he's started this campaign in such a way that people are talking about him being a 50-goal, 50-game man if the 2014 Sochi Olympics and his role with the event don't intervene.

In between those periods, columnists such as Postmedia's Bruce Arthur were writing things like, "He's still in there, somewhere. If only he could let himself out," in a Dec. 1, 2011, Province story with headline, "What is it with Alex Ovechkin?"

In Calgary, prior to the Flames upending the Capitals by a 5-2 count on Saturday, Ovechkin told reporters, "I feel comfortable right now. When you feel comfortable, it's easy to play and easy to do some work."

You have to wonder if it's really that simple.

Maybe Vancouver 2010 did him in.

Russia came in as a gold-medal contender but was ushered out after the quarter-finals, thanks to getting their doors blown off by Canada in a 7-3 romp. There were assorted murmurs that week about the Russians having way too much fun off the ice.

Maybe it was a lingering effect of Ovechkin's testy relationship with coach Bruce Boudreau, who was fired by Washington in November 2011.

Maybe it was time off and an incompetent stunt double.

Or maybe it was stress from those CCM commercials he did, like the one where a kid came across a creepy floating Ovechkin head in his school locker and wound up with crazed Ovechkin laugh to close things out.

Doubt that last one if you want. But Ovechkin did opt against renewing his CCM deal in August 2011 and signed on with Bauer instead.

It could a combination of many things, also including Ovechkin being excited about being the face of Sochi, and Washington coach Adam Oates giving opponents a different look by moving Ovechkin from left wing to the right side.

Oates is undoubtedly part of what's at play here, too, you can bet, considering the understanding he'd have of emotional, goalscoring types from his time playing with Brett Hull.

Whatever it is, it's good theatre, that's for sure.

And maybe one day it'll be a good chapter or two in a book.

It's been John Bore-torella — so far

Iain MacIntyre – The Vancouver Sun

[New man: Torts the magnanimous gives players time off after long road trip](#)

After all we'd seen, heard and been conditioned to believe, John Tortorella has been such a disappointment with the Vancouver Canucks.

Thirteen games into the regular season, he hasn't screamed at any reporters, referees or players on his bench. The only guy he has yelled at is Keith Acton, and the Edmonton Oilers' assistant coach deserved it. A warning to reporters about their cellphones? That's the most volatile Torts has been? We remember worse from Tom Renney.

All Tortorella does is just stand behind the bench and ... and ... coach. We can't even tell what that Mona Lisa grin of his means most of the time. And, yet, no Canuck had a better road trip than Tortorella. Well, maybe Henrik Sedin did. That and other random thoughts as the 8- 4- 1 Canucks, after a full weekend off thanks to Torts the magnanimous, open a threegame homestand tonight against the Washington Capitals. **KACHING:** During contract negotiations, great players rarely get cheaper when the general manager waits. With their performance on the Canucks' 5- 1- 1 road odyssey, which finished with backtoback wins in St. Louis and New Jersey, Daniel and Henrik Sedin may have added another year and a half- million per season to their next deals.

Although general manager Mike Gillis and agent J. P. Barry have maintained a publicity blackout, the sides are believed to be periodically chipping away at an extension for the twins, who are eligible for unrestricted free agency after this season.

If Henrik plays the final 69 games like he has the first 13, he'll win the Hart Trophy if Sidney Crosby gets hurt. The Canuck captain had points in all seven games on the trip, inching into second in National Hockey League scoring before Sunday's schedule, and in its final 28 hours logged 50: 47 of ice time.

Sedin's 25: 04 of playing time Friday in St. Louis and 25: 53 Thursday in New Jersey were the busiest regular- season nights in his 13- year career. Daniel, who had two goals and five points in the seven games, set a career- high with 25: 25 in New Jersey before taking it easy with 24: 06 on Friday. Henrik and Daniel averaged 19: 21 and 19: 01 last season.

With a new coach, new system and a pile of injuries, the Sedins have never seemed more important to the Canucks in October.

The notion held by some that GM Mike Gillis somehow might get the 33- year- olds to accept a two- or three- year deal at close to their current salaries of \$ 6.1 million seems nonsensical.

Toronto Maple Leaf Phil Kessel, outscored by the Sedins over the last three seasons, recently signed for \$ 8 million per year and Detroit Red Wing Pavel Datsyuk, who is 35, has a new three- year extension worth \$ 7.5 million annually starting next season.

The Sedins were never going to come cheap.

And they're getting less so by the week.

TORTS POOL: Here's predicting that when Torts finally blows, it will be because he has been asked for the 17th straight day about overplaying his top forwards. Ryan Kesler (22: 32), Henrik (22: 24) and Daniel (22: 09) are now second, third and fourth in ice time among NHL forwards. Playing in a Western Conference outpost, during an Olympic year that features a compressed schedule with more travel than ever before.

Tortorella chided reporters on the road trip, reiterating that he simply doesn't believe there's some threshold of minutes beyond which his top players shouldn't go. He's wrong, of course. It's a physiological certainty that every player has limits, otherwise the best ones would play 60 minutes a night. And Gillis, a man of science, knows this.

The minutes for Kesler and the Sedins are not sustainable.

THE PACIFIC THEATRE: Lest there was any doubt about how much tougher realignment has made it for the Canucks to make the playoffs, their winning percentage of .654 was only fourth best in the Pacific Division as of Sunday afternoon.

Even at 8- 4- 1, the Canucks were barely ahead by winning percentage of the fifth- place Los Angeles Kings, who had a game Sunday night against the Edmonton Oilers.

The Canucks get the Kings and the rest of the mighty Pacific's top five teams during a road trip that starts next Tuesday against the Phoenix Coyotes.

Only the top three finishers in each of the NHL's four remade divisions are guaranteed playoff spots, although there are two wild card berths per conference.

WHO'S ON FOURTH? In fairness to Tortorella, he hasn't had much choice with the playing time of his top players.

Not if he wants to win. There are five injured forwards missing from a lineup that had questionable third- and fourthline depth to begin with.

Already, the Canucks have used 19 different players, including defencemen, at forward positions this season. A couple of nights on the road, Vancouver barely had a third line, let alone a fourth.

Key winger Alex Burrows, out since cracking a bone- blocking shot in the Canucks' seasonopener Oct. 3, should return to the lineup this week.

Forwards Jannik Hansen and Jordan Schroeder were placed on the Canucks' long- term-injured list last week, meaning they'll be out a minimum 10 games. GOOD NEWS: Beyond the play of the Sedins, the rebirth of Kesler as a goal- scoring winger, and the NHL resurrection of forward Mike Santorelli, there were some other vital developments on the road trip for the Canucks.

Rookie backup goalie Eddie Lack, coming off major hip surgery, is proving he is NHLready and capable of starting in at least the 17 back- to- back situations the Canucks face this season.

Key defencemen Alex Edler and Kevin Bieksa are playing some of the best hockey of their careers, 23- year- old blue- liner Chris Tanev averaged 21: 07 on the trip and the team's sixth defenceman Ryan Stanton, 24, looks like a waiver- pickup lottery prize.

And the Canucks' power play is now only the sixth- worst in the league after generating the overtime winner in St. Louis where, a day after Tortorella implored officials to give his reformed team "some goddam calls," Vancouver had more man- advantages than the opposition for just the second time this season.

Kesler breaks overtime deadlock as Canucks beat Blues

The Associated Press – The Globe and Mail

Thanks in large part to centre Ryan Kesler, the Vancouver Canucks' longest road trip of the season proved to be very successful.

Kesler scored his second goal of the game at 4:45 of overtime to lift the Vancouver Canucks to a 3-2 win over the St. Louis Blues on Friday night. The Canucks went 5-1-1 on their seven-game trip.

"Day by day, it's a really good trip," Vancouver coach John Tortorella said. "Throughout the trip, we won in different ways.

"We kept our composure. We handled ourselves and stayed within ourselves. We know how long this trip has been."

The Blues agreed with Tortorella's assessment.

"They were playing their game, and they were right into it," Blues forward David Backes said. "It took a while for us to wake up. It's not acceptable. We needed two points."

The Canucks let a two-goal advantage slip away but managed to get to overtime. When it looked as though the game was headed for a shootout, Vancouver took advantage of a mistake.

With 33.6 seconds left in the extra session, Patrik Berglund was sent off for hooking Canucks forward Daniel Sedin.

Vancouver controlled the ensuing faceoff and scored on the 4-on-3 advantage when Kesler got the puck down low in the slot and swatted it past goalie Jaroslav Halak.

Kesler has seven goals on the young season, but he isn't satisfied.

"I can always improve," Kesler said. "I'm going to keep riding it. This trip has helped me a lot."

Backup goalie Eddie Lack made 22 saves in the win. Chris Higgins had Vancouver's other goal, and Mike Santorelli added two assists.

Alexander Steen had a goal and an assist for St. Louis, and Vladimir Sobotka also scored.

The Blues played their first game in a week, and their layoff showed during much of the first two periods.

"We discussed it before the game," Steen said. "There's no excuse for not coming out harder than we did, but as the game progressed, I thought we got into it more and started taking over."

Higgins gave the Canucks a 1-0 lead with 2:49 left in the first period when he raced down left wing on a 3-on-2 rush and took a shot from the left circle. Defenceman Roman Polak slid down to block the shot, but he deflected it instead, and the puck sailed over Halak's left shoulder.

After Kesler made it 2-0 with a one-timer from the slot at 9:34 of the second period, the Blues got back in it by scoring on a 5-on-3 power play with 6.4 seconds left in the period.

T.J. Oshie got control of the puck deep in the left circle and sent a centring pass to Steen, who beat Lack with a one-timer.

Sobotka made it 2-2 with a shot from the right circle 1:38 into the third period.

"When they scored late in the second and early in the third, we kept our composure," Tortorella said. "As the third went on, we changed the tide."

Notes: St . Louis played an NHL-low seven games in the first 22 days of the season. It marked the lightest schedule to begin a season in team history. ... Vancouver's Henrik Sedin, who entered the game tied for second in points with 15 and first in assists with 12, earned an assist on Kesler's game winner. ... The St. Louis Cardinals' Jon Jay and Daniel Descalso attended the game during an off day in the World Series and received a large ovation when they were shown on the video board.

Capitals are plagued by slow starts

Katie Carrera – Washington Post

What began as a hiccup has evolved into a nagging ailment for the [Washington Capitals](#), who can't seem to get out of their own way in the first period.

Even before their latest case study in poor starts, in [Saturday's 5-2 loss to the Calgary Flames](#), Capitals players recognized the importance of playing from the outset with the poise and focus they've shown late in games. But that knowledge didn't change anything in the opening 20 minutes at the Saddledome.

"We're taking too long to get into games," Coach Adam Oates said. "That's a fact."

Washington stood a step behind play by the Flames, who successfully implemented a straightforward, no-frills game plan to hem the visitors in the defensive zone. Thanks to a few lost battles on the boards, turnovers and an inability to properly track defensive assignments, Calgary took a 2-0 lead in less than eight minutes.

"Just weren't prepared to play. It was simple as that. Calgary was prepared to play the game and we weren't. That's why we lost the game," said goaltender Braden Holtby, who was pulled 12:48 into the contest with Washington down 3-1 in an effort to spark the team.

"It's nothing to do with systems, it's nothing to do with the coaching staff. It's what we do as professional athletes, professional hockey players, is prepare yourself," Holtby said when asked what needed to be corrected. "I don't think we're doing a good enough job in here. You can't single people out in that but as a group we've got to figure out what we're doing in order to prepare better."

Just 11 games into the season, it wasn't the first time a Capitals player criticized the team's preparation. On Saturday, Holtby wasn't alone in his assessment.

"I thought we were — not just right off the bat — I thought we were slow for a while," John Carlson said. "Took us a while to get our legs and we had a few good starts but it's something that we need to work on."

Carlson went on to say "preparation is big" especially with regard to anticipating how an opponent plans to attack the game. It shouldn't have been a surprise that Calgary, as the home, team, came out hustling and focused on moving up the ice. The Capitals should have been able to counteract it earlier than the second period, when they finally showed glimpses of what they're capable of and closed the gap to one goal.

“When we play right that’s what it looks like,” Oates said. “We put ourselves back in the game.”

That is what has made the Capitals’ poor starts appear so similar to each other: The absence of their basic game plan that has allowed them to make late-game rallies. Instead, they are unable to escape their own zone for shifts at a time and, with an abundance of turnovers and unorganized play in their own end, allow an opponent to dictate the game.

Washington has been outscored 12-6 in the first period this season. While it’s not all about generating offense, there’s little doubt the Capitals can make better decisions to help keep the play out of their own end. Take the top line, for example, which was held without a point vs. Calgary for the first time in four games. Alex Ovechkin dismissed the suggestion that the Flames held insight into limiting them, saying instead that they derailed their own efforts.

“We just put ourselves in that kind of position where we have puck in neutral zone but don’t make a play,” Ovechkin said. “We just have to make right decision. If you dump the puck it has to be right to dump the puck. If you make a play you have to make the right play.”

The Capitals have shown they can be a dominant team at times but have sabotaged themselves by repeatedly using their best efforts to make up for early deficits rather than gaining control from the start.

“It’s unacceptable for a team like us. We’re a great team and everyone in there knows that we need to be better off the starts,” Carlson said. “You see when our game is on it’s so tough to stop us. I think it will be a more combined effort all around, everybody chipping in whenever they can to make sure we start that off right from the puck drop and not wait for anything to happen.”

Five thoughts on the Capitals’ 5-2 loss to the Flames

Katie Carrera – Washington Post

Déjà vu all over again for the [Capitals](#) against Calgary, but this time the mistakes didn’t come with a happy ending. [Washington fell, 5-2, to the Flames](#), snapped its winning streak and gets to take stock of some familiar problems.

Five thoughts on the loss in Calgary:

1. Those slow starts. Getting off to a strong start in the first period has been a consistent issue for the Capitals through the first 11 games. Saturday night there was a lack of execution in which pretty much every player was concerned in the first 20 minutes with turnovers, missed assignments and general sloppiness. Even in games the Capitals have won this season – like in Edmonton and Winnipeg earlier this week – they were uneven in the opening frame.

It's a risky habit and one that bit Washington in the form of three Flames goals Saturday night.

"We've got to figure that out, especially on the road, especially in these buildings teams are tough to play against," Aaron Volpatti said. "They're fast. There's no excuse we've got to come out better."

Establishing a better start isn't all about offensive production and in the Capitals' case, the opposite cause is more critical. Washington, which has been outscored 12-6 in the first period this season, needs to home in on the details of its defensive and transition game from the opening faceoff.

More to come on the slow starts later in the day Sunday, a day off for the Capitals.

2. Second line. I asked Coach Adam Oates about the group of Martin Erat, Brooks Laich and Troy Brouwer, which was heading into its fourth game together. Here's what he had to say: "On a night-to-night basis, on a consistent basis, they all skate good, they're all top-six forwards. They can handle any defense pairing that's put against them, any line. I count on them for a lot of minutes. They all kill penalties, they're on the power play. Not everybody's perfect every night but they play 20 minutes for us every night."

His point is well taken in that regardless of how much offense the second line is or isn't producing, those players will be counted on to handle heavy workloads. In Calgary, Erat and Laich were on the ice for four goals against while Brouwer was on for two. On the play leading to the first goal, Erat lost a battle against two Flames on the boards but none of his teammates helped out either. On the second, Erat got caught between Sven Baertschi and Sean Monahan in the slot. A lost faceoff by Laich, who went 5 for 16 in the circle against the Flames, led to Mike Cammalleri's second goal of the night.

When that group is having as much trouble in its own end as it did in Calgary, it's likely the rest of the team isn't faring well either.

3. Where's the D? Overall the Capitals' play in their own end Saturday night left plenty to be desired, from the forwards getting back to provide proper support to the defensemen making the correct decision.

No one could escape criticism in this one and it seemed like each defensive pairing had its own adventures in the early going: getting split by a speedy Calgary forward like John Erskine and Steve Oleksy; getting caught flat-footed like Mike Green and Nate Schmidt; or giving up uncharacteristic time and space like Karl Alzner and John Carlson.

"There was a couple mistakes by everybody," Oates said. "They got two goals off of bad tracking and then we get worn down in our own end and out of position. Little mistakes by everybody."



(AP/Larry MacDougal)

4. Volpatti's goal. The gritty winger recorded his first goal as a Capital and first since Jan. 25 with a nice putback on a rebound that popped into the slot. Re-acquired on Feb. 28 off waivers from Vancouver, Volpatti played only 4:58 against Calgary. But perhaps there's something to be said for being willing to make a hit and then going to a high-traffic area on the ice.

"It went up to the point and I tried to get in that soft spot," Volpatti said. "Sometimes I find myself a little bit almost too close to the net and that time it bounced right out to me. Luckily I got enough on it, I kind of whiffed it."

Rookie defenseman Nate Schmidt also recorded his first NHL point on the play, with the primary assist, after firing the shot that rebounded to Volpatti.

5. Chimera, goal scorer. Jason Chimera recorded his second goal in as many games and third of the season with a pretty backhand after a quick feed from Mikhail Grabovski. With his third tally, Chimera matched his regular season output from last year.

He helped set up the play creating a rush into the offensive zone with Eric Fehr, but when Derek Smith laid down to block his shot Chimera recovered the puck and fed it down low to create a cycle. Some work by Fehr and Grabovski to create space down by the goal line and suddenly the veteran winger was all alone with the puck and able to skate right through the crease for the shot.

Capitals dismantled in Calgary as win streak snapped at three

Associated Press – The Washington Post

CALGARY, Alberta — After a tough road trip, the [Calgary Flames](#) were happy to be back home.

Calgary scored on the first shift, and [Michael Cammalleri](#) scored two goals and the [Flames](#) cruised to a 5-2 win over the [Washington Capitals](#) on Saturday.

[Cammalleri](#)'s first goal gave Calgary a 3-1 lead at the 13-minute mark of the first period.

“I thought it was nice for us to come out with a high energy start,” said [Cammalleri](#), who was playing in his fourth game after missing the first seven with a hand injury.

“(We) just came off a nine or 10-day road trip, quite a lot of travel and I thought it was a testament to the group’s will to win the way that we were able to get going off the start.”

The [Flames](#) started the season 3-0-2. But things didn’t go as well on a five-game road trip in which they only earned one win.

“We ended with two losses and that didn’t feel good for anybody but at the same time, you regroup, you’re excited to come home, excited to play in front of our fans and know that if we can put some wins together we’re right back where we want to be,” said [Cammalleri](#), who also had an assist and has five points (three goals, two assists) on the season.

The [Flames](#)’ big achievement was holding [Capitals](#) star [Alex Ovechkin](#) to no points for the first time in eight career games against Calgary. In the first seven, he had eight goals and seven assists.

“The start, we weren’t ready for it. They jumped on us right away, scored first shift. They had momentum and we kept making mistakes in our zone,” [Ovechkin](#) said.

Slow starts have been an issue for the [Capitals](#) all season. They’ve been outscored 12-6 in the first period.

“I don’t think we jump in right away. Something has to be happening. We have to score or there needs to be a big play by a goalie,” [Ovechkin](#) said. “We were a little sleepy out there tonight.”

Not only did [Ovechkin](#), the NHL’s third-leading scorer, get shut out, but so did the [Capitals](#)’ No. 2-ranked power play, which went 0 for 4 against a Calgary penalty kill that entered the game ranked 29th.

“The plan was to not allow ([Ovechkin](#)) to get the puck. The only place in the game where it was pretty tough was on the power play. He’s so skilled and playing on the far side, he is basically impossible to cover,” [Flames](#) coach Bob Hartley said.

“[Karri Ramo](#) had a couple of big saves on him and I thought that 5-on-5, the Stajan line and whoever was playing on D against Ovie did quite a job.”

Also scoring for Calgary (5-4-2) was [Kris Russell](#), [Jiri Hudler](#) and Curtis Glencross, with [Russell](#) and Dennis Wideman finishing plus-5.

Calgary, which has yet to lose in regulation at the Saddledome (3-0-1), continues its three-game homestand Wednesday night against the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Jason Chimera and Aaron Volpatti scored for Washington (5-6-0), which had its three-game winning streak come to an end. The [Capitals](#) have two stops left on a five-game road trip, the next game is at Vancouver on Monday.

It was the second and final meeting of the season between the two teams and for Holtby, the night went similar to the first meeting, when he was pulled 16:22 into the first after three goals on 11 shots and the [Capitals](#) down 3-0.

On Saturday, it was three goals in 12:50 and a 3-1 deficit.

Calgary got off to a fast start, jumping out to a 1-0 lead on a strong opening shift by the line of [Cammalleri](#) with Joe Colborne and TJ Galiardi.

The trio hemmed the [Capitals](#) in their end nearly the entire time and the persistent pressure led to [Russell](#)'s first goal as a Flame at 1:04.

“We weren't happy with the way we had come out to start the previous games. We knew that we were behind the 8-ball and we didn't want to have it happen, especially to a team like this,” [Russell](#) said. “We did a good job of really making sure we were focused from the start and ready for that first shift.”

The shot advantage reached 11-2 in Calgary's favor at 7:24 after [Hudler](#) converted Sean Monahan's rebound. [Hudler](#) leads the [Flames](#) with 13 points and has points in 10 of Calgary's first 11 games.

“We're going to have to realize as a group that we have to do something before the game to make sure we're prepared because the majority of the games we're losing, it's because of the first period,” Holtby said.

“It's nothing to do with systems, it's nothing to do with what the coaching staff can do, it's what we do as professional athletes, professional hockey plays. You prepare yourself and we're not doing a good enough job in here.”

[Ramo](#) finished with 27 saves to even his record at 2-2-1. Holtby took the loss and is 4-5-0.
