

Daley, Stars beat Blues 3-0, end playoff drought

Written by Administrator
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DALLAS (AP) — Trevor Daley wore a cowboy hat with a Dallas Stars logo and smiled through a swollen lip from a puck he took to the face a couple of nights earlier.

Six years of waiting are finally over for the Dallas defenseman.

Daley had a goal and an assist, Kari Lehtonen recorded his fifth shutout of the season, and the Stars clinched their first playoff berth since 2008 with a 3-0 victory against the St. Louis Blues on Friday night.

"I'm having trouble smiling, and I just can't stop smiling right now," said Daley, who took 20 stitches after a loss to Columbus on Wednesday. "We've been battling hard for a long time. It's just kind of like a little bit of a relief."

The Stars missed the postseason a franchise-record five straight seasons after never going more than one without a playoff trip since moving to Dallas in 1993. The longest previous drought was three seasons in Minnesota in the early 1970s.

St. Louis, outshot 40-22, dropped its fifth straight game for the first time since February of last year. The playoff-bound Blues also had their hopes of being the top seed in the Western Conference dashed.

"They played a very fast game ... very desperate," Blues defenseman Kevin Shattenkirk said. "They played to get into the playoffs and they really showed it, and we need to get more of that into our game, as well."

Daley, the only holdover from the team that lost to Detroit in the Western Conference finals six years ago, and Lehtonen were on the ice three years ago for a season-ending loss at Minnesota when Dallas just needed to win to move on.

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Dallas' victory eliminated Phoenix in the race for the West's final playoff spot and kept the Stars from having to worry about a potential win-or-go-home game at the Coyotes on Sunday.

"I'm old enough that I don't think about those kinds of things too much," Lehtonen said. "Not too much was needed from me. Our guys outshot them two to one and put the pucks in the net, so that made it a lot easier for me."

Daley put Dallas up 1-0 when he stole the puck during a series of St. Louis turnovers and raced ahead of everyone before beating Ryan Miller on the glove side early in the second period.

Tyler Seguin's team-leading 37th goal came on the power play 10 seconds after the Blues' Dmitrij Jaskin was called for hooking. Daley sent a pass to Jamie Benn, who zipped his second assist through the crease to an open Seguin for an easy shot past Miller.

After Ryan Garbutt tipped in Alex Goligoski's shot from the point in the third period of the home finale, the last 15 minutes were basically a celebration for the sellout crowd that included a fan with a No. 99 jersey that read "Stanley" — a reference to the franchise's only Stanley Cup title in 1999 when the hockey playoffs were a rite of spring in North Texas.

St. Louis didn't get a power play until the third period and couldn't convert on two chances with the man advantage in the final 12 minutes. After the Stars killed the last one, the crowd stood and cheered for the final two minutes, counting down the last few seconds.

"I thought the atmosphere was just playoff-like," said Lindy Ruff, the former Buffalo coach brought in by first-year general manager Jim Nill, who got quite a present for his 56th birthday. "The energy, after the third goal went in, it's like everybody else took a breath too, 'We got some breathing room; Order me another beer!'"

The Blues knew T.J. Oshie would be sidelined after he took a hit to the head that resulted in a four-game suspension for Minnesota's Mike Rupp. They also missed former Stars captain Brenden Morrow, who injured his foot in practice before the Wild game, and Vladimir Sobotka and Derek Roy, who got hurt during that game.

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St. Louis lost center Patrik Berglund to an apparent arm injury in the third period against the Stars.

NOTES: Taylor Lipsett, a Dallas-area resident who won a 2014 Paralympic gold medal with the U.S. in Sochi, was honored before the game. ... The Stars signed popular broadcasters Ralph Strangis and Daryl Reaugh to contract extensions. Strangis, the play-by-play voice, has been with the franchise since it was still in Minnesota, and color analyst Reaugh is in his 18th season with the team. ... Because of the rash of injuries, the Blues recalled Adam Cracknell, Keith Aucoin and Ty Rattie from their Chicago AHL affiliate.

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