

SHARKS GONE WRONG: Goalie Evgeni Nabokov and the San Jose Sharks fell behind 3-1 in Game 6 on Monday night after Francois Beauchemin's goal here. JEFF GROSS/GETTY IMAGES

Shark-bitten again

San Jose and Joe Thornton's playoff nightmare continues

By **KARL YU**
Epoch Times Staff

The San Jose Sharks were the toast of the NHL's regular season, racking up 53 wins, 18 losses, and 11 OT losses for 117 points—the best record in the league—and accordingly they won the Presidents' trophy.

Goalie Evgeni Nabokov was second in the league with 41 wins, the team ranked seventh in scoring (averaging 3.06 goals a game), their regular season power play ranked third (converting on 24.2 percent of its opportunities), and they ranked fifth in penalty killing (killing off 83.3 percent of shorthanded situations). The team had the stats to justify their place in the standings.

While San Jose entered the Stanley Cup playoffs as contenders to win it all in the eyes of many, they have once again disappointed after crashing out in the first round.

The Sharks drew the Anaheim Ducks as a first-round opponent

and while the Ducks were the Western Conference's eighth seed, barely squeaking in with 91 points, they weren't a team to take lightly.

The Ducks had solid goaltending and relied on physical play, a formula that won them the Cup two years ago.

Despite the temporary reprieve that a 3-2 OT win in Game 5 brought them, San Jose still faced the prospect of elimination, down 3-2 in the series going into Game 6 at Anaheim's Honda Center on Monday night.

San Jose's star centre Joe Thornton tried to rise to the occasion by starting a fight with the Ducks' Ryan Getzlaf right off the opening face-off, but Anaheim would get the last laugh as they knocked San Jose out of the playoffs by a final score of 4-1, winning the series 4-2.

Explanation needed

Questions will be asked and fingers will be pointed when people

begin dissecting why the San Jose Sharks will begin prematurely booking tee off times.

Bottom line is the Sharks' best players weren't at their best while the Ducks' were.

Anaheim netminder Jonas Hiller finished the series with a goals against average of 1.65 and a save percentage of .957 with two shutouts.

San Jose's Nabokov had a 2.82 goals against average, a mediocre .890 save percentage, no shutouts, and he allowed four goals in that sixth and final game.

Anaheim centre Getzlaf had two goals, six assists for eight points, and was +5 while Thornton had one goal and four assists for five points, and was a -3.

Three of Thornton's points came in Game 5, meaning he only had one good game out of six.

San Jose team captain and centre Patrick Marleau had three points in six games while Anaheim captain

and defenseman Scott Niedermayer chipped in five points during the series earning a +/- rating of +3.

The Sharks' special teams, so potent during the regular season, sputtered badly in the playoffs with the power play operating at 16.7 percent (4 of 24) and a PK that only operated at 78.3 percent efficiency (18 of 23).

Needless to say there were a lot of long faces in the San Jose locker room afterwards.

"I don't know if we say this after each year or not but it's very disappointing," a dejected Nabokov said after the game.

"With the expectations we had this year, we didn't come through again."

Sharks defenseman Dan Boyle, who was tied for second in team playoff scoring with four points, said the better team won out in the end.

"To a man, they were better," explained Boyle.

"Their goalie was better than ours, their D were better than ours, the forwards were better than ours, so to a man they were better."

"It was certainly a wasted opportunity," Boyle said.

The Ducks face the defending Stanley Cup champion Detroit Red Wings in the next round, a team they upset on the way to glory in 2007.

Lakers move on, Nuggets win by 58

LOS ANGELES (Reuters)—The Los Angeles Lakers cruised into the second round of the NBA playoffs on Monday while the Denver Nuggets made history with a record-equaling thrashing of the New Orleans Hornets.

The Western Conference champion Lakers utilized Kobe Bryant's 31-point effort to beat the Utah Jazz 107-96 and claim their quarterfinal series 4-1.

However, it was the Nuggets who put on the most remarkable display of the day by earning a spot in the record books with a 121-63 rout of the Hornets in New Orleans.

Not since the Minneapolis Lakers defeated the St. Louis Hawks 133-75 in 1956 has an NBA team won a post-season game by a 58-point margin.

"I must say I have never been a part

of a game quiet like this in the playoffs," Chauncey Billups told reporters after scoring 17 points to help the Western Conference second seed take a 3-1 lead in the best-of-seven series.

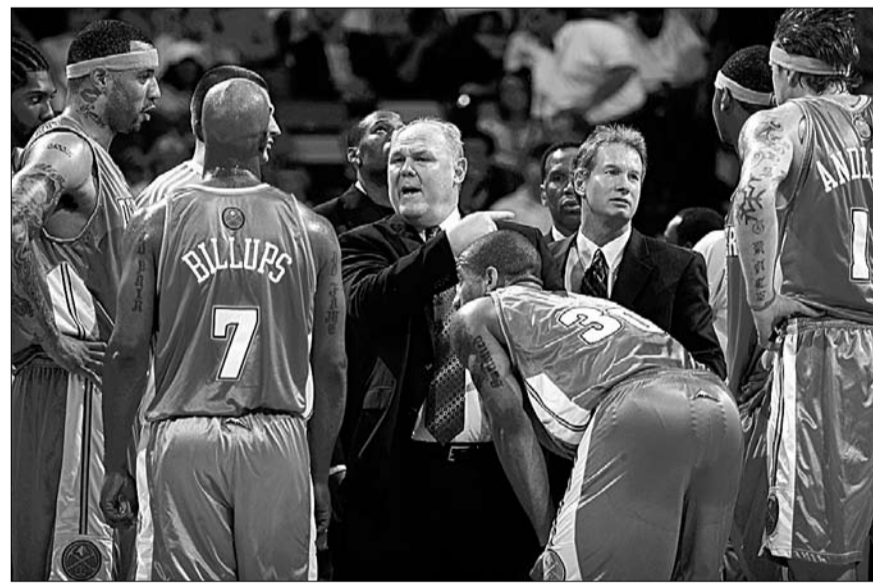
In Los Angeles, Lamar Odom and Pau Gasol provided strong support for Bryant as the Lakers strolled into the second round.

Odom delivered 26 points and 15 rebounds, while Spanish forward Gasol had 17 points and 11 rebounds.

Scoring spree

"We played well offensively but we played spotty defense tonight," Lakers coach Phil Jackson said. "We broke the game open but we didn't close the door."

The Lakers had a 21-point lead cut to six points by Utah in the fourth quarter. Paul Millsap came off the



SCORE MORE POINTS: Denver coach George Karl and his team romped to a lopsided 121-63 victory over the Charlotte Hornets on Monday night. CHRIS GRAY/GETTY IMAGES

bench to lead the rally with 16 points.

In New Orleans, the Nuggets went on a scoring spree while holding Hornets top scorer Chris Paul to just four points.

"I don't think I've ever had a team play defense like that," Nuggets coach George Karl said.

Denver had a 36-15 lead after the first quarter and was in front 61-39 at the half. Seven Nuggets, including Carmelo Anthony with 26 points, wound up in double figures.

"That's the worst game I've seen us play in the five years I've been here," Hornets coach Byron Scott said.

Chelsea frustrates Barcelona, Man U tops Arsenal

Champions League semifinal first leg review

By **RAHUL VAIDYANATH**
Epoch Times Staff

Barcelona dominated possession and scoring chances but failed to find the net in a 0-0 draw against a determined Chelsea in the first leg of their Champions League semifinal on Tuesday. On Wednesday at Old Trafford, Manchester United recorded a convincing 1-0 victory over English rival Arsenal.

Barcelona had 71 percent of the possession—an incredible statistic considering the quality of both teams. The Spanish champions also had 10 corners to Chelsea's two but were left frustrated by a defense marshaled by Chelsea captain John Terry.

"Possession is basic in their game," said Chelsea coach Guus Hiddink in

an interview with Sky Sports after the game.

Hiddink spoke about the work of his team, knowing how capable Barcelona are of ripping apart visiting teams. One only needs to think back to their quarterfinal against Bayern Munich where Barcelona jumped out to a 4-0 lead in the first half.

"They [Barcelona] couldn't create big chances. The team fought well," Hiddink went on to say.

Manchester United took early control of their match against Arsenal as defender John O'Shea scored a rare goal in a 1-0 win.

But Arsenal can breathe a sigh of relief that they didn't lose by three or four goals as they failed to really threaten the home team.

A convincing performance from

goalkeeper Manuel Almunia, who missed the second leg quarterfinal against Villarreal, was about the only thing Arsenal could be happy about.

Manchester United has been simply sensational in Champions League play. Their unbeaten record in Europe's top club competition stretched to 24 games (14 wins and 10 draws) with the victory over Arsenal.

John O'Shea scored the winner in the 17th minute after some relentless United pressure. A corner kick came to Michael Carrick whose cut back pass found its way to O'Shea. O'Shea had the composure to guide the ball into the roof of the Arsenal net.

"It was a good high tempo game. Maybe we should've got four [goals]," said Sir Alex Ferguson. "We wanted to win without losing [conceding] a goal."

Ferguson knows the worry for Ar-

senal will be that they did not score an away goal.

"We know we can go there [at Arsenal] and score."

Arsene Wenger remained upbeat about his team's chances. "We still believe we will do it. You will see a different Arsenal [in the second leg]."

The return legs will be played in London next Tuesday and Wednesday. With a 0-0 score, everything is still on the table for Chelsea and Barcelona. Both teams must play for the win as no team has managed to gain a clear advantage.

Arsenal has little room for error as allowing an away goal to Manchester United next week would be disastrous. United will rue their missed opportunities and a rib injury to Rio Ferdinand but for the moment, they are in good position to reach yet another cup final.

Stanley Cup playoffs head into round two

By **RAHUL VAIDYANATH**
Epoch Times Staff

Well, since I proved my skills as a hockey playoff prognosticator ("Long Road to Stanley Cup Underway," April 17), I thought I'd take a crack at a couple of second-round matchups.

Just to blow my own horn a little, in my previous article, I predicted Boston to beat Montreal in five, Pittsburgh to beat Philly in six, and Anaheim to upset the top-seeded Sharks in six.

My only miscalculation was the Habs not managing to take a game off the Bruins. But I was perfect with my other two picks.

In the second round of the playoffs, teams are battle-tested and the pretenders have been found out and eliminated. The different dynamic though is the amount of rest some teams have afforded themselves (Boston, Vancouver, and Detroit by sweeping their series). And, of course, we know there isn't much turn around time for teams that went seven (Caps and Devils).

Now on to my round two predictions. I tend to give the advantage to the teams who have had a week off.

Vancouver Canucks (3) vs. Chicago Blackhawks (5)

Vancouver swept the St. Louis Blues in the first round with great goaltending from Roberto Luongo, solid defensive play, and an ability to score clutch goals.

Alex Burrows really came through as a playoff performer with his ability to do the little things well, play tough, and score goals.

The Chicago Blackhawks downed the Calgary Flames in six games in a very physical series. The young Blackhawks ultimately took advantage of Calgary's lack of discipline and inconsistency from game to game.

With Roberto Luongo though, the

Canucks have the edge between the pipes. Also, with home ice advantage and over a week's rest, I expect the Canucks to get a leg up on Chicago and hang on for a series win.

Chicago won't have the luxury of facing a weakened blue-line corps against the Canucks. And like the Flames, Vancouver is prepared to mix it up, if need be. The Blackhawks spent a lot of energy to beat the Flames and will find their offensive weapons stymied by the tight-checking Canucks.

Prediction: Vancouver in six.

Boston Bruins (1) vs. Carolina Hurricanes (6)

The "Cardiac Canes" pulled off an unbelievable comeback to get by the New Jersey Devils in seven games on Tuesday night. Will they have enough gas in the tank for the well-rested Bruins?

My answer to this is no. Boston has better scoring depth and arguably has even better goaltending with Tim Thomas than the Devils do. I know that is hard to believe given that the Devils have Martin Brodeur, but based on current form, Thomas is No. 1.

Granted, the Habs made the Bruins look good but the Bruins are for real. They are a very complete team in all aspects of the game.

Eric Staal, Ray Whitney had terrific series against the Devils but Boston's defense is more physical than New Jersey's. And this is the area where I feel Boston will try to gain an advantage over the Canes.

Look for the likes of Milan Lucic, Zdeno Chara, and even Shawn Thornton, to rough up the Canes initially. Chara kept his cool during the Habs series and even though Lucic lost it, he remained a major problem for the Habs. He will be a thorn in the Canes' side.

Prediction: Boston in five.

Sport of cricket brings change to Israeli Bedouins

HURA, Israel (Reuters)—The school playground in this Israeli Bedouin desert town is abuzz with excitement as boys and girls get their first taste of cricket in a place as alien to the sport as any imaginable.

"I love to play. It's a lot of fun," says 10-year-old Mohammed, one of the children enjoying an hour's play with plastic bats and stumps and a soft ball, organized by a British-based charity.

The children, many clad in blue T-shirts that read "Hura Cricket Club" in English and Arabic, are supervised by coaches from Britain, brought in by the charity Cricket For Change.

"The ultimate aim is to get kids to enjoy each others' company, respect each others' differences and, hopefully, become good at the sport. It's very simple," said Cricket For Change's chief executive, Tom Rodwell.

George Scheader, the ICA's director of cricket development, has worked since 2000 to introduce youngsters to a sport almost completely unknown in Israel. He said the link-up with Cricket For Change had presented new possibilities.

Building bridges

"We have had 500 kids in [the southern Israeli city of] Beersheba starting with 10-year-olds," Scheader said.

Tens of thousands of Bedouin, once nomads, live in villages across the Negev desert region of southern Israel.

There are only a few hundred active cricketers and a few thousand followers in Israel. Most are Jewish immigrants from countries where cricket is already firmly established.

Among Israel's 1.5 million Arab citizens, who make up some 20 percent of the population, cricket is almost unknown.

"You get the feeling here that they don't have a lot of sports apart from soccer," said Andy Sellins, Cricket For Change's director of programs.

"I think cricket offers something different and they have picked up on that with the idea that they each have a go, that they behave nicely to each other and that they clap and cheer each other."

In Israel, apart from going directly to the youngsters, Cricket For Change has spent time nurturing young coaches who will keep the program going by organizing children's groups.

Affordable sport

Headmaster Kamel Abu el-Khiam said he knew virtually nothing about the sport before Cricket For Change introduced it to his school.

It had enhanced his pupils' outlook and was an inexpensive addition to the curriculum in a cash-strapped community, he said.

"We really do see the children's eyes light up. They love the game ... and for a really small investment we have taken on a new challenge."

Because the sport was new to the children, girls had no difficulty in taking part, unlike in soccer, which in Bedouin communities was almost exclusively for boys, Abu el-Khiam added.

The regional council's sports authority said the annual budget to keep the Hura team going was some 30,000 shekels (about \$7,000)—cheap enough to make it affordable even in one of Israel's most impoverished sectors.

Rodwell said that with the help of private and corporate sponsorship, Cricket For Change had visited more than 20 countries around the world and the group planned to introduce the sport to Palestinians in Arab East Jerusalem.

TENNIS RANKINGS			
Women		Men	
Player	Points	Player	Points
1. (1) Dinaara Safina (Russia)	8,951	1. (1) Rafael Nadal (Spain)	14,890
2. (2) Serena Williams (U.S.)	8,272	2. (2) Roger Federer (Switzerland)	10,060
3. (3) Elena Dementieva (Russia)	7,391	3. (3) Novak Djokovic (Serbia)	9,160
4. (4) Jelena Jankovic (Serbia)	7,350	4. (4) Andy Murray (Britain)	9,050
5. (5) Venus Williams (U.S.)	7,102	5. (5) Juan Martin del Potro (Argentina)	4,580
6. (6) Vera Zvonareva (Russia)	6,270	6. (6) Andy Roddick (U.S.)	4,490
7. (7) Ana Ivanovic (Serbia)	5,174	7. (9) Gilles Simon (France)	4,010
8. (8) Victoria Azarenka (Belarus)	4,646	8. (7) Fernando Verdasco (Spain)	3,870
9. (9) Svetlana Kuznetsova (Russia)	4,308	9. (10) Gael Monfils (France)	3,460
10. (10) Nadia Petrova (Russia)	3,840	10. (11) Jo-Wilfried Tsonga (France)	3,455
11. (11) Caroline Wozniacki (Denmark)	3,790	11. (8) Nikolay Davydenko (Russia)	3,405
12. (12) Agnieszka Radwanska (Poland)	3,606	12. (12) Stanislas Wawrinka (Switzerland)	3,015
13. (13) Marion Bartoli (France)	3,304	13. (14) Fernando Gonzalez (Chile)	3,005
14. (14) Flavia Pennetta (Italy)	3,040	14. (13) David Ferrer (Spain)	2,915
15. (15) Alize Cornet (France)	2,665	15. (18) Marin Cilic (Croatia)	2,555
16. (16) Zheng Jie (China)	2,501	16. (17) James Blake (U.S.)	2,550
17. (17) Dominika Cibulkova (Slovakia)	2,415	17. (16) Tommy Robredo (Spain)	2,510
18. (18) Anabel Medina Garrigues (Spain)	2,385	18. (15) David Nalbandian (Argentina)	2,465
19. (19) Kaia Kanepi (Estonia)	2,310	19. (19) Radek Stepanek (Czech Republic)	2,450
20. (20) Patty Schnyder (Switzerland)	2,269	20. (20) Marat Safin (Russia)	2,035

Rankings as of Apr. 27, previous rankings in parentheses