

Habs pull off an upset for the ages

Jaroslav Halak serves up third-straight stellar performance

By RAHUL VAIDYANATH
Epoch Times Staff

It was a movie the Caps had seen twice before in Games 5 and 6—Jaroslav Halak stands on his head after the Montreal Canadiens take a first period lead and hang on for the improbable win.

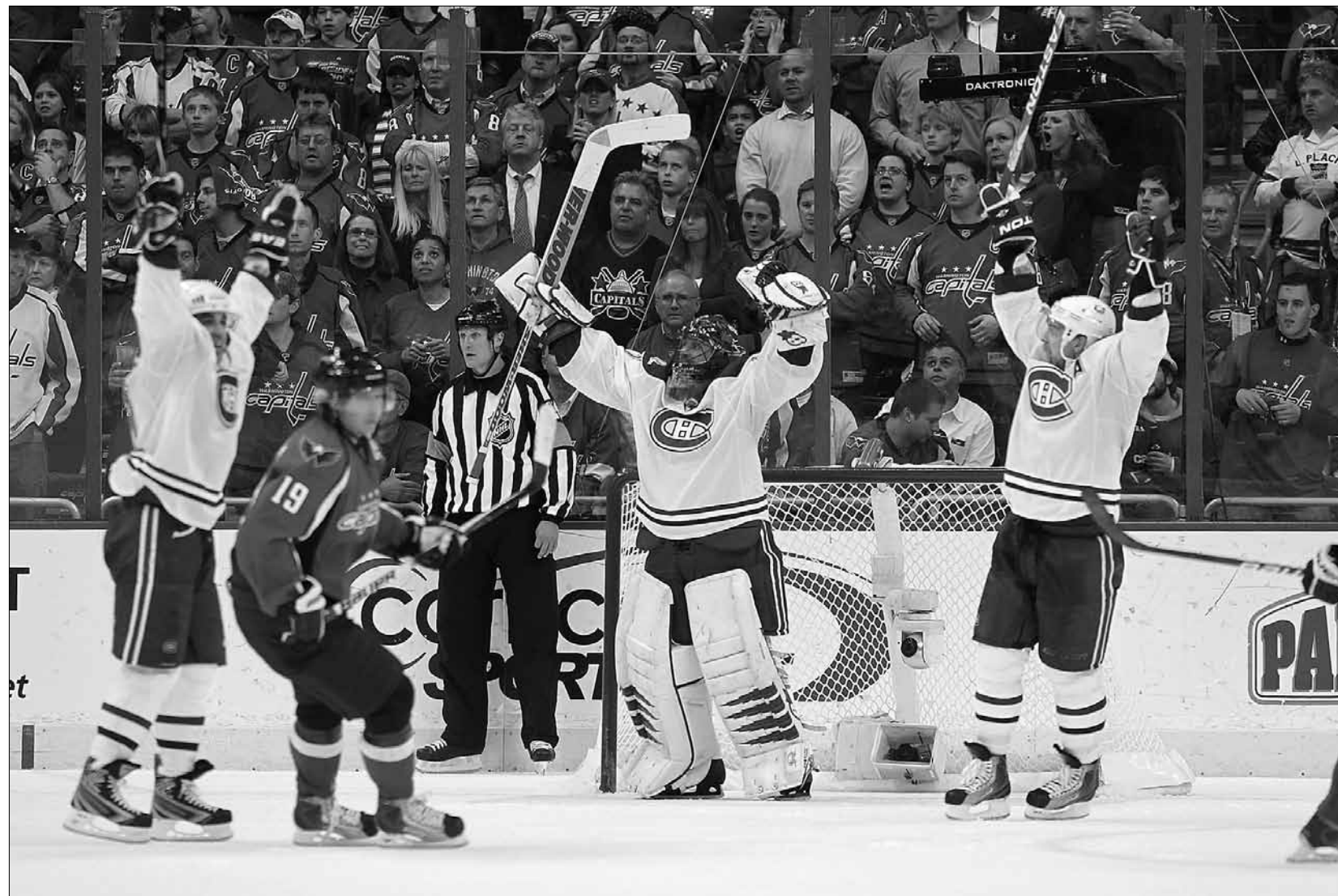
In Game 7 in Washington on Wednesday night, Halak nearly shut out the mighty Capitals. He stopped 41 of 42 shots—not the 53 of 54 he stopped on Monday—but out of this world nonetheless as the Canadiens won 2-1.

In the three games the Canadiens had to win to take the series, Halak stopped 131 of 134 shots—a save percentage of .978. His performances brought out comparisons with Montreal greats Patrick Roy and Ken Dryden.

The Canadiens got the first goal of the game late in the first period on a 4-on-3 power play. Mike Green took a dumb penalty cross-checking Habs defenseman Andrei Markov to set it up.

And power play specialist Marc-Andre Bergeron made the Caps pay. He slapped a hard shot to the top corner to beat Semyon Varlamov after a nice feed from Scott Gomez.

The unity and speed of the Canadiens was superior to the talent and size of the Caps. The Canadiens wanted it more and in the end they capitalized on the mistakes of their adversary.



HABS BEAT CAPS: Jaroslav Halak and company celebrate a most improbable result. BRUCE BENNETT/GETTY IMAGES

At 16:24 of the third, Dominic Moore, acquired just before the trade deadline, picked up a loose puck after outskating Capitals defenseman John Carlson, and lifted a shot over Varlamov's blocker.

Just over a minute later, Brooks Laich scored on his backhand, bringing the Capitals within one

and setting up a furious finish.

But that was as close as the Caps came and the Habs could now book their tickets for Pittsburgh.

IN RETROSPECT

Mike Green and Alexander Semin had horrible series for the Capitals. Forty-goal scorer Semin had one

assist in seven games. Green, the league's highest scoring defenseman, was restricted to three assists, took stupid penalties, and was exposed as a defensive liability. He may well have destroyed his chances of winning the Norris Trophy.

Caps coach Bruce Boudreau may soon be out of a job as well. The

Caps, despite their regular season prowess, have struggled to put away teams in the playoffs, regularly going the limit in seven-game series.

Alex Ovechkin who was hot and cold in the series has a whole summer to contemplate his failure in the playoffs and Olympics. Nobody

can question his talent but perhaps, he needs to have a change of game plan when the going gets tough.

The league's most potent power play clicked only once in 35 opportunities. Credit must go to Montreal's tireless defending and, of course, Halak.

"He let in that one goal tonight. We gotta work on that," joked Mike Cammalleri, who led the Canadiens with five goals in the series, in an interview with RDS.

Being down 3-1 when nobody had given them a fighting chance initially, Cammalleri tried to explain how the Canadiens pulled off the unthinkable.

"We got a lot of guys that care in this room. We just want to keep playing. Maybe that's what happened tonight."

"Jaro was formidable. After the game and half rest, he came back really strong," said Canadiens coach Jacques Martin who won his first Game 7. The humble coach didn't want to talk about his achievement.

"The satisfaction is for our fans. We have fantastic fans. The team's character speaks for itself."

The Capitals loss marks the third time in five years the Presidents Trophy winner loses in the first round.

"No one gave us a chance at the start," said series hero Halak. "They had a great season but we played more as a team. Guys were blocking shots all the time."

"We got nothing to lose. We just go out there and have fun."

Nothing could be more fun in hockey than winning Game 7 on the road against the best team in the league.

Now Montreal takes on Sidney Crosby and the Pittsburgh Penguins, which is sure to be another terrific series.

Inter Milan reaches Champions League final

By RAHUL VAIDYANATH
Epoch Times Staff

Inter Milan may have lost the battle 1-0 Wednesday but they won the war against Barcelona 3-2 in aggregate.

Jose Mourinho's men defended valiantly despite having Thiago Motta sent off with over an hour still to play.

"It was a team of heroes, where everyone left their blood on that pitch," Mourinho told Italian station RAI.

Inter had to ensure that they did not lose 2-0. And that's what their game plan was—not to lose 2-0 after an electrifying 3-1 win last Tuesday in Milan.

As the expression goes, Inter "parked their bus in front of their net."

The Inter-Barca matchup featured

two brothers playing against each other in Diego Milito (Inter striker) and Gabriel Milito (Barcelona defender). The matchup also featured two world-class strikers who were swapped for each other in the off-season in Zlatan Ibrahimovic (Barcelona) and Samuel Eto'o (Inter).

Barcelona had an unbelievable 86 percent of the ball possession, according to website www.soccer.net.com. The hosts outshot Inter 20-1 although goalkeeper Julio Cesar only made three saves.

Inter hardly even made it out of their own half, as Barcelona tried to poke and prod their way past their staunch defense.

Inter was dealt a heavy blow when Thiago Motta was shown a red card after he seemed to hit Sergi Busquets in the neck area. Busquets needed

no encouragement to make the most of it and the former Barcelona midfielder was dismissed. Thiago Motta had received a yellow card earlier in the encounter.

Shortly thereafter, Lionel Messi had his best chance. His left-footer was deflected just wide of the goal by Julio Cesar. A classic Messi move was matched by an even better reaction save by Julio Cesar.

The stalemate continued late into the second half when Barcelona central defender Gerard Pique gave the hosts a lifeline.

Pique looked offside when he received the pass in the area but he nevertheless made a move that would make Messi proud. He faked out Julio Cesar and defender Cordoba, spun around and scored into the vacant net in the 84th minute.

Inter barely survived the nervous final six minutes. Barcelona substitute Bojan Krkic had his 92nd minute goal refused after a teammate handled the ball in the lead-up to the goal.

"I reiterate that Inter are now a European force, so if they don't win it this time, they will the next year or the one after," said Mourinho.

"We tried through the middle and down the wings, but we couldn't find a way through. It was difficult because there was no space between their defense and their midfield and they defended very well," said Barcelona coach Pep Guardiola.

Inter joins Bayern Munich, who crushed Lyon 4-0 in aggregate, in the Champions League final, which will be played in Madrid on Saturday May 22.



BENDS BUT DOESN'T BREAK: Inter Milan defenders closed down the best of Barcelona's attacks on Wednesday. MICHAEL REGAN/GETTY IMAGES

Jamison-led Cavs eliminate Bulls in five

By SUSAN SHAN
Epoch Times Staff

The Cleveland Cavaliers may have advanced to the Eastern Conference semifinals with a harrowing 96-94 win over the Chicago Bulls at the Quicken Loans Arena on Tuesday, but they didn't do it without some luck.

Chicago's Derrick Rose had two crucial fourth quarter shots roll around and rim out. Even more crushing was when the Bulls were down 3 with 37 seconds left, and Joakim Noah's attempted rebound off a Mo Williams miss slipped out of his hands and out of bounds.

Rose did everything he could to keep his team in the game, finishing with 31 points to lead all scorers, but it wasn't enough.

Officiating controversy also dominated the game as three Bulls big men got into foul trouble trying to defend Shaquille O'Neal. Starting rookie forward Taj Gibson picked up two quick fouls in the first quarter while center Brad Miller got hit with his third foul three minutes into the second quarter.

Gibson and Miller fouled out. Miller had highly questionable

consecutive fouls called on him within five seconds of each other early in the fourth quarter. The third big man, starting center Joakim Noah, finished the game with five fouls.

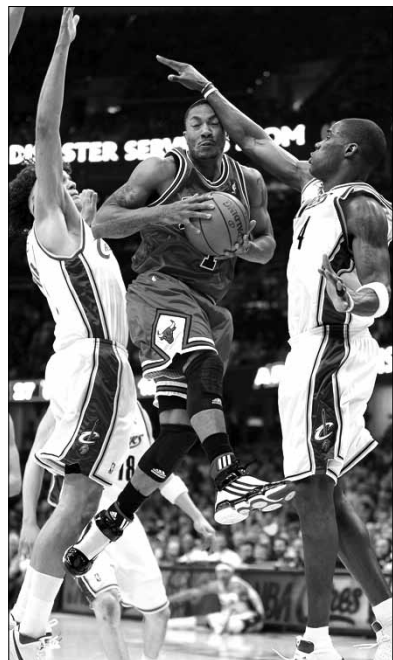
LeBron James only had 3 points at halftime on 1-3 shooting. The heavy offensive workload went to forward Antawn Jamison, who finished with 25 points, including 20 in the first half. However, James showed his versatility by almost getting his second triple double in two games.

James finished the game with 19 points, 10 rebounds, and 9 assists.

"He doesn't care if he scores or not," Jamison said of James. "He just wants to win basketball games and he's one of our most unselfish players out there so he does a great job for us finding open guys."

However, the biggest concern for the Cavs going forward is the health of James. He tried to ice the game with seven seconds left with two free throws, making the first, but shooting the second left-handed because his right arm was bothering him.

"It's been bothering me probably about the last three weeks,"



HARD DEFENSE: Cleveland's Antawn Jamison (right) shuts down Chicago's Derrick Rose in addition to leading the team in scoring on Tuesday. GREGORY SHAMUS/GETTY IMAGES

James said. "We're trying to figure it out. It's nothing structural."

The 4-1 series win now means the No. 1 seed Cavs take on the No. 4 seed Boston Celtics, who also won their series over the Miami Heat 4-1 earlier on Tuesday. The semifinal series will be a rematch of the intense seven-game series in 2008 that Boston won.

Cleveland was the No. 4 seed that year while the Celtics were the No. 1 seed and also went on to win the NBA Finals.

Oklahoma City feeling the thunder

Kevin Durant's break-out season brings out the fans

By KARL YU
Epoch Times Staff

Last weekend was a good one for sports fans in Oklahoma City.

Hometown boy Sam Bradford was taken first-overall by the St. Louis Rams in the NFL draft and the only professional sports team in town, the NBA Thunder tied up their opening-round playoff series 2-2 defeating the defending champion Los Angeles Lakers 110-89.

In a town where Bradford's Oklahoma Sooners and the Oklahoma State Cowboys receive top-billing, the Thunder are making a lot of noise.

Just two years after relocating from Seattle, the former SuperSonics underwent a phenomenal one-year turnaround.

While the Thunder struggled in 2008-09 and finished the season with a record of 23-59—third-worst in the Western Conference—they improved by 27 games, finishing this past regular season at 50-32, good enough for eighth in the West and a spot in the NBA's postseason dance.

Only in his third season, Durant has shown good progress averaging 20.3 points per game in his rookie season, 25.3 ppg in his sophomore campaign, and 30.1 points in 2009-10. He finished the regular season as the NBA's leading scorer beating out the likes of Cleveland's LeBron James and Denver's Carmelo Anthony.

Thunder head coach Scott Brooks talked about Durant's contribution after the team's 101-96 Game 3 victory on April 22.

"Kevin was not having a good shooting night," Brooks said on the team's website.

"But he made a lot of winning basketball plays: 19 rebounds, 4 assists, and he did a good job on Kobe [Bryant]."

"He has length, he's long, and he does a great job. We don't talk about it because he's such a terrific scorer but he's part of the reason why we're a better defensive team."

While he made 47.6 percent of his shots from the field during the regular season, the young Thunder forward is finding that, despite a 26 ppg average, making shots can be a little harder, especially against the defending champs. He is currently making 38 percent of his field goals in the postseason.

Durant said he is feeling more comfortable after four playoff games but he is still learning.

"I'm just figuring out how physical playoff basketball is," Durant said in

the Game 4 postgame press conference last Saturday.

"Playing [the Lakers] four times, they start to know your set, so you have to run harder, and you have to run second options. So I'm learning how to get through that and basically just playing physical and harder each game."

Brooks has played a major role in the team's success this season as well.

Brooks took over for P.J. Carlesimo back in late-November 2008 and thanks to the Thunder's banner year, was named the NBA's coach of the year grabbing 71 first-place votes.

Among the 2010 coach of the year's best moves—deciding to move Durant from the two-guard to his current small forward position.

Fans have been getting as much Thunder as they can it seems.

In 2010, the Oklahoma City Thunder averaged 18,003 fans. The team's home court, the Ford Center, holds 18,203 fans and television records are being set too.

According to www.newsok.com, last Saturday's Game 4 drew a 16.0 rating on ESPN and a 4.6 on Oklahoma's Fox Sports affiliate—the best ratings for NBA hoops since 1999, when Oklahoma City started taking TV rating measurements.

Normally Sooner or even OSU Cowboy territory, Oklahoma City is currently smitten with its basketball team.