



## Leafs Blank Canadiens In Opener

The Canadian Press

TORONTO - It only took Matthew Lombardi one game to erase the memories of a season he'd just as soon forget.

The veteran centre scored a short-handed goal in his first game in almost a year to help the Toronto Maple Leafs get off to a winning start with a 2-0 victory over the Montreal Canadiens on Thursday night.

Lombardi only played two games with Nashville last season before suffering a concussion that left him wondering about the future of his career. Acquired over the summer in a four-player trade, his tenure in Toronto got off to a dream start.

"It was almost like (the puck) was waiting for me just to put it in," said Lombardi. "It felt unreal, I didn't know what to do. It kind of happened so fast. You know, it was pretty awesome. It's hard to explain."

The goal gave the Leafs a shot of life after a lacklustre opening period that saw Montreal outshoot them 14-4. On the goal, Lombardi and Mike Brown raced in on a short-handed 2-on-1 before Lombardi swooped around the net and knocked a loose puck behind Carey Price.

He celebrated his first goal since April 16, 2010 by skating straight to the Leafs bench and jumping in the arms of teammates.

"I didn't know what to do man, it was the worst celebration of all time," said Lombardi. "But it was pretty cool."

The goal gave the Leafs the same kind of feel-good story they enjoyed late last season with the emergence of James Reimer. Now the No. 1 goalie, Reimer picked right up where he left off by registering his fourth career shutout with 32 saves.

He wasn't particularly pleased with his performance during the exhibition schedule, but felt comfortable when the games started counting again.

"That's why you can't take too much out of pre-season," said Reimer. "Honestly, I just felt like I wasn't getting the bounces (then) and tonight I felt that I was. You have to get pretty lucky to get a shutout."

"I thought I played pretty good tonight, but at the same time they could have had three goals."

Dion Phaneuf had the other goal for the Leafs, who also opened last season with a victory over Montreal.

The Habs were stymied by Reimer during the first period — Max Pacioretty was denied early off the rush while a rebound after P.K. Subban's one-timer was swept off the post — and couldn't maintain their effort after falling behind.

"(It was) a real strong first period where we had several good scoring chances — we had good support, we attacked the net, got some rebounds," said coach Jacques Martin. "But once they got the short-handed goal we got away from playing our game and they took advantage of it."

Added forward Mike Cammalleri: "We just weren't good enough in the second period. We were complacent."

Price did everything he could to keep Montreal in it. Joffrey Lupul found himself alone in front for a glorious opportunity early in the third period, but Price got his glove on the point-blank chance to keep it 1-0.

Phaneuf finally gave the Leafs the insurance goal they needed by taking a Phil Kessel pass off the rush and hammering a one-timer past the Habs goalie at 4:42 of the final period.

"He has that heavy, heavy shot, you know what I mean?" Reimer said of Phaneuf. "It was a snipe. I'm just glad I wasn't in there."

Fans at the Air Canada Centre cheered wildly as time ticked off the clock for a Toronto victory that was low on style points. Coach Ron Wilson wasn't expecting anything less with a patchwork lineup that included

forward David Steckel, who was acquired in a trade from New Jersey on Tuesday and did a fine job by winning 18-of-25 faceoffs.

There was no hiding the fact the team has a lot to work on.

"Up front, we've got to do a better job," said Wilson. "We turned too many pucks over. But considering that's the first time this whole group — the one we had on the ice — has actually played a game together and we won, I don't have any complaints."

Lombardi remains something of a wild card for a team that is desperately in need of improvement up the middle.

He only managed to get in one pre-season game and acknowledges that he's not yet back to the form that saw him register 53 points two years ago. However, scoring in his Leafs debut was certainly an encouraging sign.

"It takes away any doubt that he might of had in his mind about where he stands in his career right now," said Wilson.

Notes: It was the 709th meeting between the teams dating back to 1917 ... Montreal defenceman Chris Campoli left with a lower-body injury during the second period and was seen on crutches after the game ... The Habs were without Andrei Markov (knee), Blair Betts (lower body), Lars Eller (shoulder) and Alexei Emelin (healthy scratch) ... Tim Connolly (upper body), Nazem Kadri (knee), Clarke MacArthur (suspension), Colton Orr (healthy scratch) and Cody Franson (healthy scratch) sat out for Toronto ... Announced attendance was 19,606.

Saturday, October 8  
vs. Ottawa Senators 7 PM ET  
(CBC, AM640)

The Maple Leafs are back in action as they meet their provincial rival for the first of six meetings this season.

Ottawa is in Detroit on Friday before making the visit to Toronto. Last season, the Leafs were 3-2-1 against the Senators winning just once on home ice.