



Leafs PK Struggles In Loss

The Canadian Press

TORONTO -- The Toronto Maple Leafs head into the 2011-12 regular season on a sour note and with a number of questions down the middle.

The issues at centre became even more apparent after Mikhail Grabovski left Saturday night's game against the Detroit Red Wings after the first period and didn't return.

Darren Helm and Patrick Eaves led the way with a goal and two assists each as the Red Wings beat the Maple Leafs 4-2 in NHL pre-season action.

Justin Abdelkader and Tomas Tatar also scored and Ty Conklin stopped 20 shots in goal for the win.

John-Michael Liles and Joey Crabb replied for the Leafs. James Reimer made 22 saves in a shaky start in net.

Grabovski left the game after taking a puck off his foot. X-rays were negative said head coach Ron Wilson after the game, but all the injuries to the centres during the pre-season meant the lines heading into the regular season are still uncertain.

``The plan was to keep some lines together (in the pre-season), but it didn't work out because of all the minor little injuries," Wilson said. ``We've had to move some things around, so practice this week is going to be important."

``We'll have to sit down tonight and discuss it."

The Wings went 3-for-6 on the man advantage and took the back end of a home-and-home series with the Leafs after losing 4-3 in overtime Friday night in Detroit.

``Today we had our chances to get back in the game and take the lead," said Mike Zigomanis. ``We let a couple of PK goals get away from us. Besides for that, guys battled, especially with Grabo going down.

``I thought the guys put up a good fight and just fell short tonight."

Zigomanis, who was sent down to the Marlies earlier in the week before being recalled for the weekend, saw a lot of ice time, especially for draws, after Grabovski left the game.

``He was perfect tonight, but I don't know if any of the other centres won a faceoff," Wilson said. Towards the end I kept throwing him out there every faceoff.``

Zigomanis went 19-3 on faceoffs, while the rest of the Leafs centres went just 16-24.

The Leafs centre hopes he put himself back in the mix for a spot down the middle with the big club.

``You never know when the call's going to come," Zigomanis said. ``Playing pro for 11 years, you just always have to be prepared."

Lombardi is another centre trying to find his way into the mix down the middle. But his status is still up in the air after playing just his first NHL game Saturday in almost year.

He admitted he felt the rust.

``I just wanted to go out there and try not to make any mistakes," said Lombardi. ``It was obviously nice to get that off my shoulders. I didn't feel amazing, but it was good I was playing in a lot of different situations. It's going to get better, my conditioning's going to get better. That's nice to get that one done.

``It's nice to get in there. I'm going to put all this behind me, forget about last year and think about the season, worry about the season and not the injury."

Detroit jumped out to a two-goal lead in the first period before the Leafs struck back late in the frame.

With former Leaf Garnet Exelby off for boarding, Grabovski won the draw to Kulemin who fed Liles at the point. Liles backpedalled into the middle of the ice and fired a slapshot that deflected off a Red Wing defender past Conklin just six seconds into the power play.

That was the last of Grabovski for the night.

`` We just didn't seem to have any legs, especially after Grabo went down," Wilson said.

Detroit restored its two-goal lead with another power-play goal 2:47 into the second period . With Armstrong off with his second penalty of the game, Eaves shook off Jake Gardiner in front, grabbed the rebound off Niklas Kronwall's point shot and tucked the puck around Reimer's outstretched right leg.

But Toronto struck back quickly again at 4:12. Armstrong flipped a backhand in front and Crabb kicked it up to his forehand then slipped it past Conklin.

At 10:13, Detroit made it a two-goal game again with its third power-play marker. With Keith Aulie off for hooking, Eaves picked up another Kronwall point shot in front, but this time dished to Tatar who was alone at the side of the goal for the easy tap in.

The teams went scoreless in a sluggish third period with just eight shots on goal in total.

Toronto went 1-for-4 on the power play and finished the pre-season with a record of 4-4-0. Detroit went 3-3-1.

The Leafs begin the regular season Thursday night at home against the Montreal Canadiens. Detroit hosts the Ottawa Senators Friday.

Notes: Clarke MacArthur began serving his three-game suspension for his hit on Abdelkader Friday night in Detroit...Carl Gunnarsson was a late scratch for Matt Lashoff who faced his brother Brian with the Wings...Announced attendance was 19,027.

Thursday, October 6
vs. Montreal Canadiens
7 PM ET (CBC, AM640)

The Maple Leafs will begin the 2011-12 regular season when they host the rival Montreal Canadiens for the first of six meetings this season.

Opening night will be the first of five straight at home for Toronto who then host Ottawa, Calgary, Colorado and Winnipeg. It will be a huge test for the Leafs to get off to a fast start.