

Maple Leafs fall to Rangers in shootout in goaltending duel



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TORONTO - When Frederik Andersen and Henrik Lundqvist tapped blockers after Thursday night's overtime, no words needed to be exchanged.

"A fun goalie battle, we have big respect for each other," Leafs keeper Andersen said. "But obviously, I'd rather be on the winning side."

Toronto fell 2-1 to the New York Rangers, a valuable point going out the door with the visitors, but the Leafs exited still in third place in the Atlantic Division. That was in large part to Andersen's work early in the game.

"I don't like to see him have to be as good as he was tonight," said Leafs head coach Mike Babcock. "They put a lot of pressure on him right from the get-go. They man-handled us last time we played (a 5-2 Rangers win), I thought they were quicker than us tonight and dominated face-offs (67%)."

"But that was a really big point. The best thing tonight was that Freddy was Freddy."

Lundqvist, meanwhile, came in with a record of 9-2-1 in his last 12 for the surging Rangers and a .936 save percentage. The two goalies' 71 combined saves over 65 minutes contained many of the show-stopper variety, particularly in overtime when big guns such as Auston Matthews of the Leafs and Rick Nash and Mats Zuccarello were alone.

"I think everyone in hockey wanted that score to keep going," Andersen said. "It was a good overtime, but we haven't had that much success (1-7 in shootouts this season)."

The entertainment value already reaped by the crowd at the Air Canada Centre before shootout goals by Zuccarello and Mika Zibanejad, countered only by Matthews. Babcock grumbled about few Leafs skating hard enough, other than William Nylander getting singled out for praise in that area. The Leafs nearly did get it together and came close to a regulation win when Zach Hyman fed Morgan Rielly, who played in excess of 24 regulation minutes on the blue line, a shot off the crossbar.

Andersen's potential shutout almost survived a third period call on Nikita Zaitsev, for a whack at a breaking Zuccarello, who was trying to build on his 16 points in 12 games against Toronto. But J.T. Miller banged in a rebound as Zaitsev exited the box with 9:50 to go in the game.

Not that this stat can be laid at the feet of this year's Leafs, but they became the first club in National Hockey League history to allow 20,000 regular-season goals. Montreal, by comparison, is barely past 17,000 as the leanest times in the past 50 Cup-less years for Toronto have come back to haunt the franchise in this respect.

Andersen established himself in the first period when the Rangers pressed or his mates were too careless with the puck. Toronto's league-leading power play was one of his biggest headaches in facing 14 shots. When the Rangers were swarming despite the disadvantage. With ex-Leaf Michael Grabner's eyes no doubt popping with an empty net, Andersen stretched back across the crease and got a pad on the low drive.

Matthews, the Leafs' leading scorer, had a breakaway in overtime and a shootout chance on Lundqvist, opting for a shot over a deke.

"I saw an opening in the shootout, but he moves laterally really well," Matthews said. "He's not the biggest goalie, but he never quits on pucks."

Lundqvist and Carey Price were involved in a shootout earlier in the week, with Price and the Habs here Sunday.

When it comes to the Leafs, strange things have happened for Lundqvist. His career .901 career percentage against them coming in is his worst other than the Canadiens in the conference and wide open hockey often results.

SUN+ The Rangers left the Leafs too much room on the perimeter in the first period, Connor Brown started the play with a pass to the point and was there to finish it, banging in a rebound from Tyler Bozak via Jake Gardiner. It gave the Leafs four rookies with 15 or more goals for the first season in team history and for Brown, just making it to his 60th game was worth a \$50,000 US contract bonus. The Leafs have still not lost in regulation when Brown scores, up to 11-0-2.

His was also the 91st goal by a Leaf rookie and bumped the freshmen total to 229 this season. They will have to finish big in the remaining 22 games, but still have a shot at the Los Angeles Kings' NHL record of 344 points by rookies in 1967-68.



Blueshirts beat Blue & White in shootout

IMAGE 1 OF 32

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