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RULE: Hockey Season Ends with a Great Game, Despite Odd Game-Winning Goal



By [Heather Rule](#) - June 12, 2017

The ending was actually pretty predictable. It was drama-filled, intense and everything playoff hockey should be, of course. In a scoreless game late in regulation, it already seems like overtime

because all it will take is one goal to be the game-winner at that point.

That's pretty much how it played out as the Pittsburgh Penguins scored with 1:35 left in regulation on the way to a 2-0 win in Game 6 to clinch back-to-back Stanley Cups in front of opponent Nashville's home crowd. It's the first time a team has won the Cup two years in a row since the Detroit Red Wings in 1997-98.

A scoreless game that's competitive with plenty of chances on each side seems destined for a 1-0 finish. Essentially, that's what this game was if you take out the empty-netter in the final seconds. So, the Penguins cashed in on their opportunity with one of those fluke goals. Not a slapshot from the point. Not a rebound goal from the slot. Not a tic-tac-toe passing play on an odd-man rush.

The puck took a bad bounce off the end boards and went in off Predators goalie Pekka Renne's arm from Penguins player Patric Hornqvist, who was standing behind the goal line. Hornqvist skated backward from the goal with his arms raised and a big smile on his face in a simple celebration for what was the Stanley Cup-clinching goal.

Those kinds of goals aren't pretty, but they're part of hockey. For Penguins fans, they couldn't care less how the puck went in. For Predators fans, and probably many casual hockey viewers without a horse in the race, that's an awful way to see the hockey season end.

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Just say the word "stanchion" among Wild fans and they'll practically put their heads through walls recalling a certain Patrick Kane, series-clinching goal for the Chicago Blackhawks over the Minnesota Wild in the second round of the 2014 playoffs. It's frustrating to be on the wrong side of those kinds of goals — ones that just happen to go in or are referred to sometimes as "garbage goals."

Well, they all count the same on the scoreboard.

Remember, too, that these are best-of-seven series. So many moments, goals and penalties go into winning the needed four games to advance or win the Cup. Pinning it all on one moment is easy to do though not exactly fair. It's an endless "what if?" game.

The Predators had their chances

The loss was heartbreaking for the Predators, who thought they scored just over a minute into the second period on Sunday. Filip Forsberg took a shot from the circle that went into goaltender Matt Murray's body. He didn't have the puck frozen and it squirted underneath into the blue paint. That's when Colton Sissons crashed the net and put the puck in the net.

1-0 Predators, right?

Not exactly. The referee was quick to blow the whistle after he lost sight of the puck. The whistle blew before the puck entered the net and while it was still loose. The goal was immediately waved off. It was a mistake but one that offers no recourse. Chalk it up to another fine moment for the NHL as a whole.

At the risk of blowing this out of proportion, it might be worth reviewing how quick whistles can be avoided. This was heightened because of the moment and result, though gaffes like this do happen when refs lose sight of the puck. For example, a puck shot into a goaltender isn't always frozen underneath or caught in equipment.

Anyway, I'm not going to claim to be an officiating expert. It just seems like it might be worth a look.

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The other stinging statistic of the game for the Predators: 0-for-4 on the power play, including 32 seconds of 5-on-3 time. The Penguins didn't see any time with a man advantage. Of course, the goaltending on both sides was spectacular. Murray earned the shutout with 27 saves. Renne stopped 27 shots. The sound of iron rang out more than once during the game.

Some blowout games, but not a blowout series

Let's not forget what a series that turned out to be, especially after the Penguins took a two-games-to-none lead. Apparently, being down 2-0 has turned into the same panic as being down 3-0, so naturally, a lot of the chatter revolved around how much trouble the No. 16 seed Predators were in against the defending Cup champions.

Then the Predators went home to "Smashville" in front of their feisty, catfish-throwing (I won't get into that.) fans for a couple dominating victories to even the series and turn it into a best-of-three competition.

Unfortunately, the Predators failed to score a goal in the final two games of the series. At the most basic level, that's not going to cut it. For as much as the home-ice advantage wasn't a factor throughout the rest of the playoff season, the home team won every game in the Final except for Game 6.

Cullen should go out on top

Minnesotans take pride in their professional athletes. Matt Cullen, the 40-year-old family man from Moorhead, just won his third Stanley Cup and was part of the back-to-back effort from the Penguins this year and last. Everybody knows age 40 is downright ancient in athletic years. He's played in

1,366 games, scored 248 goals (18 in the playoffs) and accumulated nearly 700 points in his career. His first NHL season was 1997-98.

Cullen was on the ice for Hornqvist's game-winner.

It's probably one of the best scenarios to skate into the sunset of retirement for Cullen, something he's hinted is a real possibility. I'm sure he'd like to coach some hockey for his three young boys. It's obviously a decision for Cullen and his family, but it would be really great to see him go out on top. What a better way to end a hockey career than with back-to-back championships?

2017 Stanley Cup Final scores:

- Game 1 in Pittsburgh: Penguins 5, Predators 3
- Game 2 in Pittsburgh: Penguins 4, Predators 1
- Game 3 in Nashville: Predators 5, Penguins 1
- Game 4 in Nashville: Predators 4, Penguins 1
- Game 5 in Pittsburgh: Penguins 6, Predators 0
- Game 6 in Nashville: Penguins 2, Predators 0

Penguins win the series 4-2

Conn Smythe winner: Sidney Crosby, Pittsburgh, for the second year in a row.

HEATHER RULE



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