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Cullen Celebrates 41 with a 6-3 Win Over Montreal



By [Heather Rule](#) - November 2, 2017

Matt Cullen sure knows how to celebrate: His first goal of the season back with his hometown team, plus a two-point night on his 41st birthday.

Playing in his 1,500th NHL game, Cullen scored the first goal of the night as the Minnesota Wild defeated the Montreal Canadiens 6-3 Thursday at Xcel Energy Center.

"I think when I'm all done playing, I'll look back and enjoy it," Cullen said. "I feel blessed to have played as many games as I have."

Minnesota got help from six goal scorers in the game, tying a season-high. The Wild (5-4-2) extended their winning streak over the Canadiens (4-8-1) to six straight games going back to 2014. The Wild – 11-6-3 all-time against Montreal – have outscored the Canadiens 17-6 in their last three meetings.

It was a game filled with notable storylines. Actually, that could be said of the first period alone.

There was Cullen's goal off a loose puck after a point shot from Mike Reilly in the first five minutes of the game. Then just 10 seconds later, Montreal goalie Cary Price – who looked less than stellar – went for a skate behind the net and tossed the puck around the boards. Wild defenseman Matt Dumba fired off a shot that went in off a tip in front for a quick 2-0 Wild lead.

Head coach Bruce Boudreau acknowledged Dumba as one of the team's top-four defensemen, which has been his status in the line combinations.

"I thought that was his best game of the year," Boudreau said. "We can't go anywhere without him being really good."

After a couple scoring changes, the goal officially went to Nino Niederreiter for his first of the season.

Still, the scoring play was likely a huge weight lifted off Dumba's shoulders following his defensive gaffe the other night that got him benched for most of the third period against Winnipeg.

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Tyler Ennis had been stuck on 99 career goals; it was such an afterthought that he said after the game he "kind of forgot about it." But he finally got No. 100 and his third of the season off a pretty two-on-one opportunity and a pass from Cullen for a 3-0 lead in the first period. It was Ennis' 10th career goal against Montreal in 31 games.

Boudreau was particularly impressed with the play of his fourth line – Cullen and Ennis – in the first two periods. Boudreau said to himself in the first period: "If the fourth line can play like that, we're going to win a lot of hockey games."

Defenseman Ryan Suter made it 4-0 in the second period with a slick bang-bang play pass from Mikko Koivu. The Wild then started the third period on the power play. Koivu provided another assist with a pass from below the goal line to a waiting Jared Spurgeon on the side of the net who didn't miss his chance for a 5-1 Wild lead 34 seconds into the period.

To be clear, the Canadiens have had a very rough start to their season, and it showed on the ice. Price, in particular, looked to be struggling with simple things like his movement in the crease. But he got a bit of a break in the third period as his team pressured the Wild. Quickly, the Canadiens grabbed the shots-on-goal lead and scored a couple of goals to turn a 5-1 game into a 5-3 game in the closing minutes.

The Canadiens outshot the Wild 16-5 in the third period and 31-27 for the game. It was slightly similar to Tuesday's game when Winnipeg had a lead and coasted a bit in the third period as the Wild tried to come back in the game but ultimately couldn't finish it off.

Fortunately for the Wild, they capitalized on an empty-net chance with Price pulled as Marcus Foligno scored from the red line for the 6-3 win. They've won three of their past four games on this homestand.

In goal:

- Devan Dubnyk (4-3-1) with 28 saves. Price (3-7-1) with 21 saves.

Tidbits:

- Six goals tied a season-high for the Wild. They put up six earlier in the homestand in a 6-4 victory over the New York Islanders. That game also featured six scorers.
- The Wild snapped some bad luck on the power play with Spurgeon's goal early in the third period. It was just the third power-play goal for the Wild on home ice this season. They went 1-for-4 with the man advantage.
- Though Cullen and Ennis both scored, they also contributed to a pair of Montreal goals. Cullen turned the puck over at his own blue line leading to the first Montreal goal in the second period, just after Suter made it 4-0. In the third, Ennis lost control of the puck behind his goal. The play resulted in another Canadiens tally.
- Cullen, Koivu, Mikael Granlund and Dumba all had two-point nights. Cullen and Niederreiter each tallied their first goals of the season.

Up next:

- The longest homestand of the season wraps up Saturday night with a game against division-rival Chicago. The Wild got their first win of the season in Chicago, 5-2, on Oct. 12.

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