

Game 7 showdowns next for hockey's elite

By John Mossman
The Associated Press

DENVER — Chris Drury scored on a deflection with 3:51 left in the third period as the Colorado Avalanche staved off elimination by beating the Dallas Stars 2-1 on Thursday night.

Colorado's victory tied the best-of-seven Western Conference finals at 3-3, with a decisive Game 7 set for Saturday night in Dallas.

Ray Bourque assisted on Drury's goal and scored Colorado's other goal.

The Avalanche broke a 1-1 tie when Bourque took a long shot from along the left boards that sailed high toward the net. Drury, stationed in the slot, redirected it with his stick past goalie Ed Belfour.

Patrick Roy had 26 saves, extending his NHL record for career playoff victories to 121. Belfour made 19 saves.

Bourque's goal early in the second period put the Avalanche ahead, but Brett Hull tied it with a power-play goal later in the period. It was Hull's ninth goal of the playoffs and fourth goal in the last three games.

Dallas defeated Colorado in last year's conference finals, rallying from a 3-2 deficit en route to capturing its first Stanley Cup.

Colorado outshot Dallas 9-6 in a scoreless first period that saw the Avalanche continue to flounder on the power play, failing to capitalize on two man-advantage situations.

Each team lost a defenseman in the period. Dallas' Richard Matvichuk, elbowed in the head by Dave Andreychuk, went down on the ice behind the Dallas net,

apparently losing consciousness momentarily. Later, Colorado's Aaron Miller was high-sticked by Scott Thornton and collapsed in pain. Both players had to be assisted from the ice, but no penalties were called.

Matvichuk, who suffered a mild concussion, did not return, but Miller was back for the second period.

Bourque, seeking his first Stanley Cup title in his 21st NHL season, scored his first goal of the playoffs early in the second period. Joe Sakic intercepted a pass and, after putting a spin move on Sylvain Cote, fed Bourque in the slot. Bourque's shot went high on Belfour's glove side at 4:30.

Penalties against Drury and Adam Foote gave Dallas a 5-on-3 advantage for 1:14 later in the period, and the Stars capitalized on Hull's goal at 12:37. Sergei Zubov passed from the right boards to Hull, situated just inside the left circle.

Dallas' Mike Modano had to be assisted from the ice after being stunned by Foote's hit that drew a high-sticking penalty, but he returned late in the period.

Belfour had a key save off Milan Hejduk in the third period, and Roy stopped the dangerous Hull.

Sakic, his frustration continuing, missed an empty net in the waning seconds. Sakic has scored only one goal in the last 13 games.

Colorado is in a 1-for-23 slump on the power play and is only 3-for-30 in the series.

The Stars were without forward Jamie Langenbrunner, sidelined by a sprained knee sustained in Game 5 on Tuesday night.

New Jersey and Philadelphia tangle tonight

PHILADELPHIA — Nothing beats playing in a deciding game of a playoff series. Win, and the quest for the Stanley Cup goes on. Lose, and you go home with nothing.

That's the prospect the New Jersey Devils and the Philadelphia Flyers will face Friday night in Philadelphia when they meet in Game 7 of the Eastern Conference finals.

“Game 7... is one of the greatest experiences you will ever have as a hockey player.”

Craig Ramsay
Philadelphia coach

Highlighted by momentum swings, physical play and outstanding hockey, the series has been a wonderful border war for the rivals and their fans.

“It will be nerve-wracking,” said Martin Brodeur, the New Jersey goalie who will be playing in the fourth Game 7 of his career. “It will be a lot of pressure. People will hate us and yell at us, but this is hockey. This is Game 7. This is the situation a lot of people would like to be in, and this is the position we are in now.”

The Devils have gotten here the hard way. They fell behind 3-1 and then game back to win the last two games, 4-1 in Philadelphia on Monday and then 2-1 on Wednesday night, spoiling the return of Flyers superstar Eric Lindros from

a series of concussions.

The last two wins have seemingly given New Jersey back the momentum it lost after blowing a 3-1 lead in Game 2.

Craig Ramsay, who took over as Philadelphia's coach after Roger Neilson was diagnosed with cancer in February, isn't focusing on his team's two recent losses. He is focusing on Game 7 and the opportunity it presents.

“It doesn't matter how you got there,” Ramsay said. “This is a tremendous opportunity. There will be tremendous excitement in that building.”

“To have a chance to play in a Game 7, in this case to go to the

Stanley Cup finals, is one of the greatest experiences you will ever have as a hockey player.”

New Jersey coach Larry Robinson played in a number of deciding games with Montreal.

“As far as the young kids, this is something they are going to remember for the rest of their lives,” said Robinson, who has turned the team around since replacing Robbie Ftorek late in the season. “A lot of times it takes players from one level to another level because of the intensity and the importance of the game and the things that have to be done in pressure-filled situations. It's a great teaching tool.”

WNBA continues its growth spurt

By Melissa Murphy
The Associated Press

NEW YORK — The WNBA is stretching out. Way out.

In just its fourth season, the league has already doubled in size from eight teams in 1997 to 16. Teams in Seattle, Portland, Indianapolis and Miami join the WNBA for the 2000 season.

Another theme this summer will be the Olympics. The league condensed its season to allow players to join their national teams for the Sydney Games.

“We had our origins with the great success of the 1996 Olympics and see it as an important story line,” WNBA president Val Ackerman said. “We see it as an exclamation point at the end of our season.”

Games begin Monday with a nationally televised rematch of last year's championship, New York at Houston.

The new season brings new rules, too, including an unlimited number of players from the defunct ABL on all rosters and eight teams, not just six, in the playoffs in a best-of-three format in all rounds.

The 32-game schedule will be squeezed into 11 weeks, meaning plenty of back-to-back games that may affect play in a league that sent two losing teams to the 1999 playoffs.

“If you did that in the NBA, four expansion teams in one year, you'd have four horrible teams,” New York Liberty coach Richie Adubato said. “They'd win 16-18 games. That isn't the case. You still have all those ABL players, all the European players. They can play.”

Last year's collective bargaining agreement allowed just three ABL players per team, while the 1999 expansion teams in Orlando and Minnesota were allowed five.

The coaches in Seattle and Portland look to develop a rivalry before someday challenging the three-time defending champion Houston Comets in the Western Conference.

Linda Hargrove, coach of the Portland Fire, said she and Seattle coach Lin Dunn are “Northwest expansion sisters.”

“Portland and Seattle have a natural rivalry that will be very healthy,” Hargrove said. “The

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Portland coach

West is so strong, it's important that we win against each other, making our rivalry even more intense.”

Czech Republic star Kamila Vodichkova, the No. 9 pick in the draft, will be the centerpiece of the Seattle Storm's offense. Dunn, who turned the last-place Portland Power of the ABL into a conference champion in one season, never saw Vodichkova play in person before selecting the 6-foot-4 forward.

“We got a steal,” Dunn said. “She's 27, strong, physical, can run and is just learning my system.”

Ackerman said eight of the 12 Olympic women's basketball

teams will have current or former WNBA players on their rosters.

The WNBA championships will end no later than August 27 so players can rejoin their national teams before the start of the Olympics in mid-September.

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