

# Ovechkin, Caps end downward trends (20pt)

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He's back, and he returned with a vengeance.

Left wing Alex Ovechkin scored the opening goal last night then assisted on the next three, leading Washington to a resounding 5-1 victory at MCI Center over the high-flying New York Rangers. Olie Kolzig turned in a magical performance in goal to ensure there would be no shootouts like the 15-round affair the two teams had last weekend.

The heroics of Ovechkin and Kolzig aside, it was a victory the entire team earned with one of its best overall performances of the season. Forwards played both ways while defensemen also provided offense while making sure Kolzig saw no rebounds. There were, as the old hockey expression goes, no passengers on the bus.

The victory snapped a five-game Washington losing streak, longest of the season.

"I thought we deserved better last week in New York [a 3-2 shootout loss]," said Kolzig, who made 37 saves. "But definitely we were hitting on all aspects of the game. They scored on a 5-on-3 at the end to spoil the shutout but that was a great game. We frustrated their guys all night long and that's the way we need to play if we want to be successful."

The offensive outburst was a huge relief for Ovechkin, the 20-year-old rookie. His last goal came in the final minute of the second period against Buffalo on Nov. 17 -- 403 minutes, 6 seconds before last night's goal. He never had a three-point night previously in his brief NHL career and is the first Caps player to have a four-point night since Robert Lang on Jan. 18, 2004 in a 4-3 win over Pittsburgh.

"I score our first goal and I didn't score

six or seven games," Ovechkin said. "I work hard in practice, stay after practice and shoot. It get result."

His teammates kept telling him not to worry about the goal-less streak, but he admitted it did cross his mind.

"Couple games I think about it. Today I just think, 'OK, you didn't score but you must play harder,' " he said. "I don't think about score and just play hard and improve."

As hard as he played and with as many shots as he attempted, the Rangers didn't do that bad a job defending him. Ovechkin had only one official shot on goal, the one he scored on.

That goal came 12:11 into the first. The rookie stole the puck from left wing Ville Nieminen, corralled the bouncing puck then went in alone on Henrik Lundqvist. He picked the goalie's stick side and quickly wrested the puck through a small opening, ending a seven-game goal-less streak during which he assisted on four goals.

He then assisted on goals by Dainius Zubrus, Steve Eminger and Jeff Halpern, building a lead that could not be overcome. Matt Pettinger scored the final Washington goal off another steal.

Ovechkin's dramatics came with former Caps standout Jaromir Jagr playing the right side for the Rangers. Jagr was booed lustily every time he touched the puck, MCI Center fans showing they hadn't forgotten some of Jagr's very forgettable moments in a Washington uniform. He had an assist on the Rangers goal in the final two minutes, scored by Petr Prucha while the Caps were trying to kill a two-man disadvantage.