

Barons lure 527 Chicago fans in blizzard



BOB MURDOCH (20) of the Cleveland Barons is checked by Phil Russell (5) of the Chicago Black Hawks during the first period of this National Hockey

League game Thursday night. The Black Hawks turned the Barons blue, 5-0. (AP photo).

CHICAGO (AP) — The Chicago Black Hawks played well Thursday night, very well, and they were only disappointed in the fact that more of their fans were not on hand to witness their 5-0 victory over the Cleveland Barons.

"The fans mean a lot," said Coach Bob Pulford, "it's too bad they weren't around to see Stan Mikita's 508th goal or the shutout by Tony Esposito."

It wasn't that the fans are not coming out for the Black Hawks these days. Only 527 showed up because of a blizzard which hit the Chicago area.

They missed Mikita's goal and Esposito's fourth shutout of the season and the 62nd or 63rd of his career, depending on how it is determined.

Esposito actually has 62 career shutouts, most among active National Hockey League goalies. It could be 63 except he had to step off the ice for a few seconds to check out his equipment — and thus didn't play the full game.

"I'm not interested in shutouts," said Esposito. "All I worry about is how well the team plays and how far we go. I thought the guys played well tonight and did a lot of forechecking. That's what it's all about."

"I'VE SAID IT BEFORE and I'll say it again, we're not a bad hockey team," said Esposito. "In fact, I think we're pretty good and we'll prove it before this season is over."

The victory was the sixth in the last nine games for the Hawks against one loss and two ties and finally put them over the 500 mark for the season with 48 points in 47 games. They are well ahead and in first place in the Conn Smythe Division.

"I'm happy with our situation," said Coach Bob Pulford, "but we have to go through the month of February to determine our ultimate position. If we are still at 500 after that, we'll be alright."

The Hawks took a 2-0 lead in the first period on a goal by Ivan Boldirev at 9:07 and a power play goal by Mikita at 15:23. There was no scoring in the second period.

Chicago then struck for three quick goals early in the third period to lock up the decision. John Marks scored at 1:07, Alain Daigle connected at 1:56 and Phil Russell hit at 3:30 for what was the Hawks first shorthanded goal of the season.

"We played well in the first period," said Pulford, "but there was less intensity in the second period. We came back strong in the third period. We have to maintain our intensity from here on in to prove ourselves."

Jack "Tex" Evans, coach of the Barons, wasn't happy with the outcome considering his team has played well recently with five victories in eight games.

"We didn't play well at all," said Evans, a former Black Hawk. "We had no attack and no checking. There's really no reason for it. We just let them walk in and score goals in the third period. We've played well in our last eight games against teams like Boston, Buffalo and the New York Islanders. But we were flat tonight."