

Kings Drop 3-1 Battle To Barons

RICHFIELD, Ohio (AP) — The Cleveland Barons are off and running with two victories in three games, and Coach Jack Evans gives a lot of the credit to goalie Gilles Meloche.

"He (Meloche) is just absorbing the puck," Evans said with a smile following Cleveland's 3-1 National Hockey League victory over Los Angeles Wednesday night.

The Cleveland goalie has allowed just five goals in the first three games, limiting the opposition to three goals in the Barons' two home games, both victories.

"He's just playing great," Evans added. "I haven't seen him play this well this early in the three years I've been with this club."

Meloche, a slender French-Canadian, stopped 27 Los Angeles shots Wednesday night to help Cleveland pay back the Kings for a season-opening 2-0 loss at Los Angeles a week ago. It was the Kings' first loss after two victories and a tie.

"The only difference in this game was that Cleveland scored three goals and we got one," said Los Angeles Coach Ron Stewart. "We certainly had our opportunities to score. We got a number of breakaways, but we either missed the net or he (Meloche) got in the way."

"We were a little flat and seemed to let down on ourselves when we didn't take advantage of our chances," he added. "From listening to them (his players) before the game in the dressing room, I could tell they were a little cocky. It (the loss) was probably the best thing that could have happened to them."

The Kings got a scare midway through the second period when a hard slapshot by Cleveland's Bob Murdoch hit Kings goalie Rogie Vachon on the face mask above the left eye. Vachon was pulled from the game, trailing 2-1, and replaced by Gary Simmons.

"If anything should have picked my guys up, it was Simmons' play. He made some big saves for us," Stewart said.

As for Vachon, considered one of the best netminders in the game, he noted, "He's a little groggy, but he'll be okay. He took an awful shot for the second night in a row. I can't imagine how bad it would have been without the mask."

Fred Ahern started the scoring for Cleveland 8:56 into the first period, and LA's Ernie Hicke tied it with a power play goal at 10:03. Then Dennis Maruk, the center on Cleveland's explosive "3M Line," put the Barons ahead for good 46 seconds into the second period, depositing a rebound past Vachon from right in front of the crease.