

# Barons pick right time for poor performance

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RICHFIELD — Maybe Wednesday night's attendance of 3,812 was a blessing in disguise for the Cleveland Barons.

After all, why embarrass yourself in front of a big crowd when you can do it in virtual privacy? After three excellent performances (two at home and one on television), the Barons had one of those "off nights" to the great delight of the not-much-better Atlanta Flames, who retreated to Georgia with a 4-2 victory.

The Flames scored the first two and last two goals of the game and in between gave the Barons every opportunity to take the game away from them.

During that in-between portion of the game that extended from late in the first period until midway through the third, Cleveland's most noticeable failure was an inability to finish off goal-scoring opportunities.

**THE BARONS'** first goal came with 28 seconds to play in the first period, leaving them the period break to think about their sudden exuberance and no time to act on it.

In the second period, a five-minute major penalty for high sticking to Atlanta's Pat Quinn gave the Barons a chance to break the game open, but the best they could do was tie it.

"We were quite fortunate to be in the game after the first and second periods," Atlanta coach Fred Creighton admitted, "and during that long power play they could have buried us."

But there was even greater frustration to come in the third period as Hilliard Graves scored twice to win the game and goalie Phil Myre made a big save to protect the lead.

Graves scored the winning goal at 3:29, flipping a shot from the slot that deflected off Cleveland defenseman Bob Stewart's stick and off goalie Gilles Meloche's glove into the net.

"Stewie was so close and the puck came up so fast that I just didn't expect it," said Meloche. "It hit my glove and went in anyway."

The Barons followed with two of their best scoring opportunities of the night ... but all they did was make Myre star of the game.

About six minutes into the period, Charlie Simmer broke Fred

Ahern with a pinpoint pass. Ahern escaped an attempted necktie tackle by an Atlanta defender, but the Cleveland player was thrown off-balance and hit the right post rather than right corner of the net with his shot.

**ABOUT** three minutes later, Ralph Klassen had a clean breakaway on Myre, faked him to the ice, then tried to lift the puck into the open left side of the net. Unfortunately, the puck didn't go up and Myre's big goalie stick stayed down on ice and blocked the shot.

"Keeping the stick down was a desperation move," Myre admitted.

"He had me beat. I knew he was going to fake me because he had shot in a similar situation in the first period. Eighty percent of the time the guy will do just the opposite if he gets another shot. The only thing I was afraid of was that he would lift the puck."

Why didn't Klassen lift the puck? "I knew exactly what I was going to do after I faked the shot," said Klassen. "Lift it (the puck). I just didn't do it. I can't explain it."

"That save gave everyone a lift; the whole bench felt it," said

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Beacon Journal photo by Lew Henderson

**Barons' goalie Gilles Meloche reaches too late for goal by Atlanta's Hilliard Graves**

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Creighton. "That would have gotten them back in the game."

Instead, it gave Atlanta a chance to put the game away, which Graves did at 16:19, scooting up the left wing to slap in his own rebound when Meloche put Graves' first shot right back on his stick.

**THE FLAMES** scored first-period goals at 8:03 by Ken Houston and at 11:54 by Tom Lysiak, both on four-on-four situations. Bob Murdoch scored the Barons' late first-period goal on a pretty deflection in front on a lead pass from Dennis Maruk, and rookie defenseman Greg Smith tied the game at 9:53 of the second period with a shot from well inside the left point just 28 seconds into the five-minute power-play advantage.

The Barons kept the puck in the Atlanta defensive zone for most of the next five minutes, doing everything but scoring.

Ironically, Graves' winning goal was Atlanta's first power-play goal of the season (the Flames are 3-2) on their 12th attempt. The Flames were the only National Hockey League team without a power-play goal this season until then.

"We weren't skating the way we're capable of skating," coach Jack Evans said. "But I'm not going to get that excited about it at this point."