

## Drillers prove giant-killers against tough Wave

Contributed by Norm Cowley  
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The Edmonton Drillers used an explosive offence to blow away the opposition in previous games this season.

This time, they won by combining timely goals with solid defence.

"This was a big game for us from a point of view that it gives us a feel for exactly where we stand," said Martin Dugas after the Drillers extended their unusual season-opening NPSL win streak to four games with a 14-8 victory over the always-powerful Milwaukee Wave Wednesday at Skyreach Centre.

"We know they're a veteran team and a hard-working team -- similar to what we've been like in the past -- and we showed we can compete with them," Dugas continued. "Even when we weren't playing well, we found a way not to allow the goals or to put people in front of the net to make key blocks. There wasn't any easy goals for them."

The Drillers, the only undefeated team left in the league, were sparked by three goals and an assist by tough guy Rick Titus, while his linemates -- Nikki Vignjevic and Dugas -- each contributed a goal and at least one assist.

"His energy was greatly appreciated," Dugas said about Titus, who fought off Milwaukee's Mike Richardson to get to a loose ball and lift the Drillers into a 12-5 lead early in the fourth quarter.

Titus also deflected a Nikki Vignjevic shot and banged home a feed from Dugas for the Drillers' first goal after the Wave's Jason Willan had opened the scoring with a three-point goal that deflected in off the Edmonton forward's leg.

"He made a point to be aggressive and make up for it," said Dugas. "Ten seconds later, he made up for it."

Titus, who scored only two goals in 11 games with the Drillers before leaving the team in mid-December last year, said playing a team like Milwaukee is more suited to his style because it becomes "a tough-it-out game."

"Rick Titus has to be a mean player," said Drillers head coach Ross Ongaro. "That's why we brought him here. We need his toughness and his athleticism. He finished some chances tonight and that's what we need him to do."

While the Drillers scored 64 points in their first three games, they weren't as sharp offensively as they had been before a 12-day layoff. They made up for it with a playoff-like effort in a tough, hard-fought match.

"I respect their team immensely," Ongaro said. "They've got some very good forwards and great defenders. Their goalkeeper likes to come off his line a lot and made some brilliant saves but Shepherd was equal to the task and made some big-time saves when the game was close."

Shepherd blocked 17 of 21 shots to out-duel Milwaukee's Victor Nogueira, the NPSL's goalkeeper-of-the-year each of the past four seasons. "If you get 14 points against them, it means that you worked pretty hard," said Titus. "All of our guys were ready to play against these guys. They're going to be our toughest competitors in our division."

### DRILL BITS

**Game Star** -- Drillers forward Rick Titus scored three goals and also assisted on Nikki Vignjevic's late goal which gave Edmonton a comfortable six-point lead.

**Like Wall** -- Paul Shepherd, Edmonton's backup goalkeeper each of the past two seasons, blocked 17 of 21 shots to fashion his second victory of the season. "I showed I can make some saves," he said. Shepherd was also quick to thank his teammates for blocking another 17 shots, including five by defender Todd Rattee. "If I missed a shot, they were there for me off the line," he pointed out.

**Still Perfect** -- The North Division-leading Drillers, 4-0, are the only undefeated team left in the NPSL.

**Next Up** -- The Drillers and Milwaukee Wave, 4-2, meet in a rematch at 7:05 p.m. Friday at Skyreach Centre.

Note: Ran with factbox "Drill Bits" which has been appended to the end of this story