

## Drillers in desperation mode

Contributed by Joanne Ireland  
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There was 3:58 left on the clock when the players headed to the bench for one last timeout. A few eyes darted to the scoreboard. Most knew the damage had been done.

The Milwaukee Wave had taken control of the game long before the fourth quarter. They had arrived in Edmonton for the opening game of the best-of-three National Conference final and left with a commanding 1-0 lead in the series. And they did it without Michael King, their leading goal scorer.

So the Drillers, losers in a 13-7 decision Thursday night at Skyreach, now have to wrestle with the Wave on their home turf. Milwaukee had a 20-2 record at home this season.

"It's our fault. Did you see the first half?" said captain Kevin Holness. "We can't keep coming in here at the half or during the timeouts to talk about what we should have done or what we're supposed to do. It's the playoffs. We should know better.

"Milwaukee didn't beat us. The Edmonton Drillers beat us."

Captain King, out with a leg injury, stood on the bench and watched his teammates capitalize on the Drillers' mistakes. Then when Edmonton, playing before a crowd of 4,156, began to press, the defence came up big. If it wasn't one of the front men throwing his body in front of a shot, it was the wily veteran, Victor Nogueira, making a save in the net.

The Drillers outshot Milwaukee 55-24.

"He made some key saves, but just because the ball didn't go in for us, doesn't mean they should score," said Holness.

Nogueira, who finished with 20 saves, kicked away a shot from Nikola Vignjevic, then threw up a hand to block an attempt from LeBaron Hollimon. Before the first half was over, he punched away a shot from Siphon Sibiya, then robbed Carmen D'Onofrio on the rebound.

"Our goal was not to have them score in the first period -- at least," said Nogueira. "We knew Michael King was out and we knew we'd just about have to shut them out." For the first 14 minutes, both sides kept the scoreboard clean, then the Wave broke through.

Peter Hatstrup lofted a free kick into the back of the net. Seconds later, Todd Dusosky hammered a three-pointer between the pipes. The two doubled their goal production in the second quarter, giving the midwesterners a 9-0 halftime lead.

"Now we have to go into Milwaukee where we can't think, 'What if,'" Holness continued. "Now we have to go in there take it in two and come home and look forward to the championship. Simple as that."

After D'Onofrio was helped off the field with a groin injury, Vignjevic finally got the Drillers on the board, punching in a restart goal from outside the three-point circle at 5:33 of the third. He slid in another and Paul Dailly hit one to cut the Wave's lead to four but the spark was shortlived. Matt Tirschman put Milwaukee ahead 13-7 before the final quarter.

"It's a question a coach doesn't like to have to deal with," said Keith Tozer, "do you play your leading goal scorer in Game 1 on the road or do you save him? We were fortunate enough to get by Edmonton and now he'll be in the lineup Saturday."

### DRILL BITS

- POINT MEN: Nikola Vignjevic scored three for Edmonton then added a deuce. Paul Dailly struck for two. On the other end of the field, Steve Morris and Matt Tirschman each scored two pointers for the Wave; Todd Dusosky hit a two- and three-pointer and Peter Hatstrup scored a pair of deuces.

- HIGHLIGHT REEL: There was something to be said for the goal Dusosky back- heeled early in the game and Dailly did hit a rocket past keeper Victor Nogueira, but midway through the third, Vignjevic took the ball at midfield, beat a couple of defenders, sidestepped another two, stole the ball out of the corner, then slid it across the goal line. He didn't bend it into the net, it went in off the foot of Chris Jahr, but the buildup was worth a replay.

- THE BIG CHEESE: For the fifth straight year, Nogueira was named the goalkeeper of the year. The 40-year-old finished with a points- against average of 9.66. The eight-year vet also won the award in 1994.

- NEXT UP: Both teams flew to Milwaukee today to decide the series. Game 2 goes Saturday in the Bradley Centre.