

MUZZIN, LUCIC LEAD LA KINGS TO STRONG MATINEE WIN OVER PENS

👤 Ryan Cowley 🕒 December 6, 2015



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Game 25; 16-8-1

LOS ANGELES — Matinee games for the **Los Angeles Kings** are usually met with a great deal of resistance. After all, the silver-and-black have been known to look sluggish in day games for the most part, not necessarily leading to a loss but not resulting in the strongest outings either. This Saturday, however, was a different story as the Kings came ready to play, taking it to a **Pittsburgh Penguins** team who had had their number in recent years. The end result was a 5-3 win for the Kings, improving to 3-0-0 on their current homestand with a chance to sweep it on Sunday night.

Last season, it was the Penguins who took both games of the season series. But this year, the Kings were determined to turn the tide and, in the opening period, they certainly set the tone.

While there were unable to score, the Kings outshot the Penguins by a 10-3 margin in the opening frame. In fact, the Pens weren't able to record their first shot until the 9:44 mark of the period. Still, the Kings did not look their usual sluggish selves and the hometown fans felt that it was just a matter of time before their team's efforts paid off. 2:26 into the second, they did.

With former King **Rob Scuderi** in the box for Delay of Game, the Kings found themselves with their second man-advantage of the afternoon, and they only needed four seconds.



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Right off the ensuing faceoff, **Jeff Carter** won it back to **Jake Muzzin** who fed **Drew Doughty** who rifled a one-timer past **Marc-Andre Fleury** for his fourth to draw first blood for the Kings.

The score remained 1-0 until just under the halfway point of the second when the silver-and-black added to their lead.

With the Pens pressing, the Kings stole the puck and headed the other way. **Marian Gaborik**, who has been hot as of late, entered the offensive zone where he dropped a pass to a streaking **Christian Ehrhoff**, who dragged and sniped his first as a King past Fleury's stick-side to put Los Angeles up 2-0. It was a rare offensive beauty scored by a defensive-minded defenseman, but the Kings happily took it. The goal also paved the way for a barrage of scoring.

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Just 64 seconds later, **Milan Lucic** and **Tyler Toffoli** broke out on a 2-on-1, but Lucic held onto it, firing his eighth five-hole on Fleury to make it a 3-0 game, turning **STAPLES Center** into a madhouse in the process. But just when they couldn't have looked any worse, the Pens were able to answer.

Just 23 seconds later, **Chris Kunitz** got Pittsburgh on the board scoring his fourth on a point shot that beat **Jonathan Quick** to cut the lead to two. The Kings, though, answered right back as just 58 seconds later, **Dustin Brown** fed a streaking Jake Muzzin who added to his pair of his assists by sniping his second into the top-corner to quickly regain Los Angeles's three-goal lead. **Anze Kopitar**, who fought hard in the corner to keep the puck in his team's possession, picked up the second assist.

In the span of 2:25, four goals were scored and it was the Kings, usually known for their tired ways in early games, who had the upper hand. But the Pens were able to pull to within two before the middle frame was through.

With just 1:59 remaining in the second, **Olli Maatta** outstepped his man just enough to jump out in front and backhand his third past Quick. It was 4-2 Kings entering the third.

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In the third, the Penguins made things interesting as they pulled to within one. Just 2:39 into the frame, **Sidney Crosby**, who has been the subject of offensive criticism lately, tipped his sixth of the year up and over Quick to make it a one-goal game. Crosby already had an assist in this game but this was just his second goal in eight-career games against the Kings, but it came at an important time.

From there, the Kings were on their toes, but were able to regroup and play a solid defensive game with Jonathan Quick helping out with some key stops of his own. Marian Gaborik even had a penalty shot but was stopped by Marc-Andre Fleury.

Speaking of Fleury, while he did allow four goals in the second, he was on top of his game in this one as he gave his Pens every opportunity to force overtime. However, the Kings were just one better and late, with Fleury pulled for an extra skater, Milan Lucic showcased some uncharacteristic hustle as he beat two Pittsburgh defensemen to ice the game with an empty-netter — and his second of the contest — to make it 5-3 Los Angeles. Drew Doughty provided the lone assist on the goal.

Many Kings fans may not have expected such a strong outing from their team considering it was an early game but they were left impressed nonetheless and they will happily take the two points as a result.

Saturday's victory resulted in a solid collective effort that saw, among others, Anze Kopitar be a force with the puck, working his tail off not only to keep possession but to open lanes to give his teammates some quality scoring chances. Captain Dustin Brown looked strong out there as well, jumping on loose pucks to, again, help his team create scoring chances.

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Brayden McNabb was the most physical King on this day with four hits while Jake Muzzin, in addition to his three-point performance, led the way defensively with three blocked shots. Milan Lucic had a rare game going oh-fer in the hits department, but his two-goal outing helped overlooked that.

The Kings were even able to keep **Evgeni Malkin** off the scoresheet. In seven career games against the Kings, the Russian had six goals and 10 points but Malkin, despite a few scoring chances, was unable to get his name on the scoresheet, which is a testament to Los Angeles's outstanding defensive play. Chris Kunitz, however, was able to have some success offensively, scoring a goal and adding two assists en route to garnering Second Star of the Game honours.

In the end, though, it was another win for the Los Angeles Kings who pick up their third-straight win and, in the process, extend their point streak to five games, remaining on top in the Pacific Division. But now, the Kings are preparing to close out their homestand, and they don't have much time to rest as on Sunday evening, they play host to **Steven Stamkos** and the **Tampa Bay Lightning**.