

Malkin's four-point game leads Penguins to 4-3 victory over Flyers

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PITTSBURGH (AP) Evgeni Malkin's parents can't return to Russia soon enough for the rest of the NHL.

Malkin scored a goal and set up three others, giving him seven points in two days, and the Pittsburgh Penguins finally figured out how to beat cross-state Philadelphia by winning 4-3 Sunday.

The Flyers, swept in eight games by the Penguins last season, never trailed during four previous victories against Pittsburgh this season with Martin Biron in goal. They fell behind 3-1 in the second period of this game as Malkin played a role in every goal.

Malkin assisted on goals by Petr Sykora, Sergei Gonchar and Kristopher Letang and scored against Biron to extend a scoring surge that began when star Sidney Crosby injured his right ankle Jan. 18. Malkin has 15 points during five consecutive multiple-point games and 21 points, with eight goals, in 10 games as Pittsburgh has gone 6-2-2 without the injured Crosby.

Malkin's parents arrived from Russia this weekend to watch him play for the first time this season, and they must be liking this. The rest of the Atlantic Division won't enjoy this: Mom and Dad Malkin are staying another two weeks.

"Hopefully we're going to win all these games and I'm going to play good," Malkin said, speaking through an interpreter. "I've never had a stretch like this over here in NHL or back in the Russian league," where the 21-year-old Malkin played before joining the Penguins last season.

"He's a world-class player and a big concern," Flyers coach John Stevens said.

He might be a bigger concern to the Flyers in the future, too. Malkin, who usually brags on his teammates and rarely reveals much about himself during interviews, acknowledged he doesn't like playing against Philadelphia. The first four games between the teams this season featured numerous fights and angry outbursts by the coaches.

"When we play against them, we have problems like people throwing popcorn on our bench," Malkin said. "I don't really like to play against them. ... I don't like that team. It's something that's a little bit extra."

R.J. Umberger scored twice for Philadelphia and has seven of his 11 goals this season against his hometown Penguins, but he couldn't prevent the Flyers' second loss in as many days.

The Flyers, 2-0 losers at home Saturday to the Rangers, fell four points behind Atlantic Division leader Pittsburgh, which increased its lead over idle New Jersey to three points. The Penguins, 4-2 winners Saturday over Los Angeles as Malkin had two goals and an assist, are in first place by themselves for the first time this season.

Malkin, last season's NHL rookie of the year, promised when Crosby was hurt to assume Crosby's role as team leader and leading scorer, and he's done that and more.

"He's upgraded his game a big notch, so give him a lot of credit," said coach Michel Therrien, whose team won its third in a row. "He showed everyone that he is a great player. He is showing that he can be a great leader."

A very good scorer, too.

Just as they were in the 2005 NHL draft, Russian stars Alex Ovechkin and Malkin are 1-2 again; Ovechkin leads the NHL with 76 points after getting three points during a 3-2 win Sunday against the Rangers, while Malkin is tied with Ottawa's Daniel Alfredsson for second place with 73 points.

Asked if he can catch Ovechkin, Malkin said, "I'm going to try."

Malkin drew multiple defenders as he skated down the left wing boards with the Flyers up 1-0 in the first, allowing Sykora to get open near the right circle and score his 18th after taking Malkin's pass.

Later in the period, Malkin drew Hartnell into taking a roughing penalty, even though it appeared Malkin shoved Hartnell first, and the penalty led to Gonchar's power-play goal 38 seconds into the second. Malkin scored his 31st of the season late in the second, grabbing Sykora's return pass to score from the slot while slipping to his knees.

"They are playing really good with Crosby out of the lineup," Umberger said. "It's a little surprising."

Penguins goalie Ty Conklin made 27 saves, despite allowing goals in the third period by Umberger and Scott Hartnell, and is 14-3-3 after beginning the season as the injured Marc-Andre Fleury's backup.

This game wasn't as feisty as the previous four, perhaps because both teams were playing their second afternoon game in as many days.

Penguins forward Jarkko Ruutu and the Flyers' Steve Downie traded punches during an extended fight late in the first that Downie halted by dropping his hands and skating away, but there were no other fights.

Flyers forward Simon Gagne sat out the final two periods with a concussion - his second this season - and will be reevaluated Monday. Gagne was out for 26 games from Nov. 8-Jan. 8 with the same problem. The Flyers already were without defenseman Braydon Coburn (muscle injury) and right wing Scottie Upshall (high ankle sprain), who were hurt in their previous two games.

Notes: Malkin's linemates, Sykora and Ryan Malone, had two assists apiece. ... Pittsburgh is 4-1-1 in its last six games. ... The Flyers' Daniel Briere didn't score a goal for the eighth consecutive game. ... Umberger has six goals and five assists in five games against Pittsburgh this season and eight goals and 10 assists in 20 career games.