



## Fire & Ice

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# Storybook return for Devils defenseman Paul Martin in 5-2 win over Penguins

Defenseman Paul Martin said he never dreamed that he would score a goal in his first game back after nearly five months off with a fractured left forearm.

But that's exactly what he did, scoring the go-ahead tally with 1:42 left in the first period of a 5-2 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins tonight at Prudential Center.

"I was just being realistic and I wanted to get through the game," Martin said after playing 18:05 in his first game since Oct. 24. "I just wanted to play solid and keep it simple and if the opportunities presented itself, make it happen. But I definitely wasn't thinking about that or expecting it. I just wanted to make it through the game. That was my goal."

Martin would now hopes to play again Thursday night in Toronto. He is flying with the team tonight to Toronto. Devils coach Jacques Lemaire said this morning that Martin "probably" would not play Thursday because he thought it would be difficult for him to play on consecutive nights after such a long layoffs. Lemaire seemed to be wavering on that after tonight's game, though.

"We haven't decided that yet," Lemaire said. "We'll just talk briefly about it and then we'll get the decision either on our way there or tomorrow morning."

When I asked Lemaire if Martin's play tonight was making him think about changing his mind, he replied. "I just don't know."

Martin's thoughts on it are obvious.

"I would like to," he said. "I know that Jacques said they didn't know if I could play in back-to-back games after such a long time off, but I would like to play if it was up to me. But he's the coach and he has his reasons."

Lemaire like what he saw from Maritn tonight, especially his goal.

"I was happy for him," Lemaire said. "You could tell he wanted to do well, waiting for the opportunity to move up the ice and do something and at that point there when he decided to go, there was a defenseman and he wanted to go around him and he let that shot go. It was a good shot. A smart shot there."

Martin stepped up to intercept a Bill Guerin pass at the red line and then caught the Penguins in a line change, moving into the right circle before letting go a wrist shot that beat Marc-Andre Fleury inside the far post.

"Some guys were changing because there wasn't anyone in front of me when I looked up," Martin said. "There was some room and I'm just glad to be able to get it in the back of the net and to get the win is nice."

Martin's left arm/wrist is still not at full strength, but he got enough on that shot to get it past Fleury. "I already get enough ribbing for my wrist shot," he said. "To score was kind of nice. I don't think it was the hardest shot, but it's the hardest that the guys have seen so far. I put a little extra on that one." It was Martin's first goal since March 27, 2009 in Chicago.

"I don't score too many goals, so it's definitely big for me just to be back, just to be back on the ice with the guys," he said. "It's been a long time, the longest for me ever not to play hockey. So, it's just a good feeling to be back and to get that goal is an added bonus."

Martin said his arm felt, "better than I thought it would today."

"It loosened up as the game went on and I kept it loose between periods and it felt good," he said. "I think the key test will be tomorrow. If it's sore tomorrow or how it feels, but it felt good tonight, better than I thought."

Martin admitted he was nervous for his first shift.

"The most nervous I've been a long time playing hockey," he said. "Usually, I'm pretty calm, but it's been so long of a layoff. I didn't know what to expect, but as the shifts went on I felt better and better." Martin's teammates were happy to see him back and to see him get that goal.

"That was definitely nice," goaltender Martin Brodeur said. "I know where (physical therapist Gary Flink) sits because he was my rehab guy, too (when he was recovering from a torn biceps tendon last season). These two guys (Flink and business partner Matt Gible) were high fiving each other. They were happy about their work because he scored a goal. It was fun. For Paul coming back in an atmosphere like that is definitely good for our team, good for his psyche also."

"He did a good job," Martin said. "I wouldn't be here without him."

I pointed out to Brodeur that Flink is now 2-for-2 in getting instant results. Brodeur posted a shutout in his first game back last season on Feb. 26 against Colorado.

"They're doing well," Brodeur said. "We don't want to see them too often, though."