



Everything Jersey

Devils draw even with Pens atop Atlantic

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NEWARK - In any color, the Devils have owned the Pittsburgh Penguins this season.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

Devils' Zach Parise, top, celebrates his goal with teammate Travis Zajac.

Wearing their original red, white and green jerseys for the first time in nearly 18 years, the Devils completed a dominating regular-season sweep of the reigning champions with a 5-2 victory Wednesday night at Prudential Center.

Defenseman Paul Martin returned from a 59-game layoff because of a fractured left forearm to score the go-ahead goal in a victory that pulled the Devils even with the Penguins atop the Atlantic Division. The Devils, who have 13 games remaining, hold the tiebreaker because they have one more win than the Penguins, who have 12 games left.

The sellout crowd of 17,625 chanted "Sweep!" and "You can't beat us!" in the final minute. In going 6-0 against the Penguins this season, the Devils outscored them, 22-5.

"It's impressive," admitted goaltender Martin Brodeur, who made 24 saves to notch his NHL-leading 39th win. "Nobody would have thought that."

Devils coach Jacques Lemaire doesn't think the lopsided season series will mean much, though, if the teams meet in the playoffs.

"Playoffs is a different season," Lemaire said. "It's nice to have confidence in the year and beat a team, but, playoffs, I always say it's a different season and you start from scratch. But our confidence will still be up at that point."

The Devils chased starting Penguins goalie Marc-Andre Fleury to the bench 10:17 into the second period after scoring four times on 13 shots in this one. Patrik Elias, who celebrated St. Patrick's Day last year by becoming the Devils' all-time leading scorer, had a goal and an assist.

Dainius Zubrus, Zach Parise and Rob Niedermayer also scored for the Devils, who won their fifth in a row on home ice and their fourth in five games overall.

"This was a special night," Elias said.

The Devils last wore the red, white and green in the 1992 preseason before changing to red, white and black.

Brodeur, the only current Devil to have worn the original sweater, went all out with the retro look. He had a replica made of the mask he wore in his first NHL game on March 26, 1992 against Boston and used red sticks similar to the ones he used in that game.

The Penguins, who played without center Evgeni Malkin because of a bruised foot, appeared determined early to spoil the Devils' good time. They grabbed the lead 4:01 into the game when Chris Kunitz scored on a Guerin rebound.

The Devils responded with four consecutive goals.

Zubrus tied it on a breakaway goal at 10:51. Elias stripped Penguins defenseman Kris Letang of the puck at the Pittsburgh blue line and made a blind backhand pass to Zubrus, who made a backhand fake before tucking a forehand around Fleury's right pad.

Martin, who was playing for the first time since Oct. 24, put the Devils ahead for good with his unassisted goal with 1:42 left in the second. After intercepting a Guerin pass at the red line, Martin carried into the right circle and let go a wrist shot that beat Fleury inside the far post.

"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," Martin 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."

Elias made it 3-1 with a short-handed goal 3:09 into the second period, beating Fleury to the stick side after intercepting a Jordan Leopold pass at the Devils' blue line. Parise ended Fleury's night at 10:17 by putting home his own rebound after defenseman Mark Eaton blocked his initial shot in the crease.

Ruslan Fedotenko cut it to 4-2 5:23 into the third period when his right circle shot deflected off the leg of Devils defenseman Bryce Salvador and beat Brodeur between the pads.

Niedermayer's empty-net goal with 1:13 left clinched it.