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# Kraken's Surprise Playoff Run Ends in Semifinals

Naja Johnson, News Editor

The Seattle Kraken's first-ever Stanley Cup Playoff run continued this week after beating defending champion Colorado Avalanche in the first round. But the semifinal series between the Kraken and the Dallas Stars marked the bitter end to a wildly successful second season for the NHL's latest expansion.

The series against the Stars was a seven-game thriller. After stealing Game 1 in Dallas and jumping out to a 2-1 series advantage, the Kraken looked poised to knock off another solid playoff squad.

The Stars had other plans, dominating the Kraken in Game 4 with a final score of 6-3. Stars left winger Jamie Benn scored the first of a four-goal barrage by Dallas in the first and second periods.

Following that, defenseman Thomas Harley made it 2-0 early in the second period. Later in the second period, Kraken center Jaden Schwartz scored to cut the lead to 4-1. But Stars center Max Domi scored an empty net dagger goal in the final minutes for the Stars, evening the series at two games a piece.

Game 5 was more of the same, as the Kraken were crushed again with a final score of 5-2. This time, the Stars came out firing early, as Stars centers Wyatt Johnston and Roope Hintz opened the first period with a goal each, giving Dallas a 2-0 advantage not even 10 minutes into the contest. Stars Center Jason Robertson left his fingerprints all over the game, assisting on all goals by his primary linemates.

Now down 3-2 in the series, the Kraken were able to command an intense will against Dallas in Game 6, defeating the Stars 6-3. Kraken right winger Jordan Eberle contributed two goals on the night, one on an empty net. Right winger Eeli Tolvanen had a productive night, adding a goal and two assists. Tolvanen's goal in the opening minutes of the second period changed the dynamic of the elimination game, giving Seattle a 3-1 lead. Rookie Kraken center Tye Kartye, scored his third goal of the playoffs minutes later, expanding the lead.

The Kraken came ready to play hard, withstanding several timely goals from the Stars in the second and third periods. Centers Matty Beniers and Yannick Gourde each added a goal and assist for Seattle in the effort. Goaltender Phillip Grubauer continued his standout playoff run, stopping 20 shots. Mason Marchment, Joe Pavelski and Joel Kirvanta scored for Dallas.



Kennedi Finnes

A freshly painted mural outside of the Kraken team store.

The decisive Game 7 between the Stars and Kraken ended in a 2-1 defeat for Seattle, shriveling any lingering optimism that Seattle could come back. The defensive matchup saw 26 saves from Seattle's Grubauer and 22 saves from Oettinger. While Hintz opened the scoring for the Stars, Wyatt Johnson stole the show by scoring a pivotal third period goal, sealing his team's victory before a last second desperation goal from the Kraken.

Claire Hood, a third-year communications major at Seattle University and an avid Kraken fan, still enjoyed the tense Game 7 with her friends.

"[In] the final game, you could definitely see the players fatigue as it was Game 7," Hood said. "The players gave their best efforts and gave a high press till the end. We had a few good offensive opportunities in the high press."

Stephen Strehl, a lifelong hockey fanatic, has attended three playoff games at Climate Pledge Arena and six regular season games. He looks back on Seattle's season as a success.

"Making the playoffs alone was a huge accomplishment and would be considered a win by itself," Strehl said. "It feels unreal to come as far as we have, but we have good leadership and obsessed fans."

The Kraken were underdogs throughout the playoffs largely due to a lackluster inaugural performance, where they missed the playoffs altogether. Strehl noted significant changes the team made that contributed to their turnaround in year two.

"A big reason for success is improving the depth of the roster by finding players who were undervalued elsewhere," Strehl said.

Strehl identified some key factors he noticed during the season that set the team apart. He then described the new vision and identities the Seattle Kraken represent.

"We finally have a team identity. Our first year was a struggle to get oriented," Strehl said. "New teammates, new city, new organization—it is tough to throw that together and expect immediate success. This season, it is clear that the team is finally on the same page."

Brandon Gomez, another fanatic who's new to Seattle, attended one game this year but isn't from the area. Instead, Gomez was interested in living in a city with the exhilarating presence of a sports franchise. The Kraken met that wish.

"Moving from Montana, my favorite part of the season has simply been living somewhere with professional sports franchises. It's fun to watch games around town and meet people who are also excited that the team is doing well," Gomez said.

Despite the recent losses, there is still local pride for the Seattle Kraken, and the unity the team offers the city is prevalent. Even with the defeats, fans remained optimistic and were impressed with how resilient players were during the season. Seattle seems to have found yet another professional sports franchise to rally around for years to come.