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RECAP: BLACKHAWKS SNAP 5-GAME AVALANCHE WIN STREAK

Ryan Donato had two goals and an assist, and the Chicago Blackhawks snapped a four-game skid with a win 5-2 against the Colorado Avalanche at Ball Arena on Monday.

The Avalanche had won five straight games after an 0-4-0 start to the season.

Philipp Kurashev, Lukas Reichel and Ilya Mikheyev each scored for the Blackhawks (3–6–1), and Jason Dickinson had two assists. Petr Mrazek made 24 saves.

"I think we deserved what we got tonight, and there's been nights that we probably didn't deserve the final fate," Chicago coach Luke Richardson said. "We could have easily had a few more wins, and I think this team and the whole organization is tired of the moral victories. So tonight was a really big step for us to take a real victory and put it in the back of our minds how we did it."

Casey Mittelstadt and Nathan MacKinnon each scored for the Avalanche (5-5-0). MacKinnon and Cale Makar each extended their season-opening point streak to 10 games, and Alexandar Georgiev made 21 saves. Colorado was playing in the second game of a back-to-back after winning 5-4 against the Ottawa Senators at Ball Arena on Sunday.

"We were no good, again. We weren't as good as last night, even," Colorado coach Jared Bednar said. "We just looked tired. Execution was bad, mentally not sharp. So it happens. Looked like we didn't have energy, though, right from the drop of the puck.

"We're not looking at moral victories here right now. It wasn't our best game. Needed to be better and it wasn't. It's two in a row."

Kurashev scored a power-play goal to make it 1-0 at 8:47 of the first period on a slap shot from the top of the left circle.

Mittelstadt tied it 1-1 at 10:16 of the first with a wrist shot from the right circle that beat Mrazek's blocker.

"I think we made it harder on ourselves than we should have, especially like in the first period," Avalanche forward Logan O'Connor said. "I felt like we were turning tons of pucks over in the middle of the ice. Couldn't get in on the forecheck, which is sort of the staple of our game right now with the lineup we have."

Reichel gave Chicago a 2-1 lead when Craig Smith's shot off the face-off ricocheted off Reichel's body before trickling past Georgiev at 11:04.

"We've seen one or two [of those] go against us, and it was about time one bounced in for us," Richardson said. "The Reichel one, I thought, was big."

Donato extended the lead to 3-1 at 16:56 of the first when he backhanded Dickinson's rebound at the top of the crease.

"You go hard to the net, and you say your prayers. The puck can go anywhere, and for me, it was a lucky bounce, and I was lucky to put it away," Donato said. "But getting to those areas is definitely hard. I think we could do more of that, and hopefully, good things happen from that."

MacKinnon cut it to 3-2 at 19:17, speeding around Seth Jones before driving the net and shooting five-hole while on a 5-on-3 power play.

Donato scored an empty-net goal at 19:02 of the third period to make it 4-2, and Mikheyev added another at 19:41 for the 5-2 final.

"There's so many times the last couple games where we feel like we played pretty well and five minutes we take off, they're back in the game. We just find a way to not finish it off," Donato said. "Tonight, I think we all came in the locker room after the second and said it wasn't good enough, 'We got to step back up.' There's not much to say other than just getting the job done, and that's kind of what happened tonight."

Avalanche forward Ross Colton, who leads the team with eight goals this season, left the game at the end of the second period with an undisclosed injury.

"He's out. He took that shot [to the leg in the first]," Bednar said. "He's going to miss some time, but we'll get a better feel on how long, how much time that's going to be, tomorrow or by Wednesday morning."

NOTES: Makar became the fourth defenseman in NHL history to start a season with points in 10 consecutive games, joining Bobby Orr (1973-74), Doug Wilson (1981-82) and Guy Lapointe (1974-75). Makar is tied with Wilson and Lapointe for the second-longest point streak by a defenseman to open a season in NHL history. ... MacKinnon became the eighth player in NHL history with multiple season-opening point streaks of at least 10 games (13 games in 2019-20).

RAPID RECAP: BEARS DROP HEARTBREAKER TO COMMANDERS IN WASHINGTON

When the Bears turned a 12-7 deficit into a 15-12 lead with :25 remaining in Sunday's showdown in Washington, they were seemingly on the cusp of recording a dramatic comeback victory.

But with the Commanders at their own 48 with :02 to play, quarterback Jayden Daniels heaved a desperation Hail Mary pass that deflected off a group of players at the 3 back into the end zone, where receiver Noah Brown was standing all alone.

Brown caught the ball for a miraculous 52-yard touchdown that gave Washington an improbable 18-15 victory at Northwest Stadium. It was the only TD allowed by the Bears in the game.

"I just got out of the locker room; obviously the guys are disappointed," said coach Matt Eberflus. "When you lose a game like that, that's a tough one to swallow coming back like that. I also told them in the same conversation I was really excited how they battled back. They battled back to have a chance to win that game. It's important to look at that too."

The loss dropped the Bears to 4-3 and snapped their three-game winning streak.

With the offense struggling for the first two-and-a-half quarters, the defense kept the Bears in the game by forcing the Commanders to settle for four Austin Seibert field goals of 27, 30, 28 and 47 yards.

The Bears eventually cut the deficit from 12-0 to 12-7 on <u>D'Andre Swift</u>'s sensational 56-yard touchdown run with :43 to play in the third quarter.

They had a chance to take the lead midway through the fourth period. But on third-and-goal from the 1, <u>Caleb</u> <u>Williams</u> attempted to hand off to <u>Doug Kramer Jr.</u>, an offensive lineman who was lined up at fullback on the play. Kramer never secured the ball, and the Commanders recovered the fumble at the 3.

"We've worked that play since he's been in there," Eberflus said of Kramer. "We've worked the mechanics of it, the hand-off to him. We've just got to do it better. We're wedge blocking. You're on the 1-yard line. You've got a big guy to get the ball. We've practiced it a lot."

The Bears rebounded to take their first lead at 13–12 with :25 remaining in the game on <u>Roschon Johnson</u>'s 1-yard TD burst, capping a 10-play, 62-yard drive. The score came after Keenan Allen had drawn a pass interference penalty in the end zone on fourth-and-3 at the 12.

Williams followed with a two-point conversion pass to <u>Cole Kmet</u>, putting the Bears ahead 15–12.

Daniels completed back-to-back passes of 11 and 13 yards to the Washington 48, leaving :02 on the clock. On the final play, he scrambled around in the backfield for about 12 seconds before launching the ball deep down the middle of the field. When it settled in Brown's hands, the stadium erupted.

"We've practiced that play 100 times since we've been here," Eberflus said. "I'll have to look at what the execution was of that. But we have a body on a body, boxing out guys like basketball. We have one guy that knocks the ball down. We've got a back tip guy that goes behind the pile. Again, I've got to look at it and detail it out and make sure we're better next time."

"In that scenario, I'm supposed to be the jumper and try to jump and [bat] the ball down," said safety <u>Kevin Byard</u> <u>III</u>. "But I was standing back there, and everybody was just kind of piling up. It's kind of hard to get an angle, try to get a running start. When the ball is in the air, you're trying to fight to get position."

Nickel back Josh Blackwell was also in the scrum of players leaping for the ball.

"That was tough," Blackwell said. "We had them. We had the win and unfortunately just that last ball was caught."



RAPID RECAP: BEARS DROP HEARTBREAKER TO COMMANDERS IN WASHINGTON CONT...

The Bears trailed 9-0 at halftime after being outgained by the Commanders 267-90 in the first half. The defense forced Washington to settle for three field goals after reaching the Chicago 7, 7 and 9.

After their first three possessions resulted in punts, the Bears turned the ball over on downs at their own 40 when <u>DJ Moore</u> was tackled for no gain after a catching a quick pass from Williams on fourth-and-1.

The Bears picked up three first downs on their final drive of the first half, reaching the Commanders' 23. But on third-and-12 from the 25, Williams was sacked for a 15-yard loss, knocking them out of field-goal range.

In the first half, Williams completed 3 of 8 passes for 38 yards. For the game, he connected on 10 of 24 passes for 131 yards and a 59.5 passer rating, snapping a streak of three straight outings with a rating of at least 100.0.

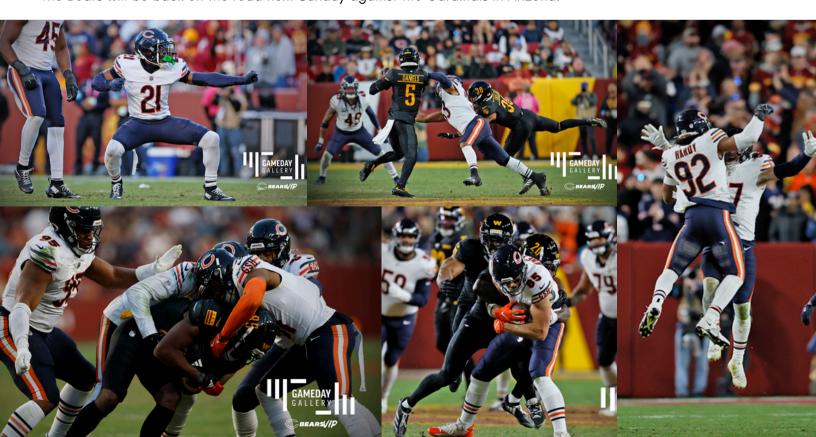
"The progressions, I thought he got off them a little bit, but I'll have to look at them," Eberflus said. "The rhythm and timing we've seen the last couple weeks ... it could be guys that are covered, pressure in his face, whatever that might be. Again, that's an everybody thing. That's a protection thing. That's a route running thing. And that's a quarterback thing."

While the defense didn't permit a touchdown until the final play of the game, the Commanders compiled 481 total yards, 168 on the ground and 313 in the air. Daniels completed 21 of 38 passes for 326 yards and a 92.7 passer rating and rushed for 52 yards on eight carries. Terry McLaurin caught five passes for 125 yards. And Brian Robinson Jr. rushed for 65 yards on 16 attempts.

Swift had another stellar outing, rushing for 129 yards on 18 carries. On his 56-yard TD run, he bounced outside and raced down the left sideline, picking up blocks by Kmet and left tackle <u>Kiran Amegadjie</u>, who had entered the game in the first half when <u>Braxton Jones</u> exited with a knee injury.

Before Swift's TD, the Bears had failed to score on their first seven possessions, a vast departure from their previous two contests in which they had generated five TDs in back-to-back games for the first time since 1956. "Sometimes when you have those days, you've just got to make sure you keep finding answers," Eberflus said. "Some of the answers could have been getting the ball to our tight ends and running backs as I look at the stat sheet. I know we were trying to do that. They did pressure with their linebackers. We knew they were going to do some of those. Those were effective for them. We've got to do a better job handling those. It's always about working to the next series and finding answers, and we've got to do a better job of that."

Eberflus is not concerned that the Bears will allow Sunday's devastating loss to define their season. "Our guys believe in each other, trust each other, have faith in each other," he said. "They're a resilient bunch. They're going to come back more determined. The game didn't go the way we wanted it to. But we had a chance to win it. We did everything we could at the very end. We've just got to execute better." The Bears will be back on the road next Sunday against the Cardinals in Arizona.



CHICAGO FIRE FC ANNOUNCES 2024 AWARD WINNERS

Chicago Fire FC today announced the Club's 2024 award winners, naming Designated Player Hugo Cuypers the Most Valuable Player and Homegrown goalkeeper Chris Brady the Defensive Player of the Year. Cuypers also earned 2024 Golden Boot honors after scoring a team-high 10 goals during the MLS regular season.

Most Valuable Player and Golden Boot: Cuypers, 27, is one of just four Fire players in the last 12 seasons to be named MVP in his first campaign with the Club, joining Mike Magee (2013), Nemanja Nikolić (2017), and Xherdan Shaqiri (2022). A mainstay in the Fire's starting lineup in 2024, Cuypers became the second Fire player to record 10 or more goals in a single season since Robert Berić in 2020. Cuypers joined the Fire for a Club-record transfer fee on Feb. 6 and scored his first MLS goal on March 16 against CF Montréal at Soldier Field. Cuypers' 90+5th minute strike tied the match at 3-3, setting up midfielder Kellyn Acosta to score the game winner just four minutes later. Cuypers then became the first Fire player to score in back-to-back matches this season with a goal on March 23 in the 1-1 draw against the New England Revolution. Additionally, after scoring a brace in the team's 4-3, come-from-behind win against the Philadelphia Union on July 3, Cuypers earned MLS Player of the Matchday honors for his performance, becoming the first Chicago Fire player to do so since Jhon Durán in Matchday 20 of 2022.



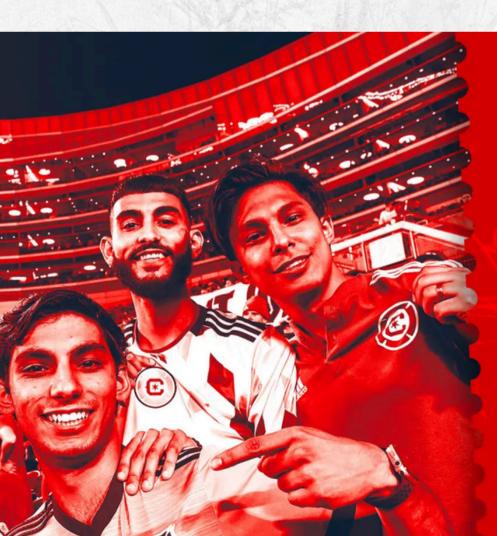
CHICAGO FIRE FC ANNOUNCES 2024 AWARD WINNERS CONT.

Defensive Player of the Year: Brady, 20, earned Defensive Player of the Year honors for a second consecutive year after completing his second straight season as the Fire's starting goalkeeper. Brady joins Sean Johnson and Zach Thornton as the only goalkeepers in Fire history to win the award in consecutive seasons and is the sixth overall Fire player to be named Defensive MVP in back-to-back years. In 2024, Brady tallied 107 saves in 33 games played (33 starts), becoming the sixth goalkeeper in Fire history to record more than 100 saves in a single season and the first to do so since Johnson accomplished the feat in 2012. Additionally, Brady recorded the most wins (14) for a Homegrown goalkeeper in Club history after the team's 2-1 victory over the LA Galaxy on June 1.

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