

## So what happened?

By Jasen Obermeyer

The Toronto Maple Leafs finished their playoff season on a very low note, after ending their regular seasons on the opposite end, filled with enthusiasm and confidence. Where did it all go wrong?

They finished this season in franchise records in wins and points, and seemed to be on the right path to a deeper playoff run than last year's.

They faced the Boston Bruins, and last time they did, we blew a 4-1 third-period lead in Game 7 to lose in overtime. Everyone, from the players to coach Mike Babcock, those behind the desk, and Leafs Nation, did not want to repeat history, yet in a way, they did. Everyone knew the Bruins would be a tough team to battle. They were one of the hottest teams in the league, and actually gave Tampa Bay a run for their money for top spot in the division, finishing just a point behind. They have depth in offence and defence, and despite injuries to some key players, it did not stop them from climbing to the top.

The Bruins came out the gate in game 1, hammering the Leafs 5-1. Game 2 was even worse, as they drilled seven goals behind the net, with Leafs goalie Frederick Andersen being pulled after allowing three goals on five shots. The wild game ended in a 7-3 Bruins victory.

Trailing 2-0 in the series, the Leafs headed back home to the Air Canada Centre and addressed the problems that plagued them back in Boston. Lines were shuffled, defence was tightened, fewer penalties were taken, and home-ice advantage seemed to give them a bit of a boost. Most importantly, they shut down the Bruins' first line of Patrice Bergeron, Brad Marchand and David Pastrnak, the line that was a nightmare to the Leafs in the first two games, combining for 20 points. Game three was a better outing for the blue and white, the kind of play they provided in the regular season, which ended with a 4-2 victory to cut the series lead in half.

Game four was an overall good effort by the Leafs, with the final score being 3-1, although unfortunately in the Bruins favor. Two of the goal came from quick turnovers that left the Leafs' defense exposed, otherwise they played consistently strong.

Now facing elimination, every game was do or die, just like the last these two teams met.

Game five was again a strong effort, and this time the Leafs won, 4-3, even chasing Bruins goalie Tuukka Rask from the net.

Although there was some cause for concern as they held a 4-1 into the third period, similar to their last Game 7, but the two goals the Bruins got were more fluky, off the end board, behind-the-net goals.

Game 6 was back in Toronto, and the Bruins quickly scored first in the second. At this point in the series, whichever team scored first was the one that took home the win. But Toronto saw to change that, with William Nylander scoring 35 seconds after the Bruins to get Leafs Nation roaring again. Toronto took another close game 3-1.

Again, like the last time they met, Toronto fought back down from 3-1 in the series to force Game 7.

In Boston, the first period of the final game was a wild one, with Boston leading by the end of the period 3-2. Toronto scored just a little over two minutes into the second to tie it up, then even got a shorthanded goal. Heading into the third period up 4-3, Leafs just needed 20 minutes to finally advance past the first round since 2004.

History came back to repeat. The Bruins quickly tied it up, then scored two more to build a 6-4 lead, with an empty netter the final nail in the coffin. The 7-4 victory meant the Leafs were out.

Some called the third period worse than the 2013 disaster, others think it's similar, or not as bad. The Leafs just seemed to lack motivation, energy, their offence non-existent, their defence terrible. Andersen did his best, but wasn't on his game in the third period, and it didn't help him much to not have defenceman provide some cover.

So many questions; who's to blame? What's next? What was the problem? What are the solutions?

Nazem Kadri getting a three-game suspension in Game 1 definitely wasn't good; superstar Auston Matthews and William Nylander lost that spark they were known for, the team just racked up too many penalty minutes, and their defence above all was not strong, (with the exception of Morgan Rielly), and particular blame on Jake Gardiner for his defensive performance in the third period.

To be fair, the Leafs are a young team, with most of the players only having one or two playoff seasons' experience. They have some work ahead of them in the off season, work that will need to pay off come October.