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By ROBIN FINNSpecial to The New York Times

New York Times (1857-Current file); Dec 16, 1988; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2004)

pg. A35

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UNIONDALE, L.I. Dec. 15 — Coach Al Arbour began mopping his brow, which has grown more furrowed with each game, in the second period.

He had watched blazing shots by his players strike posts and skitter harmlessly into corners. He had watched his goaltender and a veteran defenseman play a game of hot potato with a puck that ended up behind them in the net. He had watched his players converge on a solitary Penguin and wind up checking each other while Pittsburgh scored another goal.

"I guess what can go wrong will go wrong, and it's going wrong," Arbour said after the fourth straight loss since his return to the bench last Wednesday. "We make fifteen mistakes and they capitalize on eight goals. They make 35 mistakes and we capitalize on two."

This night rained indignities on the Is-

Penguins 8 Islanders 2

landers, who collapsed beneath them. Incredibly, they fired 51 shots, just two short of a team record but surely a record for futility as they tied the franchise losing streak of 12 games, set more than a decade ago.

"Nothing is going right; maybe we need a soccer net to fire at," said Arbour, who is worried about his team's jitters in the offensive zone and its breakdowns on defense.

"If we had any confidence, we would have filled the net," Arbour said. He did not criticize his dejected club after this loss, its 12th, for fear of sending an already anxiety-ridden bunch of players into a state of nervous paralysis. "They're nervous enough," he said.

Not since the winter of 1972-73, the franchise's first season and one where such

lapses were understandable if not acceptable, had the team dropped a dozen games in succession.

"They're a struggling team," said Mario Lemieux, who contributed a goal and four assists and leads the league in scoring with 81 points. Lemieux said that the difference in confidence levels between the first-place Penguins and the last-place Islanders was readily apparent. "Everything is going the right way for us, but for them, nothing is."

Oddly, the Islanders began with an abundance of spirit and launched a cavalcade of shots on Tom Barrasso, who halted 49.

Barrasso was beaten at 5 minutes 16 seconds of the first period by a Pat LaFontaine wrist shot that took the stick right out of his hands and tied the game, 1-1.

The Penguins could do no wrong whenever they got close to Kelly Hrudey, who yielded six goals on Pittsburgh's first 17 shots and two more on six third-period shots. The Penguins scored on three of their

five power-play opportunities — the Islanders failed on all five.

Emblematic of tonight's game were Pittsburgh's second goal, created when a simple Islander clearing play self-destructed through lack of communication, and their sixth, which happened when Bryan Trottier mistakenly deflected Paul Coffey's 40-foot power-play slap shot over Hrudey's catching glove.

Pilon Injured

Making the defeat even more devastating, Rich Pilon, a defenseman, was carried from the ice on a stretcher after being struck in the back of the head by Chris Dahlquist's shot with 8:57 to play. Pilon sustained a bruise to the back of the skull, but precautionary X-rays proved negative.

Dr. George Gilbert, the Islanders' team physician, said that the injury did not appear serious. "There are no neurological problems," he said.