



# **Buffalo Sabres**

**Daily Press Clips**

*September 25, 2013*

## **Sabres stay patient while rebuilding through youth**

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

September 24, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Sabres coach Ron Rolston is reminded of the changes taking place in downtown Buffalo every day he heads into work.

There's a construction site across the street from the team's arena, where Sabres owner Terry Pegula's HarborCenter hotel and entertainment complex is being erected. Then there's the major overhaul the Sabres themselves have been undergoing over the past eight months.

They're both works in progress, and also reflect the potential of a brighter future in Buffalo.

"I would say it's a good correlation and analogy," Rolston said. "It's both out front and in the arena."

Rolston is part of the Sabres' transformation in replacing longtime coach Lindy Ruff, who was fired in February.

The changes didn't end there during what became a tumultuous, lockout-shortened season that ended with Buffalo missing the playoffs for the fourth time in six years.

Before the season was over, the Sabres purged much of their old guard — including captain Jason Pominville — as part of a youth movement to shake up what had been an aging, high-priced and under-achieving core.

And more changes could still be store, with goalie Ryan Miller and forward Thomas Vanek's futures uncertain beyond this season. Both are entering the final years of their contracts, and the Sabres haven't ruled out trading one or both.

That's left Rolston tempering his early expectations of an opening-day roster that could feature as many as seven rookies, including 18-year-old defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen.

"You're probably not going to see the potential of our team unfold for a couple of months," Rolston said. "But everyone is excited about it. And everyone has expectations that we've got what we need here now."

Here's five things to watch out for as the Sabres prepare to open the season at Detroit on Oct. 2:

**MILLER'S TIME UP?** Uncertain about his future after 10 seasons in Buffalo, Miller is renting after selling his home this past summer.

Miller called it a pre-emptive business decision, figuring he could attract better offers while he's still in Buffalo rather than try to sell the home if he's traded.

Miller hasn't closed the door on re-signing with Buffalo, where he holds franchise records for wins (269) and games played by a goalie (500).

"I have to be professional enough just to do the job. I'm able to do a job in a city I'm familiar with, a city I'm very much at home. I like to be in Buffalo. I like the people," Miller said. "So this isn't a bad situation."

**VANEK'S VALUE:** The Sabres' top scoring threat has made it clear he'd prefer to be traded rather than endure a lengthy overhaul in Buffalo. Vanek's gone as far as to say it makes more sense for the Sabres to make a trade and get some value in return.

The Sabres' 2003 first-round draft pick has the potential to be a valuable commodity once the NHL trading deadline approaches.

Vanek is a four-time 30-goal-scorer, and has managed 20 goals in each of his eight seasons in Buffalo, including last year, when he had 20 goals in 38 games.

In the meantime, the left wing will have to adjust to a new role on the Sabres' top line. Rolston has had Vanek playing on the right wing alongside center Cody Hodgson and left wing Marcus Foligno.

**YOUTH IS SERVED:** The Sabres' opening-day lineup could feature four of five first-round picks the team has drafted over the past three years.

There's Ristolainen (No. 8 pick in June), as well as forwards Mikhail Grigorenko (No. 12, 2012), Zemgus Girgensons (No. 14, 2012), and Joel Armia (No. 16, 2011), who are being given an opportunity to make the roster.

Another rookie who has shined is forward Johan Larsson, who was acquired in the trade that sent Pominville to Minnesota.

**MOTIVATED MIKHAIL:** Grigorenko already has NHL experience, after he had a goal and four assists in 25 games with the Sabres last season.

He spent the entire summer working out in Buffalo, and is motivated to improve on last year, which included a lengthy stint with his Canadian junior team in Quebec.

"It's going to be motivating," Grigorenko said. "I've played in this league. And I know I can produce points and help my team."

**NEW LEADER:** Rolston intends to select a captain before the start of the season, and is confident he has many capable candidates to choose from.

Hodgson, who re-signed to a six-year contract this month, and defenseman Tyler Myers are considered candidates for the 'C.'

## **NHL fines Sabres coach Rolston for role in brawl; Rolston tells AP Tropp out indefinitely**

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

September 24, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. - The NHL is holding Buffalo Sabres coach Ron Rolston partially responsible for a brawl that broke out during a preseason game against Toronto.

The league fined Rolston an undisclosed amount on Tuesday for "player selection and team conduct." The NHL determined that Rolston was partially to blame for the melee that broke out midway through the third period of Toronto's 5-3 victory on Sunday.

In the meantime, Rolston told The Associated Press earlier in the day that forward Corey Tropp is out indefinitely while being evaluated for a possible concussion. Tropp was hurt and his head bloodied following a fight with Toronto's Jamie Devane that eventually sparked the melee.

On the next faceoff, Sabres enforcer John Scott initiated the line-brawl when he attempted to go after Toronto forward Phil Kessel before a faceoff. That prompted a series of fights that involved all 12 players — including both goalies — and led to 211 penalty minutes and three ejections.

The Sabres had no comment. And Rolston spoke to the AP before the NHL announced it had fined the coach.

Rolston did call the brawl "an unfortunate incident for everybody."

As for Tropp, Rolston said the player is going to be out for "a while."

"We're still in kind of the process here of going through the evaluation," Rolston said.

Rolston added forward Marcus Foligno is day to day, but should be ready for the start of the regular season on Oct. 2, when Buffalo plays at Detroit.

Foligno was hurt against Toronto when he was checked into the boards and landed awkwardly.

The Sabres were off Tuesday, a day before they host the Columbus Blue Jackets in a preseason game.

## **Pysyk has no desire to attract attention on the ice**

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

September 25, 2013

You never seem to notice Mark Pysyk. And that's a very good thing.

When you're a young defenseman who plays a simple but consistent game and isn't flashy on offense, the last thing you want to do is stand out. Usually, that means you've made a big mistake.

Most young guys want to be seen and heard. Not Pysyk. Quiet on the ice is the way to go at this point for the 21-year-old, who seems to be a lock to open the season on the Buffalo Sabres' blueline.

"Absolutely true," Pysyk said, when asked if he felt not being noticed was a compliment. "That's the kind of game I play. I'm simple defensively. I just want to be the hardest-working guy that I can be and be that consistent player."

The Sabres have nine defensemen left on their roster heading their final home preseason game tonight at 7 in First Niagara Center against the Columbus Blue Jackets (MSG, Radio 550 AM). They're expected to keep eight. Pysyk is in no danger of going anywhere.

The team was off Tuesday and will reveal its lineup this morning. But when the season opens Oct. 2 in Detroit, Pysyk is expected to be alongside veteran Henrik Tallinder, making him an NHL regular in just his second pro season. But that's what the Sabres expected from their No. 1 draft pick in 2010, a former captain of the Edmonton Oil Kings.

The 6-foot-1, 192-pounder is a good passer, with strong vision to get the puck out of his zone. And he's tough positionally, rarely getting caught where he shouldn't be.

Not a huge offensive threat, Pysyk never had more than seven goals or 40 points in junior hockey and had just four goals and 14 assists in 57 games last year in Rochester.

He had one goal in 19 games for the Sabres, that coming in the final 90 seconds of the 8-4 loss to the New York Rangers in April that ended their playoff hopes.

In Saturday's shootout loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs, Pysyk opened the scoring with a neat end-to-end rush. He outskated the Toronto forwards through the neutral zone and drove the net hard to take a give-and-go pass from Drew Stafford before beating James Reimer with a shot to the top corner.

“He has that ability,” said coach Ron Rolston. “Right at the end of last season, he was showing it a little bit. The more comfortable he gets, he’ll be able to jump in those holes. He’s a smart player offensively. He’ll be able to help us there.”

“First and foremost, you’re trying to keep the puck out of your net,” Pysyk said. “The offense will come if you’re keeping that out of your net.”

Pysyk was a leader in his junior days, playing four seasons for Edmonton and captaining the team to the Western Hockey League title in 2012. He even got acclimated to an NHL rink as the Oil Kings play their home games at Rexall Place, home of the Oilers.

He struggled early after his callup to the Sabres in March. But his confidence grew with each outing and he’s looked completely at ease in training camp this year.

“You sort of realize when you play, it’s still hockey,” he said. “It’s the same game you’ve played your whole life. If the opportunity is there, you’re going to take it. No matter what league, no matter who you’re playing with. Just seeing that last year, the confidence level is definitely more than it was at the start of last year.”

...

Because of Tuesday’s off day, there was no update on injured forwards Cody McCormick, Marcus Foligno and Corey Tropp. Rolston said Monday he expected at least McCormick to be available tonight.

Center Matt Ellis and defenseman Drew Bagnall cleared waivers Tuesday and reported to Rochester. Ellis is expected to become the Amerks’ captain.

Colton Gillies, the former Minnesota Wild No. 1 pick who was recently released from his tryout contract by the Sabres, may be signed to join the Americans.

## **Many earn blame in brawl**

By Bucky Gleason

Buffalo News

September 25, 2013

The easy part for Brendan Shanahan came Monday, when the NHL's chief disciplinarian handed down a 10-game suspension to David Clarkson for leaving the bench during the Sabres-Leafs melee. The rule for such an infraction is clear, the suspension automatic and severe.

Shanahan had a tougher call Tuesday before suspending Phil Kessel for three preseason games, essentially giving him a few days in the timeout chair. The Leafs winger turned his stick into a sickle with the intentions of cutting down a tree, namely 6-foot-8, 270-pound redwood John Scott, at the trunk.

Kessel's actions warranted punishment based on recklessness born from fear. As bad as it looked, he didn't cause any real harm. In any given game, you'll find three slashes that do more damage but are less obvious and aren't penalized. Kessel showed enough wits to swing for Scott's legs, creating the space he needed, rather than his head.

You don't think Shanahan went far enough with his punishment? I agree, but probably for an entirely different reason. He should have suspended Scott for starting the bloody mess when he attacked Kessel. If he doesn't start with Kessel, Kessel doesn't respond.

The entire altercation - the whole thing - could have been avoided if Sabres coach Ron Rolston used a shred of common sense. He didn't need to take Scott off the ice. He needed to make sure Scott didn't do anything moronic on the ice. Instead, he stood there and watched the big guy initiate the shenanigans that followed.

Looking for someone to blame?

Start with Rolston and Scott before you arrive at Kessel.

Let me make this perfectly clear: I'm not absolving Kessel in any way, but his options were limited after Scott charged him. He couldn't match Scott's size, strength or brawling skills. He had no chance if he traded punches with the only man in NHL history with more than 150 games played and fewer than five career points scored.

With little to prove and even less to accomplish, Kessel at that moment was thinking more about survival. Keywords: at that moment. Kessel's decision to take a poke at Scott after things momentarily settled down was another matter. That's when he crossed the line separating survival from stupidity.

OK, so suspend Kessel for stupidity.

Just make sure Scott joins him.

It's convenient for the Sabres and their legion of whiny apologists to grab the rulebook and claim he did little more than instigate a fight. Anyone taking an honest look could

see he was the player most responsible for the line brawl that ensued. It wasn't Leafs forward Jamie Devane or coach Randy Carlyle. And it certainly wasn't Phil Kessel.

To review, Scott was intent on settling a score because Devane supposedly broke a rule of engagement while punching out Corey Tropp.

No matter your opinion of fighting in hockey, and I'm conflicted, both were willing combatants who understood the dangers. The allegation: Devane pushed Tropp's head to the ice.

Just so we're straight, punching each other in the face is acceptable. Knocking out teeth and causing concussions is acceptable. Beating up an opponent who did nothing wrong, which Scott has turned into a career, is acceptable. Pushing the head of someone who is trying to punch you, knock out your teeth and concuss you is ... unacceptable.

Make sense?

Of course not, but common sense was absent in Air Canada Centre. Rather than get even with Devane for unnecessary roughness, barbaric as that may seem, Scott in his infinite wisdom decided somebody on the ice for the next shift - anybody other than Devane, that is - would need to pay the fare. Scott admitted as much himself.

He later blamed Carlyle for what amounted to collateral damage, which was equally asinine. Scott also failed to realize that his response to one player violating a so-called code of conduct was breaking another unwritten rule that says goons - sorry, John, enforcers - don't beat up undersized skill players.

Is that his idea of hockey? It's my idea of anarchy.

Rolston deserved the fine. He should have recognized the potential for trouble and accepted Carlyle's obvious invitation to defuse the situation. Carlyle ordered Kessel to the ice without worrying about Scott. He had no reason to worry because John Scott attacking Phil Kessel made no sense. Did Rolston really need Carlyle to explain?

You can only conclude that Rolston intended to send a message - in an exhibition game, no less. In fact, Rolston did send a message. He showed that he's just as clueless as a few others in the organization. Scott was hired in the first place to address a lack of toughness when, really, their pressing need was competitive toughness.

Anyone know the difference?

Shanahan did, but he was in a sticky spot Tuesday. Written rules intersected with unwritten rules. Scott on the surface was guilty of instigating a fight and fighting, punishable by seven minutes in the box. Kessel faced the more severe penalty for defending himself, at least at the beginning, with his stick.

Sheriff Shanny reviewed the video, considered the variables, injected common sense and handed down his punishments. No problem here with Shanahan suspending Kessel for whatever he deemed necessary. The greater crime was allowing the person most responsible for the mayhem Sunday to walk away Scot-free.

## **Leafs brawl earns fine for Rolston**

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

September 24, 2013

The often confounding wheels of NHL justice spun again early Tuesday night as the league fined Buffalo Sabres coach Ron Rolston an undisclosed amount for “player selection and team conduct” and suspended Toronto Maple Leafs winger Phil Kessel for three preseason games in the wake of Sunday’s brawl between the teams in Air Canada Centre.

The Rolston fine is pretty much unprecedented in league annals. Coaches are routinely fined for their roles in brawls – former Sabres coach Lindy Ruff, for instance, got hit \$10,000 for the team’s infamous 2007 dust-up with Ottawa – but the term “player selection” has never been used.

It’s a clear reference to Rolston having 6-foot-8, 270-pound enforcer John Scott on the ice when Toronto coach Randy Carlyle, who had the last change as the home coach, was hoping to defuse a volatile situation by having skill players such as Kessel lined up against the Sabres.

Ruff had the last change with the game in Buffalo and put out Patrick Kaleta, Adam Mair and Andrew Peters after the Senators had set their lineup. A full line brawl ensued, featuring goalies Ray Emery and Martin Biron.

This situation was different in that Rolston did not have the last change, nor did he send Scott on. Scott was already on the ice when Buffalo’s Corey Tropp and Jamie Devane were involved in a fight that resulted in Tropp having his head driven into the ice. Rolston opted to keep Scott on, and Scott then went after Kessel before the next faceoff to initiate the melee.

The Sabres had no comment on the league’s rulings Tuesday. Rolston is expected to have his normal briefing with the media this morning following his team’s pregame skate for their exhibition game against Columbus tonight at 7 in First Niagara Center (MSG, Radio 550 AM).

Toronto forward David Clarkson earned an automatic 10-game, regular-season suspension for leaving the bench to join the brawl. Clarkson said after the Leafs’ game Tuesday that he won’t appeal.

Kessel was suspended for his three stick chops at Scott but avoided a ban for any regular season games because he was not a repeat offender. In his video explanation at NHL.com, Director of Player Safety Brendan Shanahan showed clips of Kessel using a stick in a similar manner in a game last week in Philadelphia but opted not to issue a stiffer penalty.

The lack of a regular-season suspension for Kessel quickly drew reaction around the league, as Vancouver’s Zack Kassian earned a five-game suspension earlier this week – in the regular season – for recklessly swinging his stick and breaking the jaw of Edmonton’s Sam Gagner. The lack of an injury to Scott was likely the prevailing factor in Shanahan’s decision to spare Kessel.

## **More from Scott and the hockey world on the big brawl**

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

September 24, 2013

Be sure to read today's story on the reaction to the Leafs-Sabres brawl, featuring the first public comments from Sabres tough guy John Scott. The Sabres are off today while Leafs forward David Clarkson, who got a 10-game suspension for leaving the bench, did not speak to Toronto reporters for the second straight day. Might want to get it over with, big guy.

(Clarkson can't possibly be pondering an appeal, right? On what grounds? The video is the video. It's clear as day.)

One of the things that didn't make my long story was Scott's thought on the Leafs not sending out a tough guy like wannabe-enforcer Troy Bodie against him rather than Phil Kessel (Toronto brawler Colton Orr was injured and not playing).

What if it had been Bodie and not the stick-wielding Kessel?

"It would have been done with," Scott said. "There wouldn't have been any brawl, the goalies wouldn't have fought, there wouldn't be any suspensions. It would have been two tough guys fighting it out like it's supposed to be done. It would have been done a lot different."

More reactions:

---Shortly after midnight Sunday, Ryan Miller tweeted, "Well... that escalated quickly. #oldtimehockey #eddieshore". It has been retweeted or favorited nearly 9,000 times as of noon today.

---Tweet from former Sabres agitator Matt Barnaby: "I would fight Scott and lose but... he also could not have made my bantam team."

---Ottawa goalie Robin Lehner to Senators reporters: "Their heavyweight went after their star. And then Kessel went Star Wars on him. It was pretty good entertainment."

---Leafs alum Mikhail Grabovski to the Washington Post on Kessel's act: "He looked like a musketeer."

---Former NHL tough guy Jody Shelley, now a Blue Jackets broadcaster/ambassador, to the Columbus Dispatch: "I didn't mind the brawl. What I really didn't like was the fight before it where [Jamie Devane] drove [Corey] Tropp's head into the ice. The rest was whatever. The way the first fight ended, that really bothered me."

## **Rolston fined for Sabres' altercation with Maple Leafs**

NHL.com

September 24, 2013

NEW YORK -- Buffalo Sabres head coach Ron Rolston has been fined for player selection and team conduct as a result of events that took place at 10:01 of the third period during NHL preseason game No. 61 against the Toronto Maple Leafs in Toronto on Sunday, Sept. 22.

The events took place during the face-off after Buffalo forward Corey Tropp fought Toronto forward Jamie Devane. Buffalo forward John Scott initiated an altercation with Toronto forward Phil Kessel, whom he was lined up against on the face-off, resulting in several fights. In total, 211 penalty minutes, including three game misconducts, were assessed due to the various altercations.

## **Maple Leafs' Kessel suspended for the rest of the preseason**

NHL.com

September 24, 2013

NEW YORK -- Toronto Maple Leafs forward Phil Kessel has been suspended for the team's final three preseason games for slashing Buffalo Sabres forward John Scott during NHL preseason game No. 61 in Toronto on Sunday, Sept. 22, the National Hockey League's Department of Player Safety announced today.

The incident occurred at 10:01 of the third period. A match penalty for slashing (attempting to injure) was assessed on the play.

## **30 Thoughts: Leafs feeling most pain after Sabres brawl**

By Elliotte Friedman

CBC

September 24, 2013

The Sabres started the fights Sunday night, but the Maple Leafs are feeling the pain. The great irony? This is the exact recipe that worked so well last season for Toronto.

The Canadiens, Sabres and Senators won a combined four of 14 games against the Leafs in 2013. In many of those losses, the defeated club grumbled about the winner's tactics. Randy Carlyle loves a tough team that plays a hard game and Toronto did, leading the NHL in fighting majors.

The best example was probably Feb. 9 in Montreal, a 6-0 Toronto victory that featured several wild third-period fights, a biting accusation and a Rene Bourque concussion when he came to Brian Gionta's aid against Colton Orr.

The Canadiens were incensed. The Maple Leafs? Unapologetic. And Toronto's improvement to a playoff team made some of their smaller, less-physical opponents realize, "We're going to have to deal with this."

Orr and Frazer McLaren are injured right now, but that hasn't stopped the flying fists. The team averages more than two fights per game in the pre-season. The formula doesn't look like it will change. Why would it? Worked for them.

Ottawa added Matt Kassian in March. Montreal waited for the summer to go get George Parros. John Scott's Anchor Bar arrival isn't new, but the Sabres have worried about their toughness since Milan Lucic ran over Ryan Miller.

There was no legitimate reason for Scott to target Phil Kessel. Corey Tropp sure looked like he wanted to try his luck with the bigger Jamie Devane. (Biggest concern: that Tropp is okay after his head hit the ice.)

But you can see why Toronto's opponents don't have any sympathy for David Clarkson's 10-game suspension and Kessel's suspension for the rest of the pre-season, even though the team that started both altercations may get away unscathed.

Think Carlyle will have his group riled up in the next meeting (Nov. 15)? What about Orr and McLaren, assuming both are healthy? Now, though, their opponents feel better prepared.

"This is what you did to us last year," these teams are saying. "This year, we're going to fight back."

### **30 THOUGHTS**

1. Asked a few players what they thought of Scott/Kessel. The majority thought Kessel was justified in his actions. On Monday, Scott told reporters in Buffalo, "I

wasn't going to try to hurt him. I was just trying to send a message." The thing is, there is no way in the moment Kessel knows that. If he gets hurt, how much does it cost him, especially since he and the team are working on a long-term extension? The one thing a couple did say was he could have skated away from Scott before puck drop. That was the only "out" he had.

2. Here's why I have no problem with the three-game exhibition suspension: my opinion on this stuff changed after Todd Bertuzzi/Steve Moore. Moore skated away, turtled and was still badly injured. John Scott is a powerful guy. If he connects -- even without all of his force -- Kessel could get hurt. Imagine, if that happened, the fallout we'd be seeing. The damage to Kessel and the sport is not worth it. If the Sabres want to rough up Kessel, do it with punishing checks or hard play. Fighters should not be targeting non-fighters.

3. Sounds like Edmonton's decision to take Steve MacIntyre on waivers was made very late in the process, within maybe 30 minutes of the deadline. Would guess the Buffalo/Toronto brawl affected their thinking.

4. We've now seen two occasions where fighters removed each other's helmets prior to a scrap. Krys Barch and Brett Gallant avoided coincidental minors last week. Monday night, Aaron Volpatti and Kevan Miller did it. The referees reacted by giving them the penalties anyhow. That was an interesting development, as there is no specific rulebook language against this. The Ontario Hockey League did anticipate this issue when it introduced similar legislation in 2009, enacting a rule that reads, "If a player should remove an opponent's helmet or undo a chinstrap prior to or during an altercation, such player shall receive an automatic game misconduct penalty in addition to any other penalties assessed and a one (1) game suspension." Maybe we eventually see that.

5. Some people really hate the helmet rule, but I'll take that instead of Tropp's blood all over the ice.

6. It did not go unnoticed that Ryan Miller participated in the fighting. He referred to himself as a "tradeable asset" in our HNIC interview last weekend, but the Sabres told both he and Thomas Vanek it was critical they set a positive example while still in Buffalo. There is no doubt he saw this as a chance to do that. "I understand I'm a big of part of [creating a positive atmosphere]," he said. "The way I bring myself to the rink and the way I perform on the ice is obviously a part of that. This isn't all about what the Sabres can do for me."

7. Miller, by the way, is a big supporter of the goalie equipment crackdown. "It's a situation where, when you speak out about these things, guys are going to look at you and say, 'Oh yeah, thanks a lot,'" he said. "But, when you really get down to it, we're just trying to protect the scope of the game. It might not be about this year or next year, but where's it going to be in five or ten years? You have to have an even playing field. It shouldn't come down to how much extra space can you fill in with your chest protector, your pants, your knee pads, your pads...What position are you going to get into to stop the puck? And I know everyone has got a different body type, but we're

not going to go anywhere with that...Gotta play with what God gave you, so we're just trying to keep it more to the sport and not so much throwing furniture in the way."

8. Clarkson's 10-game suspension and cap problems it creates don't only affect the unsigned Cody Franson. GM Dave Nonis made it very clear last weekend that if Morgan Rielly makes it on merit, he will be there no matter the crunch. The rookie's hit is \$1.7 million US. Is that still possible?

9. Zack Kassian's five-game penalty hurts Vancouver in a similar, but smaller way. His hit of \$870,000 isn't as bad, but it tightens things when they were hoping to see if anything interesting became available from teams feeling the squeeze (maybe a centre). Prior to the ban, the Canucks had about \$2 million to play with.

10. If Cody Franson is serious about Europe, he loses control over his potential destination. If he plays any games in another league after the NHL season begins, he must clear waivers. Seems unlikely.

11. There is a conspiracy theory that the "jersey tuck" crackdown is simply setting the table for ads on sweaters. There's no way Oswald acted alone, but I generally hate conspiracies. Anyway, I did look into it and was told "not imminent" aside from what already exists with the current sponsor, Reebok. Another good point: if the NHL was to sell these ads, they probably wouldn't be located along the bottom, which is where tucking occurs.

12. That's not to say the idea hasn't been discussed. At a sales conference a couple of years ago, Brian Burke (then Toronto's GM) said the Maple Leafs were dead-set against the idea because of the iconic nature of their logo and jersey. A one-time Canadiens employee said the same thing in a different conversation.

13. A lot of debate about Ryan Nugent-Hopkins' extension (seven years, \$42 million). Here is why Edmonton did it: the Oilers believe in their young core as players and people. They believe that if you do this instead of the bridge contract, you save money -- because the cost of the next one only goes up, never down. It sounds like the biggest initial issue in these discussions was term; at one point, Rick Valette, Nugent-Hopkins' agent, wanted shorter, but the team liked this idea instead.

14. The biggest argument against Edmonton's decision is, "Why?" Nowhere in the CBA does a team have greater control over a player than after the entry-level deal. See: Subban, PK; Kadri, Nazem. The Oilers are seriously dabbling in analytics and one of the theories pushed by this analysis is that paying big money for scorers after the age of 31 is madness. Taylor Hall, Jordan Eberle and Nugent-Hopkins are heading into what are, statistically, the scoring primes of a player's career, so why not pay them then? It's a fascinating debate.

15. The other argument against RNH's extension is his shoulder injury. The doctor advising the Oilers on this is Dr. Tony Miniaci, an orthopaedic surgeon at the renowned Cleveland Clinic. If he says things should be okay, teams generally are comfortable with that.

16. Edmonton's plan is clear: Hall is the salary ceiling. He got a \$6 million cap hit, and no one is getting more than that. He didn't get any no-move or no-trade clause, so none of the younger generation is getting that. (Hall, Eberle and Nugent-Hopkins are eligible for such clauses after their seventh seasons, or midway through these extensions.) That was huge for the Oilers, not that they are looking to trade any of these guys. Teams, players and agents will tell you that avoiding that kind of protection costs extra. You rarely get guys to take discounts without it.

17. Exception: Sam Gagner. Gagner did take less, with a cap hit of \$4.8 million. He does have a no-move in 2014-15. It doesn't kick in until then because he is not yet eligible, but Craig MacTavish delivered a verbal promise that Gagner would not be dealt in 2013-14.

18. If Hall is the guy setting the standard, it seems sensible to name him captain.

19. Finally on this topic: look at where the NHL thinks the cap is going. We're talking the potential of \$80 million in a few years. Let's say five Oilers -- Hall, Eberle, Nugent-Hopkins, Justin Schultz and Nail Yakupov -- get that. Tying up approximately 30 per cent of the cap in those players is not bad business.

20. One player to watch closely this week: Oilers defenceman Anton Belov. They chased him hard after the world championships, only to see his pre-season arrival delayed by visa issues. It's possible he goes to AHL Oklahoma City for a short time, "but he's going to play in the NHL, unless he's a complete washout," as one source said. Suffice it to say the Oilers don't believe the worst-case scenario will happen. He looks very comfortable and confident.

21. A few teams are circling around Jets defenceman Paul Postma, wondering what is their plan for him. He's caught in a numbers game, especially with Jacob Trouba making a push at the big club. What they do know is there is no way Postma clears waivers. He's got too much talent and a good-value contract (two years, \$712,500 average). If Winnipeg does decide to deal him, there will be interest.

22. Kevin Cheveldayoff's two-year extension now puts him under contract for five seasons. That's big-time security. There was some surprise at this, but you have to understand owner Mark Chipman. He is very loyal to his people. When Cheveldayoff got there, Chipman wanted to keep many who were already in the organization. Now, Cheveldayoff is part of that.

23. Also wonder if the whole Seattle expansion possibility is part of this. One of the potential owners is Don Levin, who employed Cheveldayoff at AHL Chicago and remains a fan. Should Levin get that team when/if it happens, this blocks the chances of a raid.

24. Andrew Ladd on the Jets: "We need to find an identity and a way we need to play every single night. I think too many times in the past couple of years, we've been inconsistent in the way we played...some games run-and-gun, some games strong defensively...You just can't have that variance...Too many times we were too loose, and we just don't have the firepower up front to run-and-gun with teams."

25. Ladd on Winnipeg's \$90-million summer spending spree (Zach Bogosian, Bryan Little, Blake Wheeler): "I wasn't surprised. When I first went to Winnipeg...that was the message that they gave to me, that when it came time to sign guys, that they would do it."

26. Ran a list of Buffalo's six first-round draft choices over the past four years past Ron Rolston and asked how many would be on the team for the start of the season. That's Joel Armia, Zemgus Girgensons, Mikhail Grigorenko, Mark Pysyk, Rasmus Ristolainen and Nikita Zadorov. His answer: "Three or four." But the only one he would single out was Pysyk. It's time for a deeper look at him.

27. There is a sense Ristolainen might be farther ahead than Buffalo thought. However, Rolston made it very clear that no one will be rushed. "We're only keeping players who are ready," he said. "If they will be making youthful mistakes, we can deal with that. But if they are not ready, they will not be here."

28. At no position does that create bigger questions for the Sabres than centre. Cody Hodgson, Grigorenko and Johan Larsson have combined for 165 NHL games. Larsson played wing at AHL Houston but played centre in international competition. Rolston started Tyler Ennis on the side, but didn't like how little Ennis was getting the puck, especially when his middleman was a lefty passer. Look at the guys Buffalo must deal with on a regular basis.

29. Mason Raymond was signed by Toronto off his tryout contract and Chuck Kobasew has a chance in Pittsburgh. Tom Gilbert's in Florida and it sounds like there are some teams looking at him. Had heard Phoenix, but they've got a lot of defencemen under contract, so barring a move, I'm not sure how that would work.

30. As the Panthers move towards a sale, lots of questions about relocation. First, the team has an excellent lease with Broward County for 15 more years. But more importantly, commissioner Gary Bettman never changes owners without some guarantee of staying put. When Jim Balsillie tried to buy Pittsburgh, it was seven years. The new Phoenix deal is for five, but the only reason it's that short is the banks demanded it, not because the owners wanted it. Bettman wants to see how his teams will do under the new CBA.

## **2013-14 Buffalo Sabres Preview**

The Sports Network  
September 24, 2013

While Ruff, now head coach of the Dallas Stars, was sacrificed by Buffalo, general manager Darcy Regier earned a reprieve and is tasked with getting the Sabres, who have missed the playoffs in two straight and four of the last six seasons, back on track. Regier also took on his GM role in 1997 and it's unclear how much time he'll get to rebuild this franchise.

Ron Rolston took over for the fired Ruff on an interim basis and led the Sabres to a 15-11-5 record over the last two months of the season. In 2013-14, Rolston's job mainly is to try and mold Buffalo's young core into some sort of cohesive unit. It'd be a huge stretch to think of this team as a potential playoff club for the upcoming season.

One thing to keep an eye on during the campaign is whether or not the Sabres decide to trade winger Thomas Vanek and goaltender Ryan Miller, who are both in the final year of their contracts and may not want to wait around for this rebuilding project to bear fruit.

**FORWARDS** - The trade rumors have begun swirling around Vanek and there have been reports that Buffalo even would retain part of the Austrian sniper's salary in order to get a deal done. Vanek, a 29-year-old left winger with 250 career goals to his credit, is scheduled to be paid \$6.4 million in salary this season and the final year of his contract carries a cap hit of \$7.14 million.

Vanek led the Sabres with 20 goals and 41 points last season and that was despite missing 10 games due to injury.

With Vanek rumored to be on the way out, the Sabres will try to build around young forwards like Cody Hodgson, Mikhail Grigorenko, Tyler Ennis and Marcus Foligno.

Hodgson, who was acquired by Buffalo in a 2012 trade with Vancouver, recently signed a six-year contract extension with the Sabres. The 23-year-old centerman turned in solid numbers last season with 15 goals and 34 points over 48 games, but his defensive game has a long way to go.

Meanwhile, Grigorenko, who Buffalo selected with the 12th overall pick of the 2012 NHL Entry Draft, had a rough first season in the NHL. The Russian centerman had one goal and four assists in 25 games in 2013, but he is only 19 years old heading into this season and has a chance to take a big step forward.

Ennis began the 2013 season as a centerman before being moved to left wing and the Sabres expect to keep him there this season. The 2008 first-round pick finished third on Buffalo in points in 2013, scoring 10 goals and tying Vanek for the team lead with 21 assists.

Foligno, a fourth-round pick by Buffalo in 2009, had five goals and 13 assists in 47 games last season.

One veteran the Sabres will expect much more out of in 2013-14 is underachieving forward Ville Leino, who has been a huge disappointment in his first two seasons with Buffalo. After turning in a career year with Philadelphia in 2010-11, when he posted 19 goals and 53 points, the Finnish winger signed a six-year, \$27 million with Buffalo in the summer of 2011. To say it hasn't gone as planned would be a rather large understatement.

Leino had just eight goals and 17 assists in 71 games with the Sabres in 2011-12 and had six points while playing in only eight games during an injury-plagued 2013 campaign. In a somewhat surprising move, Regier did not opt to use a compliance buyout on Leino this offseason, but that still could be his fate if he suffers through another down year in 2013-14.

Another forward not pulling his weight is Drew Stafford, who was signed to a four-year, \$16 million deal in the summer of 2011. Stafford, a first-round selection by Buffalo in 2004, had a solid 2011-12 campaign, posting 20 goals and 30 assists over 80 games, but dipped to just six goals and 12 assists in 46 contests last season.

Back for another year in Buffalo is physical forward Steve Ott, a guy Rolston will likely lean heavily on for veteran leadership this year. Ott played in all 48 games for the Sabres last season and recorded 24 points (9G, 15A) and 93 penalty minutes.

Barring a major step forward from all of their young players, the Sabres offense doesn't expect to be much better in 2013-14 than it was last season when Buffalo ranked 22nd in the league in offense. Of course, it could get worse if the Sabres decide to trade Vanek during the season.

**DEFENSE** - One of the biggest mysteries for the Sabres over the last few seasons has been the regression of defenseman Tyler Myers, who has struggled since bursting onto the NHL scene by winning the Calder Trophy as a rookie in 2009-10.

Myers, the 12th overall pick in the 2008 draft, is signed through the 2018-19 season, but he hardly justified his annual cap hit of \$5.5 million in 2013. The 6-foot-8, 227-pound blueliner had just three goals and five assists in 39 games and had a minus-eight rating before his season ended with a broken leg suffered in early April.

Although the Sabres brought back veteran defenseman Henrik Tallinder, who was partnered with Myers during his tremendous rookie season, as a free agent this summer, Christian Ehrhoff is expected to be paired with Myers in 2013-14. Ehrhoff had five goals and 17 assists in 47 games last season and led all Sabres' skaters in ice time.

Tallinder could help bring depth and stability to a defensive unit that allowed 2.90 goals per game (22nd in NHL) last season. Buffalo also acquired Jamie McBain in the offseason and the former Carolina blueliner could help shore up the back end.

Mike Weber and Mark Pysyk also will log minutes on the blue line in 2013-14, while Rasmus Ristolainen, the eighth overall pick in this summer's draft, could also contend for a spot on the roster.

**GOALTENDING** - Miller, the club's longtime No. 1 goaltender, struggled at time in 2013, which is hardly surprising considering the inexperienced roster playing in front of him.

The former Vezina Trophy winner went 17-17-5 in 2013 and his goals against average of 2.81 was his highest number of any season in which he played in at least 10 games. Miller also failed to record a single shutout for the first time since the 2003-04 campaign, when the American played in only three games.

Miller says he hasn't ruled out re-signing with Buffalo when his contract is up at the end of the season, even if the Sabres decide to trade him before he hits free agency. Still, the chances of this being Miller's final season in Buffalo seem to be high.

If Miller is dealt, the Sabres will turn to Jhonas Enroth between the pipes. The 25-year-old Swede saw action in 12 games during the 2013 campaign and went 4-4-1 with a 2.60 GAA and one shutout. All told, Enroth is 21-18-7 with a 2.72 GAA in 53 career games.

The Sabres also acquired goaltending prospect Matt Hackett last season when they dealt forward Jason Pominville to Minnesota. He could challenge Enroth for playing time if Buffalo opts to deal Miller.

**WHEN ALL IS SAID AND DONE** - The Sabres are setting the bar pretty low for themselves this season, and making the playoffs in 2013-14 would take a minor miracle from Rolston and his staff. A rebuilding phase is a tough sell in a passionate hockey market like Buffalo, but getting back on track through the draft seems to be the best course of action after finishing out of the playoffs for two straight years. Still, even with low expectations, if the youngsters fail to show improvement this season, Regier could join Ruff on the chopping block.

## **Maple Leafs-Sabres brawl: Fans blame Buffalo coach Ron Rolston**

By Curtis Rush

Toronto Star

September 24, 2013

Buffalo coach Ron Rolston is mostly to blame for Sunday's brawl between the Leafs and Sabres, according to the results of a Toronto Star online poll.

Almost 60 per cent of those who voted on an online poll put the blame on Rolston.

More than 6,000 fans voted online.

The least amount of blame went to newly acquired Maple Leaf forward David Clarkson, who jumped off the bench to defend Phil Kessel.

Only 2 per cent of voters said he was mostly to blame for the brawl.

The others most at fault, the fans said, were, in order: Buffalo enforcer John Scott (24 per cent), Leaf sniper Phil Kessel (10 per cent), Leaf coach Randy Carlyle (5 per cent) and, last, Clarkson (2 per cent).

Clarkson incurred an automatic 10-game suspension and won't be eligible to return to the Leafs until Oct. 25 in Columbus.

It was Sabres coach Rolston who put 6-foot-8, 270-pound enforcer Scott on the ice against Kessel, who is listed at 6-foot-0, 202 pounds.

Scott knew what his job was: To avenge an earlier fight between Leaf tough guy Jamie Devane, who had beaten up Buffalo's Corey Tropp and made him groggy.

Kessel was helpless and decided not to drop the gloves against Scott. He instead tried to defend himself by chopping at Scott's legs with his stick.

That action could result in discipline against Kessel when he has a telephone hearing with the NHL at 4 p.m. today.

After blaming Rolston, the fan vote next faulted Scott.

Almost 5 per cent of voters pinned the blame on Carlyle, and the Leaf coach's reputation as one of the game's master line matchers took a hit, according to the Star's Dave Feschuk.

It was Carlyle who later admitted he made a mistake by putting Leafs' most skilled player on the ice against the big man, Scott.

As the home team, the Leafs had the last line change.

Carlyle explained later that he didn't think Scott would jump Kessel, believing in the "code" that enforcers aren't supposed to go after smaller skill players.

He said he put out Kessel in the hopes that this would defuse the situation.

## **NHL fines Ron Rolston for Sabres' brawl with Leafs**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

September 24, 2013

BUFFALO – The NHL has fined Sabres coach Ron Rolston an undisclosed amount for “player selection and team conduct” in Sunday’s brawl in Toronto.

After the Sabres’ Corey Tropp and the Maple Leafs’ Jamie Devane fought 10:01 into the third period, Rolston left John Scott, who had already played 8:37 in the exhibition game, on the ice. The tough guy then went after Leafs star Phil Kessel before the faceoff, igniting a huge melee.

Leafs coach Randy Carlyle, who had the last line change, said he put skill on the ice to diffuse the situation.

The Sabres didn’t like that Devane, who’s five inches taller than Tropp, knocked out and bloodied the winger.

The two ferocious, two-handed stick whacks Kessel used to fend off Scott earned the winger a three-game exhibition suspension today. Kessel can’t return until the Leafs’ regular-season opener.

“While we acknowledge that Kessel’s initial motivation was self-defense, he persists and swings his stick again, even having escaped the immediate threat from Scott,” NHL discipline czar Brendan Shanahan said in a video explaining the suspension.

Shanahan said Kessel, who had never been suspended in his seven-year career, had a similar slashing incident last week.

Officials handed out 211 penalty minutes and three game misconducts following the brawl.

## **PARRINO: Buffalo matters because we say so**

By Matt Parrino

The Tonawanda News

September 25, 2013

Sunday night's preseason melee between the Sabres and Maple Leafs provided fans with an abundance of entertainment, but the best punches may have been thrown in the two days that followed.

Toronto Star sports columnist Cathal Kelly went under attack Tuesday on Twitter after hurling a monster overhand right to the entire City of Buffalo with a column titled, "Buffalo's not important enough to hate."

The blow connected and Buffalo responded, flippantly hurling insults and even death threats at Kelly on Twitter, according to the author.

The fight at center ice between the teams included Toronto's Phil Kessel swinging his stick through the air like a sword in the direction of Buffalo enforcer John Scott and goalie Ryan Miller exchanging blows with Maple Leafs net minder Jonathon Bernier. It's up to almost 700,000 views on YouTube, Kessel was suspended for three games Tuesday night and Sabres coach Ron Rolston was fined an unannounced amount because he sent Scott out there to get physical after a Sabres player was ruffed up earlier in the game.

When the action on the ice was over, Kelly's column got things going again — this time on social media.

The reaction was typical. Buffalo is a proud city that doesn't like being the butt of anyone's joke, especially a columnist from a city whose hockey team hasn't won a championship since before the Sabres even existed.

But that's the type of response Kelly wanted — that off-the-cuff, irate rebuttal to a harsh and pointed attack at the entire fabric of a city.

I'm not going to attack Kelly here. I'm not going to talk about the fact that his nation's sport is played predominantly in another country where most people couldn't care less about it.

I will point out the irony, however. Kelly points out Buffalo's insignificance throughout his diatribe, but isn't it a bit strange he attacks the one American city where hockey — Canada's national sport — actually matters?

OK, there are a few spots that the sport isn't on life support. Detroit is Hockey Town and Chicago really supports those Blackhawks — when they're winning. But for the most part hockey is as important in the U.S. as soccer. Well, soccer is actually growing its following in the states.

I'm not surprised by Kelly's attack on our city. Aren't we used to it by now? Buffalo is a loser town, filled with losers, who cheer for losers. I've heard it all.

But when you sit back and think about it, the vitriol is born out of bitterness.

No matter how hard other cities try they can't quite manufacture what we have in this city. This is a community of blue collar people who stick together and face all comers, including the litany of individuals that continue to pile on a city trying to rebuild.

Buffalo knows sports and we love our teams. We're the 12th man and this has been dubbed "Hockey Heaven" for a reason. Check out a game in Carolina or Phoenix and watch as the Sabres sweaters outnumber the Hurricanes and Coyotes.

Buffalo may not matter to you, Mr. Kelly, but it's where hockey lives in America.

If Toronto/Buffalo isn't a rivalry, as you surmise in your column, there would have been no gloves on the ice Sunday night in a meaningless preseason game. And a walk down Washington Street or a post-game beer at Pearl Street wouldn't include a back-and-forth between Sabres and Leafs fans that would alarm even the most well-versed trash talkers.

If Toronto is such a great sports town how come so many of its fans come here to watch the games?

Toronto may not care much about Buffalo, but the people who live there sure do spend a lot of time here. Whether it be to watch a hockey game or pick up the latest fall fashions, we'll continue to welcome you into our backyard, because that's who we are.

While you're here, please feel free to take in a football game — whatever it is that is played one Sunday a year at Rogers Centre doesn't count — and grab an order of wings.

But judging by the Twitter banter, Kelly won't be crossing the border anytime soon. He's probably better off though — an up close and personal view of what makes Buffalo what it is may remind him what Toronto can never be: a true sports town.

## **Sabres Weber is a leader this team's been missing**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

September 24, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Mike Weber was one of many that seemed to relax and play better after Ron Rolston took over. He was very good on the penalty kill blocking many shots and just being solid.

Others that also seemed to improve once Lindy Ruff left were Tyler Myers and Jhonas Enroth.

Every season Weber seems to start as the team's number seven or eight defenseman, but works his way into the top six. This season, I think he has a good chance to start in the top six. Ron Rolston has used him with number one pick Rasmus Ristolainen a lot in camp. Weber said, "It's always tough not to be in the lineup. From a personal standpoint I tried to compete, I tried to stay consistent and do the things we need to do to win, but I still need to be better. We all need to be a better because if each guy was just a little bit better, we'd be in the playoffs."

Weber has also turned into a good, vocal leader for this team. One thing he didn't like was not making the playoffs last year, "The first word that comes to mind is disappointing. This is two years now that we've put ourselves in this situation. From a team standpoint we had a lot of changes to make. As a team we needed to go in a different direction and really change the culture here."

The changes have been made as, starting last season, Jordan Leopold, Robyn Regehr and Andrej Sekera are gone. Coming in are Henrik Tallinder, Jamie McBain and the two first round picks, Ristolainen and Nikita Zadorov. Chad Ruhwedel and Brayden McNabb are waiting in the wings in Rochester. Weber said, "I'm not worried about our backend at all. We have Jhonas, he's a young guy, and we still have Millsie and he's still one of the best goalies in the league, so when you have two goaltenders that can really be a difference on a nightly basis, that's huge for you, so that gives your defense a lot of extra energy and a little more confidence. We have great young players on the backend. Mysie's a great player, Nabber plays a tough game, Pisser's a great young player too, he's really silky smooth and we have Rudy in Rochester, so I think there's a lot of positives on our backend so I don't think that will take that long at all."

Under the old core group, it was obvious that the leadership was lacking. Jason Pominville was not a strong captain, but Ruff didn't want a strong captain that would stand up to him. With the season Drew Stafford had, he really couldn't say anything. You can even go back to Paul Gaustad who lost all credibility the night Milan Lucic cartwheeled Miller. The lack of leadership wasn't lost on Weber. You can tell he's ready to step up, with Steve Ott and Thomas Vanek, just from what he

said to me last April, “It speaks to everything. It speaks to how we treat each other in the room, it speaks to how we need to treat each other in the room. Guys need to be held accountable and I think a lot of that has been lost here over the last couple of years. Everyone wants to win in this locker room and everyone comes here to win, comes here to compete, but it’s the consistency. Guys need to be consistent, myself included. Everyone needs to be held accountable for when they’re not playing well. We’ve got to find a way as a team to boost each other up and to power through some struggles and that’s been our biggest downfall. We get lost in these ruts like quicksand and it just sucks us in, we don’t have enough fight to fight out of it and that’s the culture I speak of. We need to find that battle, that intensity to get ourselves out of it.”

I think the natural thought now is, how is this group of Buffalo Sabres going to hold themselves accountable? Weber said, “There are other guys in the room that are going to step up to be leaders, to really grab it by the horns here and straighten the ship. That’s just not the veteran guys, that’s got to be a lot of the younger players that need to step up on a nightly basis.”

In My mind Mike Weber has come a very long way. He’s not afraid to get into teammates faces, because now he’s providing a solid on ice example. Weber is just what this team needs both on the bench and behind closed doors.