



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

Sunday, February 3, 2013

Habs blast Sabres

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 2, 2013

MONTREAL – It was a complete and total beatdown. The Buffalo Sabres were outskated and outclassed in embarrassing fashion.

Montreal laid waste to the Sabres' feel-good vibe Saturday, trouncing Buffalo, 6-1. From the opening minute, Montreal dominated the Sabres, who came to Quebec on a high after a stirring victory in Boston.

The winning feeling came to a crashing halt after one game. The Sabres are just 1-4-1 since opening the season with two victories.

"It's unacceptable," right wing Drew Stafford said. "We're not going to win any games if we come out and get outworked like that."

The 21,273 red-clad fans in Bell Centre gleefully mocked the visitors and cheered the home team, which played at a speed and intensity level that Buffalo could not match. The Sabres, in a 4-0 hole after 31 minutes, spent the final 29 trying to keep at least a little dignity to bring home for today's game against Florida in First Niagara Center.

They didn't salvage much.

"It wasn't even close to being good enough to win a game," captain Jason Pominville said. "It's us not being good enough, not being ready right off the bat."

The first period was the Sabres' worst of the season, yet they nearly escaped in a 0-0 tie they didn't deserve. The relentless Canadiens finally turned their dominance into a lead with eight seconds left, scoring on the power play. Montreal had a 15-1 shot edge in the opening 20 minutes.

Pominville, who took a slap shot with 9:22 left, was the only one to test goaltender Carey Price. Ryan Miller, meanwhile, had Habs in his goalie mask nearly every time he looked up.

"Sometimes you get paid for the way you're playing, and we had to pay at the end," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said. "If Ryan doesn't play the way he did in the first, this game could have really gotten out of hand. It was out of hand as it was, but it could have really gotten out of hand."

After finally solving Miller to end the first, Montreal poured it on during the second. The Canadiens scored three times on six shots, victimizing struggling defenseman Tyler Myers each time. Including Thursday's 7-4 win in Boston, Myers had a stretch in which he was on the ice for six of seven goals allowed by Buffalo.

“We just got way too high after a good win in Boston,” Myers said. “It’s something that we’re going to have to learn from.”

Ruff put Miller out of his misery after 40 minutes. Backup Jhonas Enroth quickly felt the pain as the Sabres continued their run for the bus. Montreal scored on a three-on-one just 1:22 into the third period.

By the time the Sabres had something to celebrate, there was no reason to enjoy it. Thomas Vanek scored on a short-handed breakaway with three minutes gone in the third to make it 5-1, but he skipped the party line. With his teammates up along the boards anticipating fist bumps, Buffalo’s leading scorer left them hanging and took a seat at the end of the bench.

“At this point you know what went wrong,” Stafford said. “It’s something as simple as work, and it’s something that we can address as a group. We have to get ready to come out flying.”

The rested Panthers haven’t played since a 6-3 win over Winnipeg on Thursday. It’s their only victory in their last six games. They were outscored, 23-4, during their five-game losing skid.

The Sabres’ top hope is that Florida feels overconfident after its convincing win. That’s what happened to Buffalo.

“Obviously,” Ruff said, “I think that we left our heads in Boston.”

Sabres' notebook: The misery goes on for Myers

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 2, 2013

MONTREAL – The way things are going for Tyler Myers, it's surprising his foot connected with his equipment bag when he kicked it in disgust Saturday.

The Buffalo Sabres defenseman fell deeper into his season-opening slump during the 6-1 loss to Montreal. He was on the ice for all three of the Canadiens' goals in the second period and finished minus-3.

"I think sometimes when you're focused on not making mistakes it ends up that you do," Myers said in Bell Centre. "I think I just need to get my head around just going out there and playing my game the way I know I can.

"It's a tough time right now. I've just got to work through it."

How's his confidence?

"How's it look?" he said with a grimace. "I think you guys can tell."

Myers and defense partner Jordan Leopold were on the ice for Boston's final three goals Thursday, so Myers had a stretch in which he was victimized for six of seven goals allowed by Buffalo.

Coach Lindy Ruff hinted Friday he might sit Myers or Leopold, but he put them back in together. Even though Myers struggled again, he'll likely be in the lineup today when the Sabres host Florida in First Niagara Center. Defenseman Andrej Sekera left the game against Montreal with a lower-body injury and is doubtful for the Panthers.

T.J. Brennan would replace Sekera, and there's no one left to replace Myers unless the Sabres call up a blue-liner from Rochester.

"We could have really backed off the ice time, but after Sekera went down we had no choice," Ruff said of Myers. "He's making some poor decisions that have really hurt him. He's in that category now where you make them and it hurts our team."

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Sekera crawled to the bench in the opening minute after absorbing a slap shot by defenseman Alexei Emelin. During a stoppage in play, Sekera was helped to the dressing room but returned a short time later.

He played four more shifts in the first period but didn't return after intermission. He was scheduled to have further tests today.

“It looks like just a bruise,” Ruff said. “It doesn’t look like it should be too long. He tried to gut it out. There was just a lot of discomfort, which didn’t allow him to keep playing.”

...

The beatdown wasn’t fun for Cody McCormick, but it still beat sitting in the press box. The winger played his first game after missing the opening seven with a finger injury.

“It was good until they started scoring on us, but I personally felt good on the ice,” McCormick said. “It wasn’t an ideal game for us.”

He skated 8:55 and attempted three shots, though none reached goaltender Carey Price.

“The timing felt like it came back pretty quick,” McCormick said. “It’s been too long. I just wanted to get in there and see if I could help out.

“I just wish I could have helped out a little more.”

To make room for McCormick on the roster, the Sabres placed defenseman Robyn Regehr on injured reserve. He made the trip to Montreal but spent his time in a walking boot.

To make room for McCormick in the lineup, the Sabres made left wing Nathan Gerbe a healthy scratch.

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Ten of the Canadiens’ 18 skaters reached the scoresheet. Lars Eller had three points, including a goal, while Rene Bourque and David Desharnais scored two goals each.

Montreal welcomed back defenseman P.K. Subban, who missed the opening six games while negotiating a new contract. He had one assist and three hits in 18:01.

“When you’re playing your first game out there, and the team has a great start, it’s sort of a relief,” Subban said. “I’m just happy with the win.”

Inside the NHL by Bucky Gleason: Surreal world for ex-Griff Conacher

By Bucky Gleason

Buffalo News

February 3, 2013

Tampa Bay's Cory Conacher is still trying to wrap his brain around the reality of his newfound fantasy world that is precisely how this sentence reads, a little weird.

Two years ago, Conacher was driving to Buffalo State for practice and sharing a dressing room with the likes of Torrey Lindsay and Preston Shupe at Canisius College. Nothing against the two senior forwards, but they're not exactly the same caliber of players surrounding Conacher these days on the Tampa Bay Lightning.

"Just walking into the room sometimes, it's still like, 'Wow, is that really Martin St. Louis and [Vincent] Lecavalier?'" Conacher said from Tampa last week. "It really is amazing. It's a dream come true. At the same time, I try not to act too nervous and too starstruck around them. But, yeah, it's incredible."

Rather incredible, indeed.

Conacher used the word a few times, for good reason. He scored against Washington in his NHL debut, had two assists in his second game and netted the winner in his third. He was named first star after setting up one goal and scoring another in a win over Florida. Friday he scored twice and had an assist against Winnipeg, giving him five goals and 12 points in seven games with the Bolts.

Obviously, he hasn't played like a rookie. He jumped atop the NHL rookie scoring lead and already is in the conversation for the Calder Trophy. He is the first Canisius player to appear in an NHL game and the first Atlantic Hockey Association player to score an NHL goal.

Both happened after he pulled his No. 89 sweater over his head for the season opener and delivered a debut to remember.

Conacher helped set up a power-play goal for St. Louis, his boyhood idol, for his first NHL point. He scored his first goal after flying down the left wing on a two-on-one and roofing a cross-ice pass from Teddy Purcell. He celebrated by jumping into the glass behind the net with his parents, grandfather, uncle and older brother in the stands.

"They jumped out of their seats and hugged and celebrated — probably over-celebrated," Conacher said. "The 'wow' factor was definitely there. The only thing that was going through my head was, 'Wow, did I really score in the NHL?' It was an awesome start. It was nice to be able to do that in front of them. It was just a dream come true."

Conacher already has earned a nickname, too: Honey Badger. The moniker is a compliment to his grit and hunger.

All this two years after the 5-foot-8, 178-pound center began a mission to prove there was plenty of room for undrafted, pint-sized forwards in the NHL. The Lightning knew as much as any team in the league. St. Louis was the same size and had similar skill when he signed as a free agent after he was left unprotected and was unclaimed in the 2000 NHL Expansion Draft. He played parts of two seasons for Calgary after a four-year career at the University of Vermont.

Clearly, size didn't matter to St. Louis. He led the NHL in scoring and was named Most Valuable Player in 2004 while leading the Bolts to the Stanley Cup. He has been their most productive player over the past decade, has played in six all-star games and can build a strong case to be inducted into the Hall of Fame.

Conacher, 23, emulated St. Louis while growing up in Burlington, Ont., where he played against Markham star Steven Stamkos. Conacher has played mostly on a line with Lecavalier and Purcell with the Lightning, but he has been given spot duty with St. Louis and Stamkos. He's also a regular on the power play.

Yeah, it's a little surreal.

"I still get starstruck, sometimes," Conacher said. "I try not to think about it too much because I don't want to take it off my game. I'm sure I'll be sitting here in the summer and take a look back on the season. Hopefully, I can finish here, and we can make a long playoff run. We're just trying to build a nice family here."

For anyone to suggest they knew with certainty he would land in the NHL two years later would have been lucky or lying. Scouts from most Division I colleges overlooked his hands, speed and hockey IQ and dismissed him based on his stature. He spent the next four years trying to prove them wrong while evolving into an elite player.

In fact, there was no way of knowing how his career would unfold until he played with and against better players. His stock soared last year when he led AHL Norfolk with 39 goals and 80 points, enough for him to be named AHL Rookie of the Year and Most Valuable Player. He carried his success into this season.

Now, he's found an NHL home in Tampa, which is a long way from Atlantic Hockey, Canisius and Buffalo. Barring a total collapse, he'll be back when the Bolts visit the Sabres in April. He was anxious to visit former coach Dave Smith and see his old teammates. Much has changed in the past two years.

You might say it's incredible.
Kane maturing?

Whether it was a result of the lockout, age or making headlines from the wrong reasons, Patrick Kane sounded like he had a recent attitude adjustment. You can only wonder if his newfound perspective contributed to a strong start that included three goals and 11 points in his first eight games. He had a career-low 66 points last season.

“I’m just trying to take it to the next level, trying to be more focused whether it’s off the ice or on the ice and just enjoy playing hockey,” Kane told reporters in Chicago. “It’s something I’ve always loved to do. It seems like the first five years of my career have gone by pretty quick. I just want to savor it all.”

Is he finally maturing at age 24? We’ll see.

Blackhawks captain Jonathan Toews seemed to be only half-kidding when talking about a clause in the new CBA that allows veterans to have their own rooms on the road. He and Kane were roommates.

“It was five long years with ‘88’ over there,” Toews said with a laugh. “I think we’re both more than happy to part ways. We had some great memories and some bad ones.”
Sens deal with big loss

The Senators weren’t looking to make any drastic moves with center Jason Spezza sidelined for two months with a herniated disk. He was scheduled for surgery Friday after laboring through a shootout loss to Pittsburgh last weekend.

Spezza was coming off a terrific season in which he had 34 goals and 84 points, his best year since 34 goals and 92 points in 2007-08. His absence could be a devastating blow to the Senators, but they’re not whining. They improved to 5-1-1 after blowing out Montreal without their star and getting goals from five different players.

Ottawa’s first move was calling up Mika Zibanejad, the sixth pick overall in 2011, from AHL Binghamton. The 19-year-old from Sweden scored his first NHL goal against the Habs and was named one of the three stars in each of his first two games. Goaltender Craig Anderson stopped 178 of 184 shots in his first six games.

“The way we’re putting up with the injury is goal scoring by committee,” Sens coach Paul MacLean said. “We’re going to have to be that hard-working team that grinds out some goals. We did that [Wednesday]. We have to continue to do it.”
Yakupov celebrates

Oilers rookie Nail Yakupov was criticized for over-cooking his tying goal against the Kings when he celebrated with a lengthy slide. Some would argue it was spontaneous combustion from a 19-year-old. Alex Ovechkin had similar antics during his rookie year, and it was a breath a fresh air.

Now if it continues ...

“I didn’t plan this, it just came into my head,” said Yakupov, who is playing left wing on the second line. “I’m not a crazy hockey player.”

Said goaltender Devan Dubnyk, who was pulled for the extra attacker that led to Yakupov’s goal: “I thought he might slide all the way into our empty net.”
Leafs’ deals help Bruins

It must have been tough for Leafs fans to watch the game Saturday and see Tuukka Rask, Tyler Seguin and Dougie Hamilton playing big roles for the Bruins. All three had connections to Toronto from past trades.

Rask was part of a swap that sent Andrew Raycroft to the Leafs. Seguin and Hamilton were taken in the draft with picks obtained in the Phil Kessel deal. Hamilton, 19, already looks like the real deal along the Bruins' blue line. The 6-5 defenseman was paired with Zdeno Chara, giving them twin towers of terror.

"He's got all the tools to develop into a Norris Trophy candidate," said Chara, a Norris Trophy winner.

Kessel has hardly been a bust. He had three 30-goal seasons with the Leafs, who were desperate for scoring when they acquired him. He failed to score in his first seven games despite leading the Leafs with 33 shots going into Saturday night.

Hitchcock mellows

Blues coach Ken Hitchcock is making sure, with the 48-game season, that he doesn't spend too much time obsessing over mistakes made in games that lead to sloppy performances. In any other year, Hitchcock would have bawled out his players and their parents after the Blues gave up a three-on-none. After it happened early in the season in a loss to Chicago, he basically looked the other way and moved forward. The loss to the Blackhawks was their only defeat in the first six games.

"You've got to be realistic that the score on the scorecard matters more than the way you play the game right now," Hitchcock said. "We're trying not to overreact to some of the bizarre things we see in a hockey game. You've just got to burn segments of the tape and don't worry about it. ... If you overreact to that, you freeze them up to everything else."

A tale for the birds

Pierre-Cedric Lebric didn't need a tall fishing tale when a pelican brief was better.

The Lightning winger was fishing with teammates in Tampa Bay last week when he caught a pelican in pursuit of his bait. Thirty minutes later, after reeling the petrified pelican into the boat, Lebric untangled the bird and released it back to freedom.

"When we let it go, we gave him a couple of sardines," Labrie said. "He was feeling shame. His head was down and he was exhausted."

Quotable

Edmonton center Eric Belanger, 35, on the choice of music being played in the dressing room by his younger teammates: "I've got a 7-year-old and a 9-year-old, and in the car all they want to listen to is Justin Bieber. Then, I walk into our room and I get more Bieber."

Around the boards

- P.K. Subban ended his contract dispute when he signed a two-year deal worth \$5.75 million with the Canadiens. The key to the deal was the \$3.75 million he'll pocket in the second year, which falls in line with the money he was seeking on a long-term deal. If he stays healthy, he'll command more than \$4 million a year in 2014-15.
- The Wild already like what they have in rookie defenseman Jonas Brodin, who has been paired with newcomer Ryan Suter. Brodin, 19, weighs only 170 pounds, but he's loaded with speed, skill and poise along the blue line.
- After taking a stick to the eye, Todd Bertuzzi told Detroit reporters that face shields should be mandatory, then he quickly backed off, saying "I don't ask you what pencil you like to use. I'm not trying to be a jerk. It's just the way it is. It's our office, and we wear what we wear."

Sabres hope to rebound against Panthers

By Mike Battaglino

NHL.com

February 2, 2013

PANTHERS (2-5-0) at SABRES (3-4-1)

TV: FS-F, MSG-B

Season series: This is the first of three meetings. Last season, the teams split four games, with one overtime and one shootout decision.

Big story: Florida might be able to show what it is capable of with a full lineup. Center Stephen Weiss is expected to return from injury Sunday, two games after Kris Versteeg got back in. They paired with Tomas Fleischmann last season to form one of the better top lines in the NHL and would be playing their first game together this season.

The reigning Southeast Division champions are last in the Eastern Conference.

"It's a big trip for us," Weiss told the Sun Sentinel on Saturday. "We've got to get some points and get back into this thing."

Buffalo will look for a better performance than it gave Saturday afternoon in a 6-1 loss at the Montreal Canadiens.

"We just got way too high after a good win in Boston [on Thursday] and it's something that we're going to have to learn from," defenseman Tyler Myers told the Buffalo News. "We can take from it tonight, don't get too low, come back tomorrow and win a hockey game."

Team scope:

Panthers: Versteeg's second game produced his first points (goal and assist) and a 6-3 win over the Winnipeg Jets on Thursday, ending a five-game losing streak.

He and Weiss would solidify the first line and top power-play unit, and allow the second line of Alex Kovalev, Jonathan Huberdeau and Peter Mueller to slide in as planned behind it. Marcel Goc also is back after injuring his ankle playing in Germany during the work stoppage.

"That gives you options," coach Kevin Dineen told the Miami Herald on Friday. "It's not just the players you're missing, but the players we have are playing out of position to try and fit the square peg into the round hole. This gives us more continuity."

The Panthers open a four-game road trip having had three days off between games. The team reportedly will stay in Buffalo on Sunday night to watch the Super Bowl before flying out Monday prior to Tuesday's game at Winnipeg.

"On the road sometimes you have to play grind-it-out kind of hockey a little bit," defenseman Brian Campbell told the Sun Sentinel. "I think that brings the team closer together if you're successful on the road."

Sabres: Buffalo responded to an emotional 7-4 win at the Boston Bruins on Thursday by taking one shot in the first period against the Canadiens on Saturday.

The Sabres were outshout 15-1 in the first, and trailed 5-0 before Thomas Vanek scored a shorthanded goal in the third period.

"Bottom line is, as disappointing and as unacceptable as tonight was, we have to take that and get ready to come out flying tomorrow," Drew Stafford said.

Jhonas Enroth, who probably was going to make this start, relieved Ryan Miller in the third period.

Who's hot: Fleischmann had three assists Thursday and leads the team with seven points, though he is a minus-6. ... Panthers rookie forward Drew Shore has 14 shots but is looking for his first NHL goal. ... Vanek kept his season-long points streak alive. He had a hat trick with two assists Thursday at Boston, and his 16 points led the League heading into Saturday night.

Injury report: Panthers forward Scottie Upshall could be out up to a month after injuring his ankle in a fight Thursday. Defenseman Ed Jovanovski (knee) could miss another game. Kovalev (flu) missed practice Friday. ... Sabres defenseman Andrej Skejera was bruised by a shot Saturday and played only the first period. Forward Cody McCormick (finger) played his first game. Defenseman Robyn Regehr (foot) was placed on injured reserve.

Panthers-Sabres Preview

By Mike Lipka
Associated Press
February 2, 2013

The Florida Panthers are finally feeling some confidence as they begin their first lengthy road trip of the season.

Their first opponent on the four-game trek may not know what to make of its own play.

The inconsistent Buffalo Sabres try to bounce back from an ugly loss as they play their second matinee in as many days Sunday against the Panthers.

Florida (2-5-0) followed up its surprising Southeast Division title from last season with a convincing win over Carolina in its 2012-13 opener, but it lost its next five contests by a combined 23-5.

A huge third-period surge finally stopped the bleeding Thursday. Trailing midway through the last 20 minutes against Winnipeg, the Panthers scored four unanswered goals to beat the Jets 6-3, with Peter Mueller and Alex Kovalev posting power-play tallies to put the team ahead.

"We did some good things out there previous games and we knew we were moving in the right direction and if we were just going to keep pushing eventually it was going to turn around," Kovalev said.

The Sabres (3-4-1) also scored four straight goals in the third period to win 7-4 at Boston on Thursday, but they certainly didn't have any residual momentum Saturday in Montreal. They were outshot 15-1 in the first period, eventually falling behind 4-0 in the second en route to a 6-1 defeat.

Ryan Miller allowed four goals for the third straight game and was removed after 40 minutes.

"We didn't have our 'A' game right off the bat. We started in the second but it was too late," coach Lindy Ruff said. "It's a collective effort. You can't point fingers at anybody."

Plenty of people are pointing fingers at Thomas Vanek for positive reasons. He scored again Saturday - his first short-handed goal since 2008 - to give him seven goals along with nine assists in seven games.

His point total equals Florida's goal total through seven contests.

The Panthers are hoping their improved play in their most recent game combined with a weeklong trip will help them find a groove, although they have lost each of their three road games by at least three goals. They are the NHL's only team still without any points on the road.

"We looked at this trip as a big part of our season. That we can get out and start establishing that cohesiveness that's really important," coach Kevin Dineen told his team's official website. "We've had a few snapshot trips here and there but for the most part this is one where you actually get out and spend some time on the road. I think it's good timing for it."

Kris Versteeg's return to the scoresheet couldn't have come soon enough. The Panthers' leader in points per game last season, Versteeg had a goal and an assist Thursday in his second game after missing the first five contests with a groin injury.

Florida is still dealing with some injury problems. Captain Ed Jovanovski (knee) won't be on this trip, while Scottie Upshall (ankle) left Thursday's game after getting hurt in a fight and could miss several weeks.

Center Stephen Weiss (groin) has been out for the last four games, but he returned to the top line in practice Friday.

Gameday: 6-1 Montreal In 3rd
WGR 550
February 2, 2013

Montreal, QC (WGR 550) -- The Buffalo Sabres had trouble mustering up any offense early against the Montreal Canadiens, and it cost them. The Habs trumped Buffalo 6-1 on Saturday afternoon from Bell Centre.

The game remained scoreless until Rene Bourque scored with just eight seconds to go in the opening period to give the Canadiens a 1-0 lead over Buffalo. Bourque was able to outmuscle Alexander Sulzer at the top of the crease, and get a stick on a puck sent to the front of the net. The goal came on the third power play of the stanza for the Habs.

Andrej Sekera returned to the Sabres bench midway through the first after going to the locker room following a shot block. It took more than ten minutes for Buffalo to record a shot on goal. Jason Pominville was able to get a shot through to Carey Price, while the Canadiens had 10 at that point. Montreal would end the first period with 15 total shots, while the Sabres mustered just 1.

Buffalo used sustained pressure in the opening moments of the second period to try and generate offense, but it was a bounce that went against the blue and gold to make it 2-0 Canadiens. Brendan Gallagher's pass across the crease was re-directed off of Christian Ehrhoff's stick and into the goal just two minutes into the middle frame. A pair of goals just twenty-eight second apart increased the home team's lead to 4-0 in the period. David Desharnais scored first, while Lars Eller crashed the net and recorded the other tally.

Bourque scored early in the third period to make the lead 5-0 Montreal. The goal was scored on Jhonas Enroth, who replaced Ryan Miller before the start of the period. Thomas Vanek gave the Sabres a glimmer of life less than two minutes later with a short handed goal. It was Vanek's seventh goal of the season. However, another power play goal for the Habs took away any doubt about the result. Desharnais' second goal of the game made the score 6-1 in favor of Montreal.

HAMILTON: Have Myers and Leopold recovered?

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 2, 2013

Montreal, QC (WGR 550) -- The Sabres didn't build any momentum from their win in Boston as they played their worst 20 minutes of the season to start in Montreal.

It was mistake after mistake after mistake and they were lucky they were only down 1-0. Ryan Miller made 14 saves and Carey Price made one, a long slap shot by Jason Pominville.

Today my focus is going to be on the struggles of Tyler Myers and Jordan Leopold.

In that period Myers had another real tough go. In one shift he fanned on a pass that led to a good Canadian opportunity and then lost his balance and fell into Miller.

He did a good job of standing up Lars Eller on one play and Leopold got back in support. That's the way it should be done, but rarely is lately.

Myers jumped up in the play, tried to get the puck in, but had it picked off. He got back in time to break up the play to the man trailing the play.

Leopold was able to win some battles along the wall and found open men for the outlet pass, the problem was twice he missed them and iced the puck.

On Buffalo's first penalty kill, he won two battles and got pucks down ice.

He was still somewhat shaky in coverage in front of the net.

On the Montreal goal Alex Sulzer was right with Rene Bourque, but simple lost the battle.

The second period was even worse for the kid. One thing he may want to change is his attitude. He's no longer that wide eyed nice kid that came to Buffalo. He's often surly and condescending and in total denial at least publically about his play.

Myers was on the ice for all three Montreal goals in the 2nd period.

On the goal by David Desharnais, Myers stepped up at the Montreal blue line. It was a horrible decision and allowed Lars Eller to lead an outnumbered situation that wound up in the net.

Lindy Ruff elected to leave them on the ice and just :26 later, Eller scored. Leopold had to step up to take the guy in the middle which left Eller open on the right wing side.

Myers again was caught up ice producing another 2-on-1. Brendan Gallagher tried to force a puck through Christian Ehrhoff, but it hit the shaft of his stick and went in.

After 40 minutes Myers is -3 in 10:47 of play. That covers 15 shifts.

Overall I think Leopold has been better, but he's -2 in 15:54 of play covering 19 shifts. With Andrej Sekera out with a foot or ankle injury, Leopold at least has to keep playing.

Leopold again, a good job winning a battle while penalty killing early in the third period and clearing the zone.

A few minutes later while the Sabres were applying offensive pressure, he set up Ehrhoff for a good one timer that almost got by Price.

Leopold took a boarding penalty with Jason Pominville already in the penalty box giving the Habs a 1:32 two man advantage. That got taken away :02 later when Desharnais held Matt Ellis' stick on the faceoff.

Myers told me his confidence is not high right now. The blue liner said that "I think sometimes when you're focused on not making mistakes, it ends up [that] you do. I think I just need to get my, my head around going out there and playing my game the way I know I can, and...it's a tough time right now. Just got to work through it." He may have a chance to try and play through the issues again on Sunday, against the Florida Panthers.

Ruff said that when Andrej Sekera did not return to the game after a bruise, he had no choice but to continue to use Myers. The head coach acknowledged that the defenseman is, "making some, some poor decisions that really hurt him, and he's in that category now that when you make 'em it hurts out team." Myers was a -3 for the game.

Bourque, Desharnais strike twice as Habs rout Sabres

By Arpon Basu

NHL.com

February 2, 2013

MONTREAL – The Montreal Canadiens wanted to make the Bell Centre a feared venue for opposing teams again after finishing last in the NHL in home wins last season.

Thus far, they are doing just that.

The Canadiens took advantage of a flat Buffalo Sabres club Saturday afternoon to register their fourth straight win on home ice in a 6-1 blowout victory in the front end of their traditional Super Bowl weekend matinees.

Coach Michel Therrien made it a priority for the Canadiens from the day he was hired in June to improve on last season's home record of 16-15-10. The early returns look promising with a record of 4-1-0 at Bell Centre.

"I always believed this is the greatest place to play," Therrien said. "We have to play a game where we're pushing the pace, because I believe our team has speed. And pushing the pace makes it difficult on everyone. When we talk about being tough to play against, it's not only the physical aspect. It's our work ethic, our decisions with the puck, all these little things make teams tough to play against. Right now our team is buying into that."

The team did not have had much of a choice, because if the Canadiens continued to struggle at home to start this season, their playoff hopes could have been dashed very quickly.

The Canadiens' home game Sunday afternoon against the Ottawa Senators will be their sixth in eight games to start the season, part of a stretch that sees them play 12 of their first 18 games at home through Feb. 23. After that, the Canadiens will play 11 of 15 games on the road between Feb. 25 and March 27, so if they don't bank points at home now, it could make it difficult to make up ground later.

A big reason why the Canadiens are succeeding in doing that has been the resurgent play of Rene Bourque, who scored twice Saturday and has been a consistent performer on the team's top line with Tomas Plekanec and Brian Gionta.

Bourque struggled mightily after he was traded to the Canadiens by the Calgary Flames last season, and after undergoing abdominal surgery over the summer he says he was determined to show the team's fans the player they saw last season was not the one who put up back-to-back 27-goal seasons with the Flames in 2009-10 and 2010-11.

With three goals and two assists through seven games – a point total he had after his first 17 games with the Canadiens last season – Bourque is convincing people he can return to his form of old.

"I feel like I want to prove myself, prove that I'm a good player," Bourque said. "I never doubted myself. I had a tough time when I came over from Calgary, but over the summer I just wanted to focus on having a good season and making a difference on this team."

David Desharnais also scored twice, Lars Eller had a goal and two assists and Brendan Gallagher added a goal for the Canadiens (5-2-0), who welcomed defenseman P.K. Subban back into the lineup after he missed training camp and the first six games of the season in a contract dispute.

"When you're playing your first game and the team has a great start, it's sort of a relief and it's easier to handle the puck and do all that stuff," said Subban, who picked up his first point of the season assisting on Desharnais' second goal. "So I'm just happy with the win here today."

The Sabres were coming off a thrilling 7-4 win in Boston on Thursday, but none of that momentum appeared to make its way past the Canadian border and into Montreal.

"I think we left our heads in Boston," coach Lindy Ruff said.

The scorching-hot Thomas Vanek scored a shorthanded goal on a third-period breakaway to snap Carey Price's shutout bid and make it a 5-1 game, but it was far too late for the Sabres (3-4-1) to muster a comeback.

Vanek's goal gave him at least a point in each of the seven games he's played and increased his League-leading total to 16 points.

Sabres goaltender Ryan Miller did not make it to the third period, getting pulled by Ruff at the second intermission after allowing four goals on 21 shots. It was the third straight game Miller has allowed four goals, and his save percentage over that span is .862 while his record is 1-3-1 over his last five starts.

Still, Ruff commended Miller for keeping the score at 1-0 after a first period in which the Sabres were outshot 15-1.

"If Ryan doesn't play the way he did in the first, this could have really gotten out of hand," Ruff said. "It was out of hand as it was, but it could have really gotten out of hand."

Canadiens rookie Alex Galchenyuk had two assists for a third time in his last four games, giving the No. 3 pick in the 2012 NHL Draft a goal and six assists in seven games. Prior to the games Saturday night, that placed Galchenyuk third in rookie scoring behind Tampa Bay's Cory Conacher and St. Louis' Vladimir Tarasenko.

"I definitely put pressure on myself for the things I want to do, but coming into this League as an 18-year-old you don't expect to do [certain] things," Galchenyuk said. "You

just have to stay patient and keep working hard and learn every day. That's what I think I'm doing."

Despite thoroughly dominating the first period, the Canadiens were eight seconds away from entering the first intermission in a scoreless tie. But a perfectly executed set play on the power play allowed Gionta to find Bourque driving the net at 19:52 to give Montreal a 1-0 lead.

The Sabres came out with more life in the second, but it was the Canadiens who took over the game in the period.

Gallagher scored his third of the season when his attempt to complete a give-and-go play with Galchenyuk wound up bouncing in off the stick of Sabres defenseman Christian Ehrhoff and past Miller at 2:03. Desharnais and Eller then scored goals 28 seconds apart at 10:08 and 10:36, with both getting their first goals of the season.

Bourque scored his second of the game at 1:22 of the third off a Plekanec feed that was a near-carbon copy of his first goal, beating Sabres backup Jhonas Enroth on the first shot he faced.

Marcus Foligno grabbed a Raphael Diaz giveaway to send Vanek away of his shorthanded breakaway at 3:01 of the third, but Desharnais got his second on a power play at 12:43 after Eller corralled a rebound of a Subban shot and set him up with an open net.

HAB-IT BREAKER

By Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

February 2, 2013

GAME RECAP

MONTREAL – Rene Bourque and David Desharnais both scored twice and Carey Price made 30 saves as the Montreal Canadiens defeated the Buffalo Sabres 6-1 on Saturday afternoon. The loss drops the Sabres to 3-4-1 on the season, while the Canadiens improve to 5-2-0.

Montreal controlled much of the play in the first period, holding a 15-1 edge in shots. But it took them until the 19:52 mark to get on the board when Bourque tapped in a cross-ice pass from Brian Gionta. They scored three more times in the second period to build a commanding 4-0 lead after 40 minutes. The Canadiens went up 5-0 early in the third before Thomas Vanek broke Price's shutout bid at 3:01 when he was sent in alone by Marcus Foligno and chipped the puck over the sprawled netminder. It was Vanek's seventh goal of the season and league-leading 16th point.

Ryan Miller played the first two periods in goal for Buffalo, and allowed four goals on 21 shots. Jhonas Enroth finished the game off, giving up two goals on 11 shots.

NOTABLE

Andrej Sekera left the game after the first period when he was hit in the foot by an Alexei Emelin shot just 54 seconds into the game. Sekera struggled to the bench, and went to the dressing room briefly, but he returned to play 3:37 of ice time in four additional shifts. Ruff said that Sekera has a bruised foot and will be evaluated further on Sunday... Cody McCormick made his season debut for the Sabres after missing the first seven games with a hand injury... To make room for McCormick, Robyn Regehr was placed on IR before the game. Regehr had missed the previous two games with a lower body injury... Patrick Kaleta (neck), Nathan Gerbe and TJ Brennan were Buffalo's scratches... This was Kaleta's second game missed after being hit from behind against Toronto on Tuesday.

BEHIND THE NUMBERS

With his third period goal, Thomas Vanek has points in all seven games he's played in... Dating back to last season, Vanek has 27 points (9+18) in his last 17 games... Marcus Foligno's assist on Vanek's goal extends his point streak to four games (1+4)... This was Buffalo's first regulation loss to Montreal since November 27, 2010; snapping a nine-game unbeaten streak (8-0-1) against the Habs... Jason Pominville, Mikhail Grigorenko, Christian Ehrhoff and Mike Weber all saw their two-game point streaks come to end today... Buffalo recorded just one shot in the first period, their lowest total in a regulation period since Oct. 7, 2011 vs. Anaheim (0, 3rd period)... The Sabres are 1-2-0 in afternoon games... Buffalo allowed three goals in the second period, and have now been outscored 15-8 in the second period this season... Christian Ehrhoff had 25:41 of ice time, and is the only Sabres defenseman to play at least 20+ minutes in all eight games... This was Buffalo's first loss against a Northeast Division opponent (2-1-1) this

season... First of five meetings between the Sabres and Canadiens this season; 254th game all-time... The Sabres are 116-101-37 against the Canadiens; 48-67-13 on the road.

BUFFALO'S RECORD WHEN...

- * Trailing after the first period: 0-1-0
- * Opponent scores first: 0-2-1
- * Trailing after the second period: 0-3-1
- * Outshot by the opposition: 2-4-0

BUFFALO'S REAL-TIME STATS LEADERS

Time on Ice: Christian Ehrhoff, 25:41
Shots: Vanek/Pominville/Hodgson, 4
Blocked Shots: Jordan Leopold, 3
Faceoff Wins: Cody Hodgson, 13
Total Faceoffs: Hodgson, 21 (13-8)
Hits: Mike Weber, 7

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Sabres were held scoreless on six power plays, dropping their season average to 19.4% (6/31). After going six-for-six over the past two games, Buffalo killed off six of eight Montreal man advantage opportunities, and are now at 81.1% (30/37) on the year.

UP NEXT

- * Sunday vs. Florida, 3 p.m.
- * Tuesday @ Ottawa, 7:30 p.m.
- * Thursday vs. Montreal, 7 p.m.

Habs Have Their Own Prized Young Prospect

By Howard Simon

WGR 550

February 2, 2013

While the Buffalo Sabres were trying to figure out whether or not to keep Mikhail Grigorenko on the roster or send him back to juniors, the Montreal Canadiens were going through the same process with their first round pick from last June's draft.

Like the Sabres, the Canadiens decided to keep their prized prospect on the roster. So far, so good for 18 year old Alex Galchenyuk.

Galchenyuk was taken with the third overall pick and was considered, along with Girgorenko, one of the prized forwards in the draft class. He played junior hockey for the Sarnia Sting of the Ontario Hockey League. His debut campaign in 2010-2011 was quite impressive. Playing with 2012 number one pick Nail Yakupov, Glachenyuk scored 31 goals and added 52 assists in 68 games. Galchenyuk, who is of Russian descent but was actually born in Milwaukee, saw action in only two games last season due to a major knee injury.

He was back in Sarnia when the lockout kicked in where his 61 points in 33 games proved that not only was he fully recovered from the injury, but that there wasn't much else for him to accomplish at the junior level. Like Grigorenko, Galchenyuk got a chance to play on the international stage as he competed for the gold medal winning USA team at the World Junior Championships.

He has provided quite a spark for the Canadiens who are off to a 4-2 start. Galchenyuk has one goal and four assists and is averaging just under 12 and a half minutes of ice time. He's been on a line with fellow rookie Brendan Gallagher and off season acquisition Brandon Prust. Glachenyuk's five points is tied for the most among Canadiens forwards.

Gallagher is quite a story himself, going from a walk on at age 16 for the Vancouver Giants of the Western Hockey League to being selected by Montreal in the fifth round of the 2010 draft and now to the NHL where he has two goals and four points in the Habs six games.

Habs explode for six goals against Sabres

By Brenda Branswell

The Gazette

February 2, 2013

MONTREAL — David Desharnais and Rene Bourque each scored two goals to propel the Canadiens to a decisive 6-1 victory Saturday afternoon over division rivals the Buffalo Sabres.

The Sabres spoiled goaltender Carey Price's shutout bid when Thomas Vanek scored a short-handed goal in the third period. Price tried to smother the puck, but it hit his arm and bounced over him into the net.

Vanek went into the game leading the league in points.

The game also marked the return of P.K. Subban, the Canadiens' star defenceman who led the team in ice time last season, but remained unsigned at the start of this shortened season. The Canadiens signed him to a two-year deal on Monday.

Subban was greeted with cheers and some chants of "P.K.!" "They rained down again in the third period when Subban assisted on a power-play goal by Desharnais that put the Canadiens up 6-1. It was Desharnais' second goal of the game. Forward Lars Eller also got an assist on the play.

The Sabres replaced goaltender Ryan Miller with Jhonas Enroth at the start of the third period.

The Canadiens pulled ahead 4-0 in the second period on back-to-back goals by Desharnais and Eller, both of whom have struggled so far this season.

Desharnais fired a shot past Miller from Eller at 10:08 of the second period. As Desharnais' first goal of the season was being announced, it was Eller's turn, sliding the puck through Miller's legs. Alex Galchenyuk and Tomas Kaberle assisted on the play.

The Canadiens' two rookies continue to shine on the ice to the delight of the Bell Centre crowd. Brendan Gallagher scored at 2:03 of the second period on a 2-on-1 with Galchenyuk, the Canadiens first-round draft pick last June. Gallagher's pass to Galchenyuk hit Sabres defenceman Christian Ehrhoff's stick and went past Miller. It was Gallagher's third goal of the season. Galchenyuk collected two assists in the game.

The Canadiens got on the scoreboard in the dying seconds of the first period on the power play when Gionta raced after the puck in the Sabres' end of the ice and shot toward the net, where Bourque was camped out. Bourque was given credit for the goal, his second of the season.

Bourque had a strong game and drew a penalty on a similar play to set up the power play. He also scored in the third period.

The Canadiens outshot the Sabres 15-1 in the first period. The Sabres' lone shot by Jason Pominville only came at 10:38.

Canadiens forward Ryan White, who took three penalties in the team's 5-1 loss to the Ottawa Senators on Wednesday, was a healthy scratch, as was defenceman Yannick Weber.

Max Pacioretty has been cleared for practice after undergoing an emergency appendectomy on Jan. 26. But he is still on the injured reserve list and did not play Saturday.

The Canadiens' home record last season was the second-worst in the Eastern Conference after the New York Islanders. The Canadiens have won four of five games at the Bell Centre so far this season.

It's the first of five matchups this season between the division rivals. The Sabres won all but one of their six games last season against the Canadiens.

The Canadiens play back-to-back afternoon games this weekend. Next up at the Bell Centre is the Ottawa Senators on Sunday at 2 p.m. at the Bell Centre.

Rene Bourque, David Desharnais each score 2 as Habs rip Sabres

Associated Press
February 2, 2013

MONTREAL -- A rough start to the season got a bit smoother for Lars Eller and David Desharnais on Saturday.

Eller had a goal and two assists and Desharnais scored a pair to lead the Montreal Canadiens to a 6-1 win over the Buffalo Sabres.

"We've been struggling a bit the last couple of games so I think it was relief for Davey, too, to see the puck go in twice," said Eller of his and Desharnais' first goals of the season, just 28 seconds apart in the second period. "It's a great feeling to score and a great feeling to win."

After suiting up for the Canadiens' season opener, Eller was a healthy scratch the next two games. He returned to the lineup last Sunday, inserted on the wing with Desharnais and Erik Cole, with Max Pacioretty sidelined following an appendectomy a day earlier.

Desharnais, meanwhile, had struggled to find his breakout form from a season ago, a campaign that saw him pile up 60 points in 81 games.

"I've got to be better, I want to be better," he said. "There's nobody else that's going to feel sorry for me so I've just got to be better and I was tonight. I just want to keep going."

Rene Bourque's pair and a goal from rookie Brendan Gallagher completed the scoring for Montreal (5-2-0), which is averaging 4.4 goals in its five wins.

Carey Price made 30 saves for the Canadiens for his fifth win of the season.

The game marked the season debut for Montreal defenseman P.K. Subban, who signed a new contract Monday after sitting out the team's first four games while negotiations went on.

"When you're playing your first game and the team has a great start it's sort of a relief," said Subban, who picked up his first point with an assist on Desharnais' second goal. "I'm just happy with the win here today."

Subban admitted he didn't "feel too great" in his return, recognizing his timing was off. Canadiens coach Michel Therrien planned to ease the blue-liner into the lineup after his long layoff, dressing seven on the back end.

Subban finished the game with 18:01 of ice time, fourth among Montreal's defensemen.

"It's important for us to manage his return and his ice time. Unfortunately there aren't a lot of practices available like the others had," Therrien said. "We felt the best way to get him back in was to dress seven defensemen."

"He did very well in his first game."

After a big win in a wild game against the Boston Bruins on Thursday, the Sabres (3-4-1) lost for the fifth time in their last six games. Goaltender Ryan Miller made 17 saves over two periods before being replaced in the third by backup Jhonas Enroth.

"We didn't have our `A' game right off the bat. We started in the second but it was too late," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said. "It's a collective effort. You can't point fingers at anybody."

Bourque injected some life into what had been an uneventful first period with Montreal's 10th power-play goal of the season. Andrei Markov's stretch pass -- tipped along the way by Tomas Plekanec -- found Brian Gionta along the right boards. Gionta waited before passing it on to Bourque, who drove to the net for his second of the season.

Montreal took a 2-0 lead for the fifth time in its seven games early in the second. Gallagher and fellow rookie Alex Galchenyuk completed a nifty 2-on-1 that Gallagher capped with his third of the season as the puck went in off Sabres defenseman Christian Ehrhoff at 2:03.

Desharnais finally got his first at 10:08. Just seconds after Sabres forward Tyler Ennis hit the crossbar, the diminutive Canadiens center took a pass from Eller in the high slot and fired a shot past Miller.

Eller added to Buffalo's misery with his first goal of the season just 28 seconds later.

Plekanec set up Bourque's second goal of the game at 1:22 of the third. The Czech center showed patience on a 2-on-1, waiting out Buffalo defenseman Mike Weber's attempt to block the pass before easily placing it on Bourque's stick.

Thomas Vanek broke Price's shutout bid with a short-handed goal at 3:01.

Desharnais picked up his second of the season on the power play at 12:43.

Game notes

D Yannick Weber and F Ryan White were scratches for the Canadiens, who went with 11 forwards and seven defensemen. ... Therrien acknowledged "there's a chance" that Pacioretty, who practiced with his teammates on Friday, could be back in the lineup on Sunday. ... Buffalo's one shot in the first was its fewest in a regulation period since Oct. 7, 2011, against Anaheim when the Sabres had none in the third. ... Montreal last allowed one shot in a period Oct. 13, 2011, against Calgary.

Don't worry, Boston Bruins have might without the fight

By Bud Barth

Telegram & Gazette

February 2, 2013

The reaction was as if the Bruins had been clipped of their manhood and banished to live the rest of their days in shame.

Let's reel it in for a second. The Bruins lost a fight on Thursday night, and then they lost a game, but one had nothing to do with the other.

To all those goobers who think the sky is falling just because the Bruins failed to retaliate for John Scott's beatdown of Shawn Thornton, maybe you'd be better off watching WWE wrestling than NHL hockey.

There's nothing better in hockey than a good fight, but the last time we checked, they didn't award points in the standings for a good right cross or a knockdown.

Thornton got his clock cleaned by a guy six inches taller and at least 63 pounds heavier when Thursday's game with Buffalo was less than three minutes old.

Was the Bruins' spirit crushed? No. They responded by coming back from a 1-0 deficit to take a 3-1 lead before their defense took a holiday and left goalie Tuukka Rask hung out to dry.

The Sabres' comeback had nothing to do with physical toughness or lack of the same by the Bruins. Some people think they should have sent Milan Lucic or Zdeno Chara out for revenge.

Not only would that have served no good purpose, but what if Lucic or Chara breaks a hand and is out for six weeks? With this condensed schedule, that's 24 games — half of the 48-game season.

You don't want to lose anyone for that long, but especially not one of your top forwards or your best defenseman.

"We like to consider ourselves 'team tough,' " coach Claude Julien said after Friday's practice when asked who would fill Thornton's role while he sits out seven to 10 days with a concussion. "We stick up for each other. It's not about one guy — it's about our whole team."

Should the Bruins have jumped the Sabres when Buffalo coach Lindy Ruff called a rubbing-salt-in-the-wounds timeout with 14 seconds left after scoring to take a 7-4 lead? If Ruff had been on the ice, by all means. Otherwise, what's the point?

It's too late for a fight to turn the game around. The teams play again in Buffalo a week from today and again five days after that. If there's revenge to be had, that's the time.

But knowing the Bruins and their coach, they'll be more concerned about the points at stake, and not about upholding their fans' juvenile ideas about pride and manhood.

"This isn't about revenge," Julien said. "It's two tough guys going at it. When we win our battles (aka fights), I don't think other teams send a guy for revenge. It's two big, tough guys going at each other and it just happened. ... This was a fair, one-on-one fight that got decided by the other guy getting the upper hand.

"We still played a solid game (after that), we still had a lead. If anything else, it was more our play that was disappointing."

Thornton was a willing participant, maybe even the instigator. He lost, something that rarely happens, but get over it.

"It's not about toughness, it's about playing hockey," Julien said. "We just go out and play and do what we have to do to win hockey games. It's pretty simple."

Buffalo's timeout was "disrespectful," as Brad Marchand called it, and cheap tactic. Julien looked steamed on the bench after the move, but he soft-pedaled it later.

The word out of Buffalo is that Ruff thought Julien had put Lane MacDermid, a noted pugilist, on the ice against No. 1 star Thomas Vanek in the final seconds to do damage, so he called time out to change lines and put Scott in.

"Anybody who knows me," Julien said, "knows better than that. I don't do that in the last seconds. That isn't my style, nor is it wise to do those kind of things. ...

"I don't think I'm a coach that will send a guy that can fight against the other team's top player and beat him up with (14) seconds left. That certainly wan't going to happen."

Khudobin wants to stay

Backup goalie Anton Khudobin, who played in Russia's KHL during the lockout, was quoted there as saying he might prefer Russia over the NHL next season, but now he's backtracking on that statement. This is the final year of his Bruins contract paying him \$800,000.

"I hope I'm going to stay here as long as I can, but you know, it's hockey," Khudobin said after Friday's practice. "I would love to stay here."

The issue, of course, is money. Tim Thomas may or may not be back next season for the final year of his contract, and the Bruins will have to re-sign Rask after this season. If those things happen, there'll be no room for Khudobin, which he knows. If Thomas balks at playing in Boston, then the B's might want to keep Khudobin, depending on his performance this season.

The 26-year-old posted a 5-3 win over Carolina in his only start so far, making 29 saves. In eight career NHL appearances, he is 6-1-0 with a 1.59 goals-against average and .953 save percentage with one shutout.

Stat check

The Bruins, as of Saturday, were the top-ranked faceoff team in the league at 60.1 percent, with San Jose second and Detroit third. Rich Peverley (67.3 percent) and Patrice Bergeron (65.9) rank third and fourth in the NHL with Chris Kelly (60.0) tied for ninth. David Krejci, at 56.6 percent, was also in the top 25.

After killing off their first 24 penalties, the Bruins rank third in the league in PK at 93.6 percent (29 for 31). Chicago and the Islanders are 1-2.

The power play, of course, is a different story. At 10.7 percent (3 for 28), Boston is better than only three teams in power-play production — Carolina, Colorado and the L.A. Kings. Yet even that anemic performance gives the Bruins a special-teams edge of plus-1, since they've scored more power-play goals (three) than they've given up (two).

Though he had just one goal as of Saturday, Tyler Seguin led the Bruins with a plus-5 rating. Lucic was tied for sixth in the NHL with 27 hits, while Boston as a team was fifth.

Marchand was tied for fifth in shooting percentage with five goals on 10 shots (50 percent).

Still waiting for proper Bruins' response

By Joe Haggerty

CSNNE.com

February 1, 2013

This isn't about Shawn Thornton.

This isn't about John Scott.

It's not even about Zdeno Chara's willingness to step up when one of the true fellow giants in the NHL decided to inflict some damage on the Boston Bruins.

The 7-4 loss to the Buffalo Sabres on Thursday night was about a divisional rival and hated enemy waltzing into the TD Garden and basically announcing that they were going to set the tone for the series this year.

Thornton did his job and stepped up to the gusty task that he takes full pride in: protecting his B's teammates from getting the same kind of blood sport treatment that he accepts and doles out as a trained fighter.

Thornton is a player that has had every single of his teammates' backs over the last six years as a member of the Black and Gold, and even before that while working his way up through the Chicago and Anaheim organizations.

So Thornton took it upon himself to tussle with 6-foot-8, 270-pound Scott – at least six inches taller and 50 pounds heavier on the scale than Boston's tough guy – and got pounded down to the ice with a right handed punch to the side of the head and a finishing upper-cut blast.

“He's a guy who does everything for his teammates and his team, done [it] very well. Unfortunately there's always a risk in that job,” said Claude Julien. “He took on a pretty big man, as we all know – 6-foot-8 and around 280 pounds. He handled himself as best as he could, but those things are going to happen.

“At the end of the day, he still was willing to do it for his team. Not only do we lose a guy [to a concussion] that does it well, but he's a good teammate and he's great in the dressing room. Hopefully we get him back soon.”

It was shocking to watch because Thornton normally wins every one of his fights, but this was like watching the hockey version of a hammer and nail play out on the Garden ice. There's a very good chance that the Bruins enforcer knew this is the way it was going to go if Scott got the upper hand early, and it didn't turn into a grappling match as Thornton's fight with the equally massive Derek Boogaard turned out a few seasons earlier.

The upper-cut caused the B's enforcer's legs to buckle on his way down to the ice and had him inquisitively asking arena officials if he'd just been in a fight when he was finally directed to the Bruins penalty box.

It's a difficult way to make a living, but it's the one Thornton has chosen where he's risen to the top ranks of his profession while winning a pair of Stanley Cups. But there are times when even the mighty fall down and need a little help from their friends as they stagger back to their feet. Sometimes a player like Thornton needs other Bruins players to have his back as much as he's got theirs, and it seems that was a missed opportunity in the aftermath of the Scott/Thornton tilt.

It might not have changed the outcome of a game they lost to a pumped Sabres bunch, and it might have even put the 6-foot-9 Chara in harm's way against a player every bit as mammoth as him in Scott. But there's also a point, at least in this hockey writer's opinion, where Chara needs to step in as the team captain and the most feared player in the league and tell Thornton that his back is covered.

There are times when the fear of injury or the potential downside of spending a five-minute major in the penalty box isn't the point. There comes a time when it's about sending a message about the way the Bruins do business, and making an example of a team that's looking to punk them.

That's what the Sabres arrived in Boston looking to do, and that's the mission they accomplished.

Instead, Thornton was downed early in the first period, and Buffalo felt they had a green light to take liberties with the Bruins over the course of 60 very uncharacteristic minutes for the Black and Gold.

Chara looked distracted in one of the worst games of his NHL career, and finished with a minus-3, zero hits and turnovers made all over the ice. For the NHL's most intimidating player in a hated rivalry game, it appeared almost as if he spent the rest of the game running through his mind what he "should have done" rather than doing nothing at all.

When asked by CSNNE.com whether he'd considered going after Scott once he'd bested Thornton, Chara didn't really address the question while leaving the door open for what could be done Feb. 10 in Buffalo.

"Right now we're getting (ready) for the next game, which is Toronto," said Chara. "Those questions [about John Scott] you guys should save for when we play [Buffalo]."

Scott hopped out on another shift in the first period after the decisive win and elbowed Rich Peverley in the head right in front of the Bruins bench for good measure.

Scott was whistled for the elbowing infraction, but it was pretty clear the 6-foot-8 monster felt free to do whatever he wanted on the ice after his fists of fury in the third period. Daniel Paille and Patrice Bergeron both got dinged up in the hard-fought defeat,

and now Paille is out as well after catching a high-stick late in the third period. Drew Stafford felt free to throw an elbow at the head of 19-year-old rookie Dougie Hamilton that forced the youngster off the ice for a few minutes.

But luckily there was no permanent harm done, and the promising young defenseman was able to joke about it the next day after finishing out Thursday's game.

The final punch to the B's gut was the Lindy Ruff timeout with 13.6 seconds left after he took Lane MacDermid's presence on the ice as a message that the Bruins were headhunting. Never mind that "third period message-sending" has never been a trait of a Claude Julien-coached team, or that it's basically been purged from the league because of automatic suspensions and hefty fines when it comes in the last few minutes of the third period.

It was instead about Ruff – and by extension his Sabres players – giving one last middle finger to the Bruins players and their coaching staff before getting back on a plane to Buffalo with a sense they accomplished their mission.

The message was clear from the Sabres after the game was over and the Bruins had been beaten: they came into Boston intent on making a point to the Bruins after the Milan Lucic/Ryan Miller incident created some tension within the Buffalo dressing room and ostensibly sidetracked their entire season.

Scott admitted as much after the game.

"Obviously going into this game there was a lot of hype around what happened last year [with Miller and Lucic]," said Scott. "So I kind of just wanted to set the tone.

"Regardless of the outcome I just want to be there for my teammates and let them know I'm here to fight, I've got your back...last year's not going to happen like this year."

As previously stated, this isn't about one lost fight between two tough guys and the relative fairness of a massive human being throwing fists with a merely extra-large human being. Just as the Lucic/Miller collision was about much more than a forward skating into a goaltender last season for the Sabres, Buffalo's fulfilled intentions of belting the Bruins straight across the face in their own barn Thursday night takes on bigger meaning for both hockey clubs.

Nobody is questioning the heart or toughness of a Bruins nucleus that memorably won a Stanley Cup two years ago, and the hope is that this is simply a blip on the radar screen of a crazy 48-game regular season.

But now everyone, including Shawn Thornton at home in Charlestown recovering from a dreaded concussion, waits to see when the Bruins will actually respond to Thursday in a way that's consistent with putting on the Spoked 'B' Bruins sweater.