



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

Tuesday, March 12, 2013

Rangers-Sabres Preview

By Tom Castro
Associated Press
March 12, 2013

The New York Rangers capped a very busy stretch with one of their most complete efforts of the season their last time out. They'll look to continue their surge by extending their recent success against the struggling Buffalo Sabres on Tuesday night.

The Rangers (13-9-2) rebounded from having a four-game winning streak snapped by defeating Washington 4-1 on Sunday afternoon. Four players scored and backup Martin Biron made 28 saves for New York, which closed a stretch of three games in four days that was capped by the early start time against the Capitals.

New York went 4-1-0 while playing five games in eight days, and is 5-1-0 since a four-game skid.

"I think we're beginning to sort ourselves out as far as how we have to play and doing it a little bit more consistently," said coach John Tortorella, whose team opened a season-high four-game road trip.

The Rangers are in the midst of their best stretch of the season on the power play after struggling for most of 2013. New York, still toward the bottom of the NHL at 15.9 percent, has gone 6 for 19 in the past six contests.

The Rangers have also been better defensively, giving up 10 goals in the 5-1-0 stretch after allowing 13 during the four-game losing streak.

"We just continue to try to put together 60-minute efforts and try and be effective in our D-zone," defenseman Ryan McDonagh said.

One of the victories during this surge came against Buffalo, 3-2 in a shootout at home March 3 that was New York's fourth win in five meetings. The Rangers have taken the past two road matchups with the Sabres.

That loss opened an 0-2-2 trip for Buffalo (9-14-3), with each defeat coming by one goal. The Sabres closed the road stretch by losing 3-2 to Philadelphia on Sunday, getting outshot 12-4 in the opening 20 minutes and falling behind 2-0 before Brian Flynn cut the deficit to one before the period ended.

"We've got to be ready to go," coach Ron Rolston said. "We didn't have enough urgency or desperation off the start. We kind of got a little back as the game went on."

Buffalo has not led in the first period of the last five games and has been outshot in that period in each by a total of 55-26.

"We knew they were going to come out hard ... that's one thing we stressed before the game, and then we came and we just didn't match it," said Flynn, who recorded his second career goal by scoring for the second straight game.

" ... You have to come and compete every night for 60 minutes to win hockey games, and we were 20 minutes short there in the first period."

Center Tyler Ennis departed in the first after he was taken out by Flyers forward Wayne Simmonds. His status for this game is uncertain.

New York got a goal Sunday from center Brad Richards, who played in his second straight game after missing two following a hit from behind by the Sabres' Patrick Kaleta in the last meeting. Kaleta won't play in the rematch as he'll serve the fourth game of a five-game suspension for the hit.

Rangers forward Rick Nash had two assists against Washington and has seven goals and nine assists during a career-best 10-game point streak. He had a goal and an assist March 3.

Buffalo forward Ville Leino could play Tuesday after missing the first 26 games with a hip injury.

Penalties keeping Sabres boxed in

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

March 12, 2013

The Sabres wanted to be tough. They're learning the hard way that lack of discipline does not equal toughness.

Buffalo carries a four-game winless streak into tonight's home game against the New York Rangers. The Sabres' propensity for penalties started the 0-2-2 slide and was a major factor in three of the four setbacks.

"It's losing us games," defenseman Christian Ehrhoff said Monday in First Niagara Center.

The Sabres had won three in a row and held a third-period lead over the Rangers on Feb. 3 when they started thinking inside the box. Andrej Sekera departed for hooking and Patrick Kaleta followed with a major penalty and five-game suspension for boarding New York's Brad Richards. New York scored twice on the power play and earned a 3-2 shootout victory.

Buffalo had New Jersey in a 2-0 hole with 7:30 to play Thursday when the referees whistled Ehrhoff for hooking. The Devils scored on the power play and rode the momentum to a 3-2 shootout win.

Philadelphia scored two power-play goals Sunday, including one just 4:31 in, en route to a 3-2 victory.

"With the penalties being called the way they are, it's a difference-maker," Sabres left wing Thomas Vanek said. "Some are questionable, but at the end of the day, penalties are penalties. We're not very good at that right now. We're taking too many."

The stats back up Vanek:

- The Sabres have taken 127 minor penalties, the second most in the NHL behind the Flyers' 128.
- Buffalo averages 15.3 penalty minutes per game, the league's third-highest total.
- The Sabres have the second-most misconducts (five) and are tied for seventh in majors (16).

"There's obviously something going on there," said defenseman Tyler Myers, whose 10 minors rank second on the team behind Steve Ott's 11. "We're taking too many penalties regardless if they're deserved or not. You just have to work that much harder to get yourself in a position you need to be to make a solid defensive play instead of maybe working your stick a little much and reaching. It just comes down to battle."

The Sabres (9-14-3) would be in better shape if they could kill the infractions. They've allowed 23 power-play goals, tied for the most in the league with Washington and Florida. The penalty-kill unit ranks 19th at 81.7 percent.

"We've got to be better," said Ehrhoff, who is tied with Vanek for third on the Sabres with nine minors. "Some of those penalties have definitely been undisciplined, and we can't have those. I can't control what's being called against us or for us. We just have to live with it and do the best on our part that we don't give the refs an opportunity to call penalties on us."

Staying out of the box would be a good idea against the Rangers. Although New York's power play ranks just 23rd at 15.8 percent, it has connected in five of the last six games and is firing at 31.6 percent during the run.

More enviable than the Rangers' power play is their eighth-place spot in the standings. They hold the final playoff position in the Eastern Conference and are seven points ahead of the Sabres with two fewer games played.

"We're not happy with 14th out of 15 places," Ott said. "It's atrocious. We know that."

With only 22 games left, they're running out of time to do anything about it.

"With the amount of games left, we know we have to win most of them to even have a chance for the eight spot," Vanek said. "We should be in the playoffs without a doubt, and we're not. We're on the outside looking in again. I don't think we're too far off, but we've said that before."

"Unless we fix our special teams here soon, it's going to be a long last seven weeks."

Sabres notebook: Rolston faces decisions on Leino, Leopold

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

March 12, 2013

Tyler Ennis is probably out. It remains to be seen whether Ville Leino and Jordan Leopold will be in.

Ennis, who needed stitches Sunday night after getting hit headfirst into the boards, skipped the Buffalo Sabres' practice Monday. Interim coach Ron Rolston said Ennis does not have a concussion and is day-to-day.

"He's a little dinged up," Rolston said.

Ennis was hit from behind by Philadelphia's Wayne Simmonds after stopping along the boards while carrying the puck. Though the Sabres felt it was boarding, there was no penalty.

"It was a tough play," Rolston said. "I thought his back was turned, but it's not the way they saw it. It's what they see and what they think they see. They made the call on it."

Rolston will need to make the call on Leino and Leopold. Both say they are ready to play.

Leino has been sidelined all season with a hip injury. He practiced as part of a four-man forward line with Jochen Hecht and Ennis' wingers, Steve Ott and Nathan Gerbe.

"I feel really good, so we'll see," said Leino, who had hoped to debut in Philadelphia. "It would have been good extra momentum to play against an old team and a fun rink to play, but we're looking at this day now."

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The Sabres activated Leopold from injured reserve before facing the Flyers, but Rolston decided to keep the defenseman on the sidelines for the 10th straight game.

"I think they were waiting to see what the lineup was going to be, if a couple other guys were healthy or not," Leopold said. "Whatever. It was another day of rest for the injury, so I'll take it. I'm ready when called upon."

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Kevin Porter and Brian Flynn may have traveled from the minor leagues to the Sabres' power play. The forwards received extensive work with the second unit during practice, joining right wing Drew Stafford and defensemen Tyler Myers and Leopold.

The first group featured Cody Hodgson, Thomas Vanek and Steve Ott up front, with Jason Pominville and Christian Ehrhoff at the point.

“We had some adjustments,” Rolston said of the league’s last-place unit. “It’s a work in progress.”

While Stafford may get special teams minutes, it appears he’s still stuck in a fourth-line role. The right winger, who is in the second season of a four-year, \$16 million contract, practiced alongside rookie center Mikhail Grigorenko and enforcer John Scott.

“He’s working on it,” Rolston said of Stafford returning to a scoring line. “We need him to be there, especially with his body, big body, and his ability. He’s working on it, and he understands what he has to do to be back in that position.

“But we want to make sure guys are earning those opportunities.”

Rolston scratched Grigorenko on Sunday after using him in seven straight. The coach was disappointed in Grigorenko’s play Thursday in New Jersey.

“The three games before that, we really saw some good growth in his game,” Rolston said. “He took a step back for us, but now there’s more opportunity to keep moving.”

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The Sabres conducted two shootout relays at the end of practice. Scott scored the winning goal in both.

“I don’t usually get a chance like that, but it’s always fun to score,” said the forward, who still doubts he’d get the shootout call during a game. “I maybe jumped up a couple of spots in the lineup, but hopefully it doesn’t get that far ever.”

Leino looking for chance to show his worth to Sabres

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 12, 2013

BUFFALO – Last season, in the first year of a six-year, \$27 million contract, Ville Leino bombed. For a cool \$6 million, the Sabres received eight goals and 25 points in 71 games, paying out \$240,000 a point.

The Sabres initially tried converting Leino into a center again, an experiment that failed miserably. Leino was back on the wing after just a few weeks, generating little as a third- or fourth-liner.

Before the season ended, some observers had already started calling Leino the biggest free agent bust ever.

So much for the Sabres' belief Leino could grow into a top pivot following a short-but-strong run in Philadelphia.

These days, the likable Leino's close to returning from a hip injury that has sidelined him the first 26 games this season. The 29-year-old will be a game-time decision for tonight's tilt against the New York Rangers inside the First Niagara Center, interim Sabres coach Ron Rolston said Monday.

Some of the same fans who wanted to run Leino out of town are intrigued by Leino's possible return, hoping he can recapture his old form and help jumpstart the 14th-place Sabres, losers of four straight (0-2-2).

"It's not like one man is going to change everything," Leino said after practicing Monday. "We all know that."

But he could certainly help. Leino still has a strong NHL track record, having scored 21 points during a sizzling 19-game playoff run in 2010 and 18 goals and 51 points two years ago.

So what happened last season?

"Well, I wasn't really having the chance that I wanted to," Leino said. "I come here with a big deal, and I don't have a chance to show it. I played a lot of third-line and even fourth-line minutes, no power play. I mean, that takes a lot away from my game."

"I'm always used to be playing (the) power play and big minutes. Obviously, there's a lot less opportunity and good feeling and a chance to score. You're not able to do that and get those chances."

Clearly, Leino didn't mesh well under former coach Lindy Ruff. Like most coaches, Ruff wanted players to get to the net and shoot. Leino, a superb puck carrier, did little of either.

An east-west player got stuck in a north-south game.

But having Rolston in charge now doesn't mean things will automatically change.

"Everything has to be earned," Leino said.

There's a theory Leino didn't quite fit on the ice or off it last season. The Finn arrived from a loser (and more successful) dressing room in Philadelphia, and when the Sabres began having some success last year, he said he found them "way too serious" during their struggles.

On Feb. 23, two days after Ruff was fired, Leino said the Sabres had to "have higher demands, higher priorities in the games," adding, "It's not always a happy family. You got to have some controversy, some guys pushing each other. It's not all smiles and happy and be nice."

Leino hasn't even played a game since April 7.

"I don't know if it's ... fitting, whatever it is," Leino said. "I'm not sure. I don't think that way. Sometimes I might speak my mind too much. I think it should be what you show on the ice, how you work with the team on the ice. That's how you show. That's (how) they see you compete."

Leino, who went down suddenly Jan. 18, two days before the season opener, sounds hopeful last season will become an anomaly.

Playing center, even for a fraction of the campaign, was different and difficult.

"I wasn't in my comfort zone as much, or a zone where I feel good, where I play the best, you know?" said Leino, who played center early in his European career and wanted to try it again. "I think that was the issues, too."

By the end of 2011-12, Leino found some chemistry and comfort on the left beside Derek Roy and Jason Pominville.

"I didn't have too many points, but we had a lot of chances," Leino said. "We played good every game. The team was really enthused."

Leino practiced beside Jochen Hecht and Nathan Gerbe on Monday. The Finn spent training camp with rookie center Mikhail Grigorenko and Steve Ott.

Rolston could put Grigorenko and Leino together again. The coach wants to surround Grigorenko with veterans.

Following seven straight appearances, Grigorenko was scratched for the fifth time this season in Sunday's 3-2 loss in Philadelphia.

"The three games before (Sunday) we really saw some growth in his game," Rolston said. "The Devils game (Thursday) we would've liked him to be better than he was, and he took a step back for us."

Sabres' Ennis 'dinged up' from Simmonds hit, not concussed

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 12, 2013

BUFFALO – Tyler Ennis, whose face was crunched into the boards by Wayne Simmonds 15:48 into the Sabres' 3-2 loss Sunday in Philadelphia, missed practice Monday and is day-to-day, interim coach Ron Rolston said.

“He’s a little dinged up,” Rolston said after the Sabres prepared for tonight’s contest against the New York Rangers inside the First Niagara Center.

Ennis, who left the game, didn’t suffer a concussion, Rolston said. The slick center received some stitches on his forehead.

What about the hit? Simmonds nailed Ennis from behind but wasn’t penalized.

“It was a tough play,” Rolston said. “He was going, and I thought his back was turned. That’s not the way they saw it.”

Sabres defenseman Mike Weber fought Simmonds seconds later.

Several candidates could replace Ennis on the second line, Rolston said. Jochen Hecht practiced there Monday.

In other news, Rolston said defenseman Jordan Leopold will be a game-time decision. The 32-year-old has healed from what was possibly a hand injury. He skated during the warm-up Sunday and was expecting to play.

Instead, Leopold, a healthy scratch before getting hurt, sat for the 10th straight game.

“I just didn’t get the nod,” Leopold said. “It was one of those things. I was ready to play. If asked to play, I was ready.”

Was he upset?

“No, I understand,” Leopold said. “I was disappointed I didn’t have the opportunity. Today’s a new day. Tomorrow’s a new day. I’ll look to get back in the lineup.”

Andrej Sekera’s return possibly pushed Leopold out. With Leopold healthy, the Sabres sent defenseman Adam Pardy back to Rochester on Sunday.

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Inquiring minds want to know why tough guy John Scott received a 10-minute misconduct Sunday.

“I don’t know,” Scott said. “I didn’t even say anything to the refs. He just came over and teed me up. I think he was worried about the game getting out of hand because I think he blew a call on (Ennis). ... Then he gave Webby the instigator when Simmonds dropped his gloves first. ... I was the scapegoat.”

Scott, who has one NHL goal in 166 games, scored twice during a shootout competition Monday, including the practice-ending clincher for the “PK team.”

“It happens every once in a while,” Scott said. “You get a hot stick. It’s just always fun to score.”

Sabres Ennis missed practice

WGR 550

March 11, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Tyler Ennis was not at practice on Monday. Ron Rolston said he got stitches in the forehead, but does not have a concussion. Rolston said, "He's day to day right now. He's a little dinged up so he was off today and we'll see how he's doing tomorrow."

As far as the hit by the Flyers Wayne Simmonds which was not penalized, Rolston said, "It was a tough play. He was going and I thought his back was turned, but it's not the way they saw it. It's what they see and what they think they see and they make the call on it."

Four players were working on Ennis' line, Steve Ott, Nathan Gerbe, Jochen Hecht and Ville Leino. Both Leino and Jordan Leopold have a chance to play Tuesday. Rolston said, "Ville will be a game time decision, him and Leo." Both Leopold and Rolston spoke on Sunday's pregame show like Leopold would face the Flyers. Rolston said, "He's a coach's decision, it was a possibility for him to go in last night." Leopold was perplexed talking about it because it appeared he'd play and he ended up not being in the lineup. Leopold said, "We'll take it one day at a time. The prospect looks good, but we'll see tomorrow." Leopold stressed he had no setback during the day and he was ready to play. He added, "They activated me so I'm available."

Leino hasn't played all season and Leopold has missed 10 games. Rolston said, "He's been out for a while and that's really the next phase for him and Leo is just that transition back in to the team and coming in and helping the team be successful, but also fit in with the team and get that chemistry back."

If Ennis can't play Rolston said they could go with Hecht, Ott, Leino or Grigorenko. The line that I thought would be interesting would be Leino, Grigorenko and Stafford. Rolston did say that would be a possibility.

The team worked on the power play again and the second unit was changed up. It had Stafford, Kevin Porter, Brian Flynn, Leopold and Tyler Myers. Since Leopold was in for T.J. Brennan on the PP, that tells me he likely will play on Tuesday.

SABRES: Does Rolston still believe?

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 12, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Sabres tried to pawn off last year's failure to make the playoffs as injury related. To a point that was true, but anybody could see there was more wrong with this team than just injuries.

It wasn't tough enough and that was addressed, yet here the team sits as the second worst team in the NHL. It really goes to show that injuries or not, this is a bad team. It's changed the coach and at times played better, yet they get further and further behind.

They players are always talking about talent in the room, but eventually the talent would show up.

The Sabres play with very little emotion which makes it look like they're just going through the motions. There's rarely a sense of urgency in their play and they just seem like a team that can't be coached.

I like Ron Rolston and I like the way he teaches. It seems like Tyler Myers is starting to get some of his game back. The best and hardest working line the past three of four games has been three players who started the year with Rolston in Rochester, Marcus Foligno, Kevin Porter and Brian Flynn. No matter how the rest of the team is performing, that line seems to never stop hustling.

For me the Philadelphia game ended the season. The gap to 8th place in the East is just too much with too many teams to leap. This team never just loses one game, they lose them in streaks. The way Ron Rolston talks I think he realizes, there are too many problems with this team to get them all fixed in time for the playoffs.

The Sabres are dead last in the NHL on the power play by a lot. Buffalo also leads the NHL with four shorthanded goals against. That is the willingness to compete and win battles. Their entrees are atrocious many times because two Sabres lose the battle to one player. Ron Rolston said, "We have to be a lot simpler than we are right now, especially on our entrees and in zone, we don't get pucks to the net,"

Buffalo had a few opportunities to tie the game in Philadelphia with the extra man, Rolston said, "I thought we were moving in a good direction, but last night I thought we took a step back in our overall game, our five on five game I thought took a step back last night." Thomas Vanek added, "I think our biggest issue is special teams. You look at how many games we've lost by one goal and how many chances we've had on the power play."

In his brief stay here in Buffalo I had never seen Rolston get upset or mad, but he got a little stern when talking about how attention to detail was awful in Philadelphia, "I thought especially early on we took a step back as we were moving in a good direction.

We addressed that this morning, we had talked about it all day and we knew what we were getting into, especially after they had lost to Boston. Obviously we wanted to be a smarter hockey team and then we didn't start that way. The first two shifts we gave up probably three scoring chances. It certainly wasn't the way we wanted to start, especially when they're your top two lines."

Many find this team to be talented, Vanek said, "We should be in the playoffs and we're not and without a doubt we're on the outside looking in again. We're not too far off. I think we're a team that can win and put wins together, but we're not doing that right now. Five on five most of the time we're OK. We do get ourselves in trouble, but special teams is huge and we're not very good at those."

The conversation got back to all this supposed talent that's on this team. Rolston said, "I think it's more that we haven't been able to execute and play with the attention to detail that we want to with the players in the room on a consistent basis from the start of the season to this point. Unless you play a certain way, it doesn't matter what players you have. You've got to be willing to play the way and right now we've got to be willing to change some of the things we're doing to get where we need to go." And right there folks is your problem. There aren't enough players on this team willing to play the way.

Pregame Notes: Rangers at Buffalo

NYRangers.com

March 11, 2013

The Rangers will face-off against the Buffalo Sabres tonight at First Niagara Center (7:00 p.m.), as they continue their four-game road trip. The Blueshirts currently rank third in the Atlantic Division standings, and rank eighth in the Eastern Conference, with a record of 13-9-2 (28 pts). The Rangers enter the contest having defeated the Washington Capitals, 4-1, on Sunday at Verizon Center, and have won five of the last six games. The Blueshirts have now registered a point in four of their last five road games (3-1-1). The Sabres enter the contest with a 9-14-3 (21 pts) record to rank 14th in the Eastern Conference, and have lost their last four games. Following tonight's contest, the Rangers will face-off against the Winnipeg Jets on Thursday, Mar. 14, at MTS Centre (8:00 p.m.), as they continue their four-game road trip.

Tune In Today!

Tonight's game will be televised on MSG with pregame coverage beginning at 6:30 p.m. You can also catch the radio broadcast on ESPN New York (FM 98.7) and on satellite radio at XM 212.

All Time -- Rangers vs. Sabres

Overall: 61-72-25-5

At MSG: 35-28-15-3

At Buffalo: 26-44-10-2

2013 Rangers vs. Buffalo

March 3 Rangers 3, Sabres 2 (SO) at MSG

March 12 Rangers vs. Sabres at Buffalo

April 19 Rangers vs. Sabres at Buffalo

Upcoming Regular-Season Schedule

March 12 Rangers at Buffalo, 7 p.m.

March 14 Rangers at Winnipeg, 8 p.m.

March 16 Rangers at Pittsburgh, 1 p.m.

March 18 Rangers vs. Carolina, 7 p.m.

March 19 Rangers at New Jersey, 7 p.m.

Injuries

* Marc Staal has missed three games with an injury, suffered on March 5.

* Arron Asham has missed nine games with an injury.

* Michael Sauer has missed 24 games due to a concussion, suffered on Dec. 5, 2011.

* The Rangers have lost 59 total man-games to injuries or illness this season.

Surging Rangers seek another win over Sabres

By Dave Lozo

NHL.com

March 11, 2013

RANGERS (13-9-2) at SABRES (9-14-3)

TV: MSG, MSG-B

Last 10: New York 5-4-1; Buffalo 3-5-2

Season series: This is the second of three meetings. The Rangers rallied for a 3-2 shootout win at home on March 3.

Big story: The spark that ignited the Rangers' comeback that night was a major penalty assessed to Sabres forward Patrick Kaleta for checking Brad Richards from behind. The Rangers scored on the ensuing 5-on-3 and again during the major to take the lead in a game that looked to be getting away from them. Kaleta was given a five-game suspension for the hit and Richards missed two games with an injury. Don't expect any type of retribution in this one, as Kaleta is still serving his suspension.

Team Scope:

Rangers: With their 4-1 victory Sunday afternoon in Washington, the Rangers have won five of six to climb into the top eight of the Eastern Conference. Brian Boyle, a healthy scratch Friday against Ottawa, scored the game winner and backup goaltender Martin Biron was sharp after allowing a weak goal to start the game.

"We held them to 11 scoring chances -- that includes the 5-on-3 -- but grinded and did our job on the walls," coach Tortorella said. "I think we're beginning to sort ourselves out as far as how we have to play and doing it a little more consistently."

Sabres: Trying to dig themselves out of an early-season hole, they had a chance to gain ground on the Flyers on Sunday night. They didn't allow a 5-on-5 goal in the contest, but they gave up two power-play goals and a shorthanded goal in a 3-2 loss.

"I don't think we hurt ourselves 5-on-5," captain Jason Pominville said. "We gave up a shorthanded goal and we gave up two or three power-play goals. I think our special teams put us in trouble. Our 5-on-5 play obviously wasn't where we wanted it to be, but it didn't get us in trouble. It was more our special teams."

Who's hot: Rick Nash had his five-game goal streak snapped Sunday, but his two assists extended his points streak to 10 games. ... Buffalo's Steve Ott is averaging a point per game in his last six games.

Injury report: The Rangers' lone lingering injury is forward Arron Asham (back). ... Sabres defenseman Jordan Leopold (hand) has missed the past eight games.

SABRES PROSPECTS REPORT

By Kris Baker

SabresProspects.com

March 11, 2013

With regular season schedules winding down, Buffalo Sabres prospects on two continents were busy posing productive weeks with post-season play just around the corner.

OHL

Brady Austin (2012, seventh round) added two goals to his season resume as Belleville won two of three outings to maintain a share of the top spot in the Eastern Conference. Austin's wrist-shot tally just 17 seconds into Saturday's loss to Barrie gives the mobile rearguard seven goals on the year, eclipsing his previous personal best of six set a season ago.

Dan Catenacci (2011, third round) snapped a four-game scoring drought over the weekend with goals in back-to-back games as Owen Sound swept a weekend set with Erie. The quick-handed centerman leads the Attack with 36 goals and 75 points with three games left to play. Owen Sound holds down the third position in the Western Conference, needing a win or an overtime point in the final three contests to lock up the third playoff seed.

Justin Kea (2012, third round) scored his 22nd goal of the season Sunday as Saginaw was dealt a 7-5 loss at Plymouth. The big-bodied forward, who on Friday earned an assist as the Spirit clinched the final Western Conference playoff spot in a win at Guelph, enters the final week of play with 48 points and an even 100 penalty minutes.

Barrie defenseman Alex Lepkowski (2011, fifth round) was a cumulative plus-one in the week's three games as the Colts pushed their winning streak to six to jump back into a tie with Belleville for first place in the Eastern Conference standings. The steady lefty will look for his first goal of the season this week as the Colts close the regular season with their final three contests.

WHL

Colin Jacobs (2011, fourth round) gathered two goals, four assists, and a shootout winner as Prince George won three of the week's five contests to stay alive in the Western Conference playoff chase. Jacobs' productive week ups his totals to 24 goals and 51 points for the Cougars, who remain four points behind Everett for the final playoff with four games left to play.

Andrey Makarov made 41 saves Friday as Saskatoon doubled Medicine Hat 6-3. The Russian workhorse enters the final week of the regular season with a league-best 36 wins, including 20 in his last 25 starts. The East Division champion Blades finish the regular season with three road games before kicking off the playoffs at home on March 21.

Logan Nelson (2012, fifth round) snapped home his 13th goal of the season Sunday as Victoria was bested by Portland 5-2. The Rogers, Minn., native has amassed 41 points in 46 games this season, including five goals in his last seven. The Royals, who have locked up the sixth seed in the Western Conference, head into the final week of play having won just once in their last 14 outings.

NCAA

Jake McCabe (2012, second round) notched a pair of assists Saturday as Wisconsin closed the WCHA regular season schedule with a 3-2 win over St. Cloud State. The double helping gives the sophomore 17 points (3+14) in 32 appearances. Brad Navin (2011, seventh round) recorded a

minor penalty in checking line duty for the Badgers, who enjoy home ice advantage next weekend in the first round of the playoffs versus Minnesota-Duluth.

Sophomore forward Christian Isackson (2010, seventh round) ended his 15-game goal drought Saturday with a mark at the final buzzer as second-ranked Minnesota earned a share of the WCHA regular season title with a 5-1 victory at Bemidji State. Isackson, who also picked up an assist for the second-straight night, enters the conference playoffs with four goals and 19 points. The Gophers will host a rematch with the Beavers in the first round beginning Friday.

European Leagues

Joel Armia burst to the net to score the game-winning goal Thursday as Assat Pori earned their 14th-straight victory 3-2 over JYP. The third-period strike, Armia's 100th career SM-liiga point, gives the big winger 19 goals on the year, setting a new personal best after totaling 18 in each of his first two professional seasons. On Saturday, Armia was blanked in 19:40 of work as Assat's hot streak came to an end with a 2-1 loss to Karpat. With a quarterfinal playoff spot reserved, the fourth-place Aces will play their final regular season tune-up Tuesday at TPS Turku.

In Sweden, Linus Ullmark (2012, sixth round) returned to the SuperElit ranks Saturday, stopping all 30 shots he faced to steer MODO J20 to a 2-0 win over Timra IK. Ullmark has been outstanding when tabbed for SuperElit Top 10 duty, winning all seven of his starts, including a pair of shutouts, while amassing a 1.28 GAA and .953 save%. The 6-foot-3 netminder will re-join MODO's top club for the start of their quarterfinal playoff round with Färjestads BK on Tuesday.

Sabres' Miller to take no text-and-drive pledge

By Dave Bertola

Business First

March 11, 2013

Buffalo Sabres goaltender Ryan Miller will be at Springville-Griffith Institute High School on Thursday, March 14, to talk to students about the dangers of texting while driving.

Miller will be part of a presentation that begins at 11:30 a.m. for students, faculty and staff as part of AT&T's It Can Wait program, which features a 10-minute documentary, "The Last Text," which recounts stories of families and students who lost loved ones or were involved in accidents due to texting while driving.

Students will try an online simulator which provides a safe environment to experience the dangers of texting while driving. AT&T employees will provide laptops and a wheel and pedal kit to augment the experience. The online simulator is free and available at www.itcanwaitimulator.org

Research has found texting drivers are 23 times more likely to be in an accident and more than 100,000 car crashes and injuries happen while a driver was texting and driving.

AT&T, its employees and other supporters are calling on drivers to visit www.itcanwait.com, take the no-texting-and-driving pledge, and share their promise with others via Twitter (#itcanwait) and Facebook. The pledge effort is part of the company's public awareness campaign aimed to make texting and driving as socially unacceptable as drinking and driving – especially with young drivers. As part of its campaign to spread the word about the dangers of texting and driving, AT&T in November visited Iroquois High School, where students took the pledge.

According to an AT&T spokeswoman, Miller on Thursday will sign the pledge to never text and drive.

Streets to close around First Niagara Center

By Jill Terreri
Buffalo News
March 12, 2013

Construction on a hotel and ice rink complex near the inner harbor will close streets around First Niagara Center beginning Wednesday.

At 7 a.m., Perry Street between Main and Illinois streets will be closed, along with one block of Washington Street, from Perry to Scott Street.

Arena visitors are urged to use Michigan Avenue as an alternate route to approach and exit First Niagara Center, partly for parking reasons.

Motorists headed south on Washington Street approaching the arena will be directed to turn left or right onto Scott Street. There are more parking opportunities between Michigan Avenue and the arena, said Buffalo Sabres spokesman Michael Gilbert.

Scott Street will remain open for east-west travel.

HarborCenter, a \$172.2 million development by the Buffalo Sabres, is under construction on a two-acre parcel north of First Niagara Center, bounded by Main, Perry, Washington and Scott streets. The complex will feature two ice rinks, an 845-space parking garage and a 200-room hotel, as well as a sports bar and restaurant, and retail space. Most of the complex is scheduled to open in September 2014, though the hotel is not expected to open until spring 2015.

When Washington Street reopens, it will be narrowed. The road is wide enough for four lanes of traffic, though it has just one lane of parking and two lanes for travel. Two lanes of traffic, one in each direction, will remain, but will be pushed to the eastern side of the roadway, as the equivalent of two lanes on the western side will be absorbed into the HarborCenter property.

During the street closures, visitors to the First Niagara Center box office and Sabres retail store will have access to free parking for two hours in the arena garage, which is accessible on Illinois Street and South Park Avenue.

Officers from the Buffalo Police Department will direct traffic at intersections during First Niagara Center events.

HarborCenter Development paid the city \$2.2 million Friday for the Webster Block parcel.

As part of the agreement with the city, HarborCenter has rights to construct a third-floor bridge over Perry Street between the new development and the arena, making the entire complex the only three-rink facility in the National Hockey League.

Washington Street will be closed for an undetermined amount of time – weeks, but not months, Gilbert said.

Perry Street, the least-traveled of the four streets that bound the Webster Block, will be closed for much longer, possibly until HarborCenter opens in September 2014, to allow for construction of the bridge between the facilities.

The streets are being closed as crews relocate utility lines, which are buried. Once the utility lines are moved, construction above ground can begin, and heavy machinery should appear at the site late this month or early in April, Gilbert said.

Pedestrians will be able to approach First Niagara Center and Canalside throughout construction by using sidewalks on the eastern side of Washington Street and on the south side of Perry Street directly in front of the arena.

Main Street between Scott and Perry streets had been closed to traffic because of HarborCenter construction but will reopen before Washington Street is closed to allow traffic to move freely behind the area, via South Park Avenue, which turns into Main Street.

