



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*Monday, January 21, 2013*

## **Sabres find that winning combination**

By John Vogl  
The Buffalo News  
January 21, 2013

Thomas Vanek got a glimpse of life alongside Cody Hodgson at the end of last season. The two skated together for the final 11 outings, and Vanek put up a point per game with three goals and eight assists. Obviously, he liked the combination.

Hodgson's audition next to the Buffalo Sabres' most potent scorer deserved an encore, so coach Lindy Ruff began the season Sunday with the center in the middle of Vanek and right wing Jason Pominville. Obviously, Vanek still likes it.

Vanek had the best day of his career during a 5-2 victory over Philadelphia, scoring twice and adding three assists as a sellout crowd in First Niagara Center welcomed the NHL back in a rollicking way.

"It's a lot of luck when you get that many points," said Vanek, who had the best outing by a Buffalo player in five years. "I was fortunate every pass I made went in, and when I scored, I scored. You won't have many of those nights. You enjoy it, you like the win and you move on."

Vanek can attribute the outing to luck all he wants, but he earned the avalanche of points. He skated hard, controlled pucks, made nice passes and tortured the Flyers and goaltender Ilya Bryzgalov.

"He's got a lot of special talents, and he used them all," said Sabres defenseman Tyler Myers, who snapped a 2-2 tie with 5:03 left.

Myers' goal was one of three power-play tallies for the Sabres, who went 3 for 6 with the man advantage in a game that featured 20 penalties. Steve Ott opened the scoring and Hodgson added the fourth goal. Pominville had three assists.

"That line was the difference," Ruff said. "Van was fabulous, [Hodgson] was terrific and Pommer was right somewhere between those two. We look at those guys as being our top line that can push us to that next level."

Hodgson is embracing the top-line opportunity he has craved. He wanted out of Vancouver because he was stuck on the third line, and skating with Pominville and Vanek means significant minutes.

"He's pretty excited about this opportunity he's getting," Pominville said. "He took advantage of it."

The Sabres took advantage of the Flyers' trips to the penalty box. The opening goal of the season came with 11:07 gone and gave the power play a perfect start.

Vanek, from behind the net, fed Pominville near the bottom of the left circle. The captain spotted Ott alone in the slot, and the newcomer crouched low to rip a one-timer past Bryzgalov.

The Flyers caught the Sabres flat-footed to start the second. Philadelphia took the first five shots and needed less than five minutes to take a 2-1 lead on goals by Sean Couturier and Claude Giroux.

The Sabres' power play struck again to tie the game with 4:06 left in the second, and Vanek's goal was a beauty.

Pominville, from his own zone, hit Drew Stafford along the boards at the Flyers' blue line. Vanek took off down the middle, got behind Philly's defensemen and accepted Stafford's pass for a breakaway.

Bryzgalov didn't stand a chance. Vanek made one deke left, the goalie bit and the winger went around him on the right to dump the puck into an empty net.

"We talked about playing the game quick, not slowing it down, which we were pretty good at in the past," Vanek said. "That was a good example of that."

Myers had just hopped off the bench to join the play on the winning goal. He rushed into the Flyers' zone, got a cross-ice pass from Tyler Ennis and spotted Vanek in front. Myers kept his shot along the ice in hopes of a deflection, and the puck hit Flyers defenseman Kimmo Timonen and caromed through Bryzgalov's legs.

The goalie stopped Vanek on a breakaway with just under four minutes to play, but the rebound popped into the air and landed in the crease. Hodgson rushed in to tip it home, with the puck going off his skates and stick as he hit the brakes in the blue paint.

"I had three or four point-blank shots earlier in the game, and all it took was for me to stop in front of the net for me to get one," he said.

Vanek, fittingly, sent the crowd of 19,070 home with an empty-net breakaway goal in the final minute. He and the Sabres hopped on the bus for tonight's game in Toronto after giving the fans a stick-waving salute from center ice.

"Our line played real well," Hodgson said. "There's always openings out there and lots of free ice playing with those guys because guys key on them so much. I just try to complement them as much as possible."

## **Sabres notebook: Stafford earns praise for challenging Hartnell**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

January 21, 2013

Philadelphia Flyers agitator Scott Hartnell was running all over the First Niagara Center ice in the second period Sunday, plummeting Sabres captain Jason Pominville into the boards from behind and then nailing Tyler Ennis with another rough check.

Enough was clearly enough in Drew Stafford's mind. The Sabres winger stepped out of character and immediately challenged Hartnell, both players tossing their sticks and helmets aside. Stafford took four or five tough rights from Hartnell at the start of the scrap, rallied some at the end and earned universal praise for it after the Sabres' 5-2 win.

For a game-within-the-game moment, this was it. The Sabres insist they won't be pushed around this year and here was a quick example in the first game of a new season.

"Obviously I'm not an every-day fighter kind of player," said Stafford, who had not dropped the gloves since taking on Columbus' R.J. Umberger on Feb. 6, 2010. "But when the time comes, I feel as though I can handle myself. It's not something you're going to see out of me too often. It carries over from last year. Everyone in this lineup is going to hold each other accountable to be harder to play against and that falls into that category."

"It was important for him to stand up for a teammate," said goaltender Ryan Miller. "It was definitely the right thing to do. It can send a message in a game that we're here to play. They like to bump and grind and get in your face and talk a little bit. So remind them that you're there, that's good."

Stafford's locker is next to 6-foot-8 newcomer John Scott, one of the NHL's toughest fighters. Stafford said Scott joked his teammate is trying to take his job.

Stafford admitted what he did was out of character. That's especially true since it came against the shaggy-haired Hartnell, one of the Flyers' tougher players.

"He's that kind of player but at the same time it's just the way it is," Stafford said. "Whoever it is, it doesn't have to be anyone in particular, you've got to respond. It just happened."

"What Staff did was awesome," said coach Lindy Ruff. "Right away. Addressed it. Didn't wait for somebody else to address it. ... Those are the type of things that bring your team together. Those are the types of things we talked about."

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Rookie Mikhail Grigorenko, the Sabres' No. 1 draft pick, played 11 minutes, 13 seconds in his NHL debut. He had two shots on goal, went 5-4 on faceoffs, drew a penalty that led to a power-play goal and finished with a minus-1 rating.

"The first shift I was kind of nervous but I wasn't nervous at all after the first few," said Grigorenko, who played his most (4:15) in the third period. "It was great to have so many people here. I can really see it's a great city to play in. People like hockey and it's an honor to play here."

"I thought he was steady," Ruff said. "I probably used him about as much as I wanted to. There's going to be an opportunity to inject him in a few other places in the coming games, but I wanted to get him through that first game and I thought he handled it well.

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Longtime broadcaster Rick Jeanneret was ill and missed the opener. The Sabres issued a one-paragraph release two hours before the faceoff announcing Jeanneret's absence. Paul Hamilton of WGR Radio stepped in to do the play by play.

A Sabres spokesman emphasized Jeanneret was not hospitalized, although his status is uncertain for tonight's game in Toronto.

Jeanneret, who is believed to be 70, was the winner of the Foster Hewitt Memorial Award for broadcast excellence, as selected by the Hockey Hall of Fame and was honored in November.

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Winger Ville Leino missed the game with the leg injury that flared up at the end of practice Friday. Ruff said it's doubtful he'll play tonight. Jochen Hecht took Leino's place on the line with Grigorenko and Steve Ott, while Matt Ellis dressed and took six shifts on the fourth line.

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The Danny Briere-less Flyers are 0-2 for the first time since 2008. They have led for a combined 11 minutes in the two games, are 1 for 9 on the power play and have killed only four of nine penalties.

"It's one team I really like to beat and it's one team I really hate to lose to," said Ruff, whose team was 0-3-1 against Philly last year. "So I feel pretty good right now."

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Sabres players, coaches and owner Terry Pegula greeted fans in the pavilion when the gates opened, handing out programs and posing for pictures. ... The Sabres improved to 24-14-4 in season openers, including 17-6-4 when opening at home. Ruff is 9-5-1 in

season openers as Sabres coach. ... Many fans were surprised they could not buy beer when they entered the building until noon had passed because of New York State law. The no-beer-before-noon ban will also apply for the Feb. 17 game against Pittsburgh, which is the season's other 12:30 p.m. start. ... The crowd of 19,070 was the Sabres' 32nd straight sellout. Capacity is up this year by 380 with renovations on the 200 and suite levels. The number is a tribute to the birth year of the franchise.

## **Ott produces, as advertised**

By Bucky Gleason

The Buffalo News

January 21, 2013

To hear Steve Ott describe his first goal for the Sabres and their first goal of the season, you would have thought it was an ordinary play in a forgettable game in January. On the surface, it wasn't anything special. He one-timed Jason Pominville's perfect pass into the high slot and scored on the power play.

Nice pass, nice shot.

Ott was tossing and turning in bed Saturday night because he was so anxious to play his first game for the Sabres after being acquired for Derek Roy. Ott admitted worrying about the game. He arrived at First Niagara Center more than three hours before faceoff. He gave the Sabres an early lead against a good team in Philadelphia.

Plus, it was his mother's birthday.

So, yes, he knew the goal was important on various levels. For the most part, however, he was oblivious to its significance on the grand scale. Ott is more than a third-line winger on this team no matter what the depth chart shows. He's the type of player the Sabres have lacked, the kind who can change their chemistry and collective heartbeat.

Sometimes, that's all it takes for a team to reach its potential. Talent hasn't been the Sabres' biggest issue in recent years. Their persistent problem has been players underachieving. The issue revolved mostly around a lack of effort, an overall reluctance to pay the fare. Too many times, they were collecting paychecks without earning them.

"He's a guy that you absolutely despise playing against," said winger Patrick Kaleta, who could have been describing himself. "When you look at the lineup of the other team, you go right to his name and say, 'This could be a long night. I don't know if I'm up for this.' He's a role model for me. A lot of guys look up to him and follow his lead."

Let's not get carried away. We're talking about Steve Ott, not Steve Yzerman. The Sabres beat the Flyers with a score that was more convincing than their overall performance. It was a 2-2 game before Buffalo finished by scoring three goals in the final 5:03 and left for Toronto with a 5-2 victory.

Kaleta was right. There was no mistaking the impact Ott made Sunday.

His goal gave the Sabres an early lead, but it meant much more. He can relax with the first one out of the way. He helped justify Darcy Regier's reason for acquiring him. He gave his team, and himself, a boost of confidence. He helped stiffen their backbone. He also helped people forget about Roy.

“Team-wise, it felt so good to have all of us up and cheering right away,” Ott said. “I want to be competitive every single night. I hold myself accountable. I want to be there and help the team out. It's real easy to play in the East when you have a full building and screaming fans like this. It's instant energy.

“It felt great. Pommer set the table. I was just trying to get in on net, and it went in. You always worry about how long it's going to take to get the first one. To get that monkey off your back, it felt pretty good.”

Ott is a fresh face and welcomed voice in the dressing room, a new toy that worked as advertised. His willingness to punish opponents at full speed with Kaleta-like indifference toward his own body will endear him to long-suffering fans. He adds bite to a team that had been pushed around far too often.

If anything, he's the antithesis of Roy.

Roy had several good years in Buffalo. His productivity should not be dismissed, but he needed a change in scenery. That alone is hardly a crime. Any sport can grow stale for players who have been in one place for too long. For years, there were rumblings about him being a selfish player and lousy teammate. He feuded with Lindy Ruff.

Regier acquired Ott for his character and leadership, for the positive effect he had on his teammates. The Stars received the better player based on talent alone, but the Sabres believe they added the better player for them. Unlike Roy, he will show up and provide a full effort on most nights.

His passion was evident after the game. He sounded like he was ready to drive to Toronto and play a doubleheader Sunday night rather than wait to play the Leafs tonight. He showered rookie linemate Mikhail Grigorenko with praise after an uneventful NHL debut, suggesting he was riding the young center's coattails.

“How easy is it to grab energy from a full house of anxious hockey people?” Ott said. “I felt like a rookie this morning. I was up at 6 o'clock, 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock. I was nervous. Nervous energy is a good thing. You want to prove yourself. It felt so good to put that Buffalo Sabres jersey on and earn that jersey.”

Keyword: Earn.

Yeah, he gets it.

He also knew what do with the puck in his wheelhouse Sunday. Pominville gave him a perfect pass before he rifled a shot past Ilya Bryzgalov to give the Sabres the lead on the power play. Ott killed penalties and played with boundless energy. He spent the afternoon banging bodies and maximizing his 15 minutes, 16 seconds of ice time.

OK, so he was whistled for embellishment, prompting someone to suggest the referee penalized No. 9 for diving out of habit. Ott will take his share of penalties, but the Sabres

would gladly trade two minutes in the box for 15 minutes of oomph. If his aggression also comes with a little scoring punch, he makes the Sabres that much better.

Ruff could sense a difference in their overall attitude Sunday. Drew Stafford made it clear when he stood up for Tyler Ennis and picked a fight with Scott Hartnell, who was a general nuisance all afternoon. For now, anyway, it appears they're going to be a tougher team to play against. In that respect, Ott has quickly come to personify his new team.

One player, one goal, can make a world of difference.

## **Region's hockey-starved Sabres fans finally get their wish**

By Robert McCarthy

The Buffalo News

January 21, 2013

Maybe Western New York never realized that something was missing until the Buffalo Sabres returned to a hockey-starved town Sunday afternoon.

Call it the “hockey buzz” – that intangible feeling infecting hometown fans fired up about a National Hockey League game.

There it was Sunday, at full strength, as die-hard Sabres fans streamed into First Niagara Center for the first time this season following a four-month lockout. From regular old fans, to ticket takers and vendors inside the arena, to downtown bar and restaurant proprietors, the Sabres' return – not to mention their 5-2 victory over the visiting Philadelphia Flyers – seemed to add a sunny tinge to a cold and blustery Sunday.

“The crowd, the atmosphere – it's just so energized in here,” said security official Victor Aguilar between periods above the arena's main lobby.

Indeed, an aura missing from the downtown scene for months returned Sunday, even if only for a truncated 48-game schedule. Scalpers hawked tickets along previously quiet downtown streets, young people on hockey dates showed up in matching jerseys, and nobody seemed fazed at all over traffic snarls spawned by a sold-out audience.

A few hours before game time, arriving fans experienced a special welcome from the entire Sabres team, who suddenly appeared at the main gates to greet returning fans. They shook hands, signed autographs and posed for photos.

“All of a sudden, everyone saw the players coming out to see them,” said Ed Cotter, a Buffalo Police Department detective who was also working security at the game. “It was just a real nice gesture.”

Around the ice, hockey fans enthusiastic over the Sabres' prospects this year seemed poised to vent their pent-up frustrations. After loudspeakers blared “The Boys Are Back” just before referees dropped the first puck, a full house roared to the announcer's rally cry of “Let's play hockey.”

Then it was only a matter of time before the first fisticuffs of the season erupted, prompting a lusty roar from a crowd that seemed to ask: “What took you so long?” And when the upper reaches of the 300 section spawned a “Let's go, Buffalo!” cheer, it was obvious these fans had been waiting a long time to proclaim their loyalties. All it took was a power-play goal by Steve Ott – his first as a Sabre – at the 11:07 mark of the first period to rock the house.

It all added up to a fun afternoon for Jenny and Colin Ramsey, enjoying not only a beverage but the whole atmosphere at the Aud Club bar.

“It’s great having so many people down here, and there’s just so much excitement,” Jenny Ramsey said.

“It’s finally nice to be able to make out my sports events list for the next few months,” added her husband.

More than a few fans, however, were still playing hard to get after being jilted by the NHL over the past long months. Tom Buchan of St. Catharines, Ont., was ready to rekindle his love affair with hockey, but with a little less passion – at least for now.

“I don’t feel the real excitement in the air yet. It will take time,” he said. “All the teams will have to prove themselves to the fans.”

“It’s not resentment, but a little apathy,” he added. “Maybe we have to just warm up to them. If the team plays well, it won’t take long.”

But the return of the Sabres means much more to hundreds who depend on the team for their livelihoods. With a 50-percent-off sale of all merchandise inside arena shops, sales personnel such as Dawn Prynne had little time to chat while tending to long lines of customers.

And outside the Old Time Hockey store, Bill and Michelle Blythe of Oakville, Ont., had just picked up an official jersey, two pairs of gloves and a decal.

“The lockout was a good deal for us at 50 percent off,” Michelle Blythe said.

“We got a new Nexus card just to come to all the games,” her husband added, referring to the pass that provides express clearance through customs at the international bridges.

While tending a busy bar above the main lobby, Bob Durham of South Buffalo said it was good to return to the “great job” he has held for a decade and see so many familiar faces.

“I’m glad for all the businesses around here, too,” he said.

Nobody agreed more than Melissa Smith, bar manager at the Liberty Hound on the inner harbor. The lockout forced the new restaurant and tavern to suspend operations earlier this year, but the doors swung open again for business on Sunday.

“Are we glad? That’s an understatement,” Smith said, adding the bar was full and lunch business was brisk even before the 12:30 p.m. face-off.

And over at the Irish Times on Swan Street, owner Marie Stachera pronounced herself the happiest businesswoman in Buffalo now that hockey fans are returning to her downtown mahogany.

“I never want to live through another four months like that again,” she said. “I had to borrow every month and max out my credit card. It’s all about events down here.”

But with the Sabres posting a healthy lead late Sunday afternoon, early arrivals were already streaming in – just the way they were supposed to.

“And with the Blue Jays across the street for baseball, I think it’s going to be a phenomenal season,” she said.

Perhaps few people could appreciate the return of hockey more than Tom “Conehead” Girot, the legendary beer and snacks hawker at both First Niagara Center and Coca-Cola Field. He’s now in his 41st season of slaking the thirsts of hockey fans.

“When I woke up this morning, I didn’t say ‘good morning’ to my wife,” he said. “I told her it’s going to be a great day.”

Then Conehead turned toward the stands with his familiar refrain: “Cold Buds, Bud Light, peanuts. Get your cold Buds here.”

Hockey was back on this Sunday afternoon. So was life in Buffalo.

## **Sabres Take Down Flyers 5-2 in Season Opener**

By Dan Cave

WGR 550

January 21, 2013

Thomas Vanek was in on each Sabres goal as Buffalo bullied its way past Philadelphia 5-2 in Sunday's season opener. The Sabres' lineup featured several newcomers on Sunday including Steve Ott. It didn't take long for the former Dallas Star to make an impact, dropping to one knee and ripping a shot past Ilya Bryzgalov during an opening period power play. Ott, camped out alone in the slot, took a feed from Jason Pominville and converted to put Buffalo ahead 1-0.

Moments later, the Flyers thought they tied it up, but the goal was waved off due to interference. Ruslan Fedotenko appeared to shove Ryan Miller off-balance as the puck bounced into the Buffalo net. Miller was sharp throughout the period, denying Philadelphia on several power play chances, including one in the final minute of the first.

The Flyers grabbed the lead early in the second period, scoring twice in the first five minutes. Sean Couturier, parked alone in front of Miller, deflected a shot to make it a 1-1 game. About two and a half minutes later, Claude Giroux put Philadelphia ahead on the power play, firing a rocket past Miller from the right circle. Buffalo nearly tied it up later in the period, but Ott was denied on a pretty pad save by Bryzgalov after a nice set up by Mikhail Grigorenko.

The equalizer finally came on another power play chance when Thomas Vanek connected on a beautiful breakaway goal. Nearing the end of a 5-on-3 advantage, Pominville worked the puck up to Stafford at the blue line. Stafford hit Vanek, streaking in alone, in stride and the Sabres forward deked Bryzgalov to tie things up 2-2. Moments later, Buffalo showed off its new attitude when Drew Stafford went fist-to-fist with Scott Hartnell after the Flyers forward checked Tyler Ennis from behind.

After going back and forth for most of the third period, Buffalo caught a break at the 14:00 mark when Luke Schenn hauled down Marcus Foligno on a half-breakaway. The Sabres regained the lead on the ensuing power play with a Tyler Myers goal. Just a little over a minute later, Cody Hodgson put the Sabres up 4-2, flying down the ice to finish off a Vanek breakaway chance. The goal was allowed to stand following a brief review to check if Hodgson used his skate to kick the puck past Bryzgalov. Vanek capped off his big day with an empty net goal in the game's final minute to make it a 5-2 final.

The 1-0 Sabres are right back at it on Monday night when they visit the Toronto Maple Leafs at Air Canada Centre. Hear the call on WGR SportsRadio 550 and the Buffalo Sabres Radio Network.

## **The little things made the difference**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 21, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Sabres put together a pretty complete game to start the season and it was pretty impressive to watch.

Now let me stress, it's only one game and there's plenty of hockey to be played, but that one game had moments within moments.

Of course there's the obvious, Thomas Vanek posting a five point day and Jason Pominville picking up three assists. Add in center Cody Hodgson and that line had three goals and six assists for nine points.

What impressed me more in this game was the attention to detail. The little things that need to get done if you're going to be a good team.

Late in the second period Buffalo was down 2-1. The Sabres were on a short 5-on-3 advantage. Pominville was behind his own net with six seconds left in the two man advantage. He understood that he needed to get the puck up ice quickly so the man coming out of the box wouldn't get into the way. He took a few steps out from behind the net and hit Drew Stafford all the way up at the Flyers blue line. The winger immediately hit Vanek entering the zone and Vanek faked Ilya Bryzgalov right out of the crease to tie the game. When the goal was scored, the two man advantage was over, but the player coming out had no time to get back into the play.

Just a few minutes later, Scott Hartnell hit Tyler Ennis from behind. Marcus Foligno was on the ice, but he wasn't the one that responded. It was Stafford he got pounded until finally landing a decent punch right at the end to put Hartnell down. Between the goal and that fight, it took the momentum away that the Flyers had gained and set Buffalo up for a three goal third period. Teammates notice what Stafford did. He's really not a fighter, but he stepped up for Ennis. It's the exact thing the Sabres haven't done for a long time.

For the first two periods there was one very large negative in that game for Buffalo. Tyler Myers wasn't just bad, he was awful. He couldn't pass, his decisions were horrendous and he defended poorly. Buffalo had to kill off a penalty to Steve Ott to start the third period and Myers did a great job during that kill. From that point forward, he made good passes to get out of the zone, joined the rush with purpose instead of making bad decisions and even scored the Sabres third power play goal of the game which turned out to be the game winner. Many times when a player is performing that poorly, you don't see him turn it around in that game.

In past seasons the Sabres were usually all over the place within a game. They'd play very poorly then play very well. There were brief lulls in this game, but look at the shots, 13, 13 and 15. That's just a very consistent effort.

In his first NHL game Mikhail Grigorenko played 15 shifts for 11:13. He had two shots on goal and won five of nine faceoffs. I liked his play in his own zone. Offensively he made a very nice no look backhand pass to set up Steve Ott all alone, but Bryzgalov stopped Ott with a nice save. The kid didn't have the puck all that much, but that should get better.

Ruff had mentioned certain players would get more ice time and the fourth line may get less. John Scott only played 2:10 and Matt Ellis put in 3:48. That gave Vanek 19:17 which is about five minutes more than he's gotten on the average in the past. Hodgson was at 19:44 and Ennis played 18:47. I really like getting players like that on the ice more if possible.

Again I want to caution, this is only one game against a team that was playing its second game in less than 24 hours. They deserve a lot of credit for the win, but there needs to be a lot more efforts just like it.

## **For one game, 2013 Sabres exorcise their demons**

By Joe Buscaglia

WGR 550

January 20, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- If you're hoping for a grandiose revelation and declaration saying the Buffalo Sabres have changed their ways and have put their problems from last season in the past, you're reading the wrong column.

What you can gather following their 5-2 victory over Philadelphia, however, is that most of the complaints fans and media alike had for the Sabres in the 2011-2012 season disappeared on their opening statement to the 2013 campaign.

Predictably, it was a slow start full of rust and difficulty to get any continuity established. That just seems to be the trend for some teams around the league. The defending Stanley Cup Champion LA Kings get blown out at home, Detroit gets shellacked by St. Louis and Vancouver didn't show up against Anaheim.

To their credit though, the Sabres overcame that adversity and others quite swimmingly. Take a look at some of their problems from last season:

A middling power play unit? The Sabres chipped in three goals on that front.

Answering back after the Flyers stormed ahead with two straight goals? These Sunday Sabres certainly didn't crumble.

Physicality, accountability and not backing down? Check, check and check. Drew Stafford, although not showing too well against Scott Hartnell, proved that he and his teammates wouldn't shy away when opposing intimidators attempted to do exactly that.

Not to mention, they closed the game down after scoring a late go-ahead goal. Heck, they even chipped in an empty-net goal to seal the deal.

Most of those weren't seen all that regularly at First Niagara Center and on MSG by fans of the team. Is it a pre-cursor to how they'll play for the rest of the season?

I'm not willing to make that leap, nor should you, especially considering the Flyers were on the back-end of two games in two days.

For one game, though, things felt and looked a lot different on the ice for the Buffalo Sabres.

## **Vanek leads Sabres to 5-2 win over Flyers**

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

January 20, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) -- A nine-month layoff, courtesy of the NHL lockout, wasn't long enough to disrupt the chemistry between the Buffalo Sabres' top two linemates, Thomas Vanek and Jason Pominville.

Vanek scored twice and added three assists, and Pominville had three assists in leading the Sabres to a 5-2 season-opening win over the Philadelphia Flyers on Sunday afternoon.

"Ah, they spent a lot of years playing together. You go all the way back to their days in Rochester," coach Lindy Ruff said, referring to the two playing together in the American Hockey League 2004-05 season. "Those two guys are a little bit like glue."

They sure stuck it to the Flyers as the Sabres scored the game's final four goals - the last three coming in the final five minutes.

"Good linemates," Vanek said of his career-best outing. "And a little bit lucky at the same time."

He became the first Sabres player with five points in a game since Drew Stafford had three goals and two assists in January 2008.

Vanek tied it 2-2 by scoring on a breakaway with 4:06 left in the second period. He then had a hand in setting up defenseman Tyler Myers' go-ahead goal with 5:03 remaining.

The Sabres worked the puck around to the left point, where Myers got off a shot that appeared to deflect in off the skate of Flyers defenseman Kimmo Timonen, who was battling with Vanek for position in front of the net.

Cody Hodgson and newly acquired forward Steve Ott also scored for the Sabres, while Ryan Miller made 27 saves. Buffalo ended a five-game skid against the Flyers (1-4-1) and improved to 6-1-1 in its past eight season openers.

Claude Giroux, with his second goal of the season, and Sean Couturier scored for the Flyers, who were coming off a 3-1 season-opening loss to Pittsburgh on Saturday. This marks just the 10th time Philadelphia has opened 0-2.

"The bounces aren't going our way right now," Giroux said. "It's not the start that we're looking for, two losses in a row. But we'll just have to fight through it and come back."

The Flyers had two goals disallowed. The first one, scored by Ruslan Fedotenko in the first period, was waved off after referee Steve Kozari ruled Fedotenko had bumped Miller before the puck went in. The second came in the final minutes, when officials ruled the whistle had blown before the puck dribbled over the goal line.

Coach Peter Laviolette questioned why Fedotenko's goal was disallowed, noting the Flyers player was outside the crease when he nudged Miller. As for the second disallowed goal, Laviolette said he never spoke to the official who made the call.

A bigger concern is Philadelphia's penalty-killing unit.

After allowing the Penguins to score twice on three power-play chances, the Flyers gave up three more on Buffalo's six opportunities.

"The penalty-kill right now, we've got to continue to look at it and work at it," Laviolette said. "Every day is a new opportunity. But we've got to get on track here and get a win in the column and get moving in the right direction."

They'll have to get it started on the road. The Flyers are in the middle of a stretch in which they're playing six of seven away from Philadelphia.

The Sabres did little wrong in rewarding their fans in coming out of the NHL lockout.

Before the game, Sabres players, coaches and team owner Terry Pegula were in the First Niagara Center lobby to greet fans when the gates opened. They handed out programs, signed autographs and posed for pictures.

Once the game began, Buffalo scored the first goal, courtesy of Ott. At the final horn, they gathered at center ice and raised their sticks to acknowledge the sold-out house.

The Sabres were without third-line forward Ville Leino, who is listed as day to day with a lower body injury after he was hurt in practice Friday.

Notes: At 18 years and 254 days, Sabres rookie C Mikhail Grigorenko became the fifth-youngest player to be on the team's opening roster. Pierre Turgeon was the youngest (18 years, 41 days) in 1987. ... The Sabres have only about 12,000 tickets unsold for their remaining 23 home games. ... Flyers C Zac Rinaldo played just 2:47 before leaving the game with what the team called a lower body injury.

## **Sabres C Leino misses season opener vs Flyers**

Associated Press

January 20, 2013

**BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) -- Buffalo Sabres forward Ville Leino is missing the team's regular-season opener against the Philadelphia Flyers because of a lower body injury.**

Listed by the team as day to day, Leino missed practice Saturday a day after he was hurt in practice.

Leino was well enough to join his teammates, coaches and Sabres owner Terry Pegula to greet fans in the First Niagara Center lobby when the gates opened before Sunday's game.

Veteran journeyman forward Matt Ellis took Leino's spot in the lineup.

The Sabres travel to play at Toronto on Monday.

## **FIVE ALIVE: VANEK LEADS SABRES PAST FLYERS STATS**

By Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

January 20, 2013

Buffalo 5 – Philadelphia 2  
First Niagara Center (Buffalo, NY)

### **GAME RECAP**

Thomas Vanek had a career-high five points, including three in the third period, as the Buffalo Sabres scored three unanswered goals in a 4:15 span late in the third to open the season with decisive 5-2 win over the Philadelphia Flyers before a sold-out First Niagara Center crowd. Buffalo scored three times on the power play, with newcomer Steve Ott getting things started midway through the first period. Tyler Myers scored the game winner at 14:57 of the third period on a wrist shot from the right faceoff circle that appeared to deflect in off the skate of Flyers defenseman Kimmo Timonen. Jason Pominville chipped in three assists, and Ryan Miller stopped 27 shots to earn the victory.

### **PLAYER OF THE GAME**

Thomas Vanek: Set a new career-high with five points, scoring two goals and adding three assists. He becomes the first NHL player to record five points in a season opener since Steven Reinprecht of Phoenix had a goal and four assists vs. NY Islanders on October 5, 2006. Vanek's previous career high was four points, which he had accomplished four times – the last being December 16, 2011 vs. Toronto. Vanek also led both teams with nine shots, matching his career-best single-game total. Dating back to last season, Vanek has 16 points (5+11) in his last 12 games.

### **BEHIND THE NUMBERS**

The Sabres are now 24-14-4 in season openers; 17-6-4 at home... Eight different Sabres recorded a point, the most in a season opener since 10 found the scoresheet in a 6-4 loss to the New York Islanders on Oct. 5, 2007... Vanek's five-point game was the first by a Sabres player since Drew Stafford had three goals and two assists vs. Atlanta on Jan. 18, 2008... Steve Ott scored on his first shot as a Sabre at 11:07 of the first period to stake Buffalo to an early 1-0 lead. It was the first time in Ott's career that he scored in the season opener... With his three assists, Pominville now has 27 points (11+16) in 27 career games against Philadelphia... Pominville has not gone two consecutive home games without recording a point since Feb. 25/26, 2011... Miller and Vanek are the only Sabres to have played in every season opener since 2005... Lindy Ruff improved to 9-5-1 in season openers as Sabres head coach... Buffalo won 36 of 67 faceoffs in the game (54%); Philadelphia's Claude Giroux led both teams with 15 wins... This was just the second time the Sabres have opened the season against Philadelphia; previous was 2-0 loss on Oct. 9, 2004.

### **BUFFALO'S REAL-TIME STATS LEADERS**

Time on Ice: Tyler Myers, 23:11

Shots: Thomas Vanek, 9  
Blocked Shots: Robyn Regehr, 3  
Faceoff Wins: Cody Hodgson/Tyler Ennis, 11  
Total Faceoffs: Hodgson, 20  
Hits: Steve Ott, 5

#### SPECIAL TEAMS

Buffalo was three-for-six on the power play, and killed off three of four Flyers man advantages. All three of Buffalo's power play goals came while playing five-on-four. Christian Ehrhoff was on the ice for all three goals. On two of the goals, the Sabres were using four forwards on the power play unit. The Sabres only scored three or more power play goals twice last season, and were just three-for-19 over their last five games.

#### GRIGORENKO WATCH

Rookie Mikhail Grigorenko had 11:13 of ice time in his NHL debut, becoming the sixth 18-year-old to ever dress for the Sabres. He finished the night with two shots on goal, and won five of nine faceoffs. Just like his confidence and comfort levels, Grigorenko's ice time gradually increased each period (2:50, 4:08, 4:15) after being held back early because of special teams play. His first NHL shot was a wrist shot right off a Steve Ott faceoff win in the second period. Grigorenko also made a nifty behind-the-back pass to Ott at the edge of the crease in that period, and drew a tripping penalty on Ruslan Fedotenko in the third period while driving to the net. He also had some brief time on the power play, on the right side of a line with Marcus Foligno and Tyler Ennis.

#### NOTABLE

Ville Leino missed the game with a leg injury, and head coach Lindy Ruff says he's doubtful to play Monday in Toronto ... TJ Brennan and Mike Weber were healthy scratches.

#### UP NEXT

- \* Monday @ Toronto, 7 p.m.
- \* Thursday @ Carolina, 7 p.m.
- \* Friday vs. Carolina, 7 p.m.

## **Vanek's career day pushes Sabres past Flyers in opener**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
January 20, 2013

BUFFALO – It was as if nine months hadn't passed. One game into a new season, the Sabres kept exorcising their old demons, picking up where they left off last winter and spring during an exciting 5-2 triumph over the Philadelphia Flyers on Sunday inside a noisy First Niagara Center.

Thomas Vanek enjoyed an opening day that will forever live in Sabres lore, recording two goals and a career-high five points to start the lockout-shortened 48-game season.

But splendid performances from Vanek and linemates Cody Hodgson and Jason Pominville shouldn't overshadow a strong all-around game.

Like so many other times during recent years, the Sabres nearly lost control. Their early 1-0 lead became a 2-1 second-period deficit. The Flyers tried pushing them around.

Instead of wilting, the Sabres buried the Flyers. Minutes after Vanek's power-play goal tied it at 2, Drew Stafford provided the afternoon's seminal moment, challenging and fighting Scott Hartnell after the pest had hit Tyler Ennis.

It didn't matter Stafford lost the scrap. A message had been sent as the capacity crowd of 19,070 fans roared.

"What Staff did was awesome," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said. "Right away (he) addressed it, didn't wait for somebody else to address it. ... Those are the type of things that bring your team together. Those are the type of things we talked about. We finished our year on a better note with that last year."

The Sabres blitzed the Flyers during a wild third period, getting the go-ahead power-play goal from Tyler Myers at 14:57. Hodgson iced it later before Vanek scored an empty-net breakaway goal.

"It's one team I really like to beat," Ruff said about the Flyers, "and it's one team I really hate to lose to. So I feel pretty good right now."

The Sabres mirrored the team that nearly completed an improbable 10-week run from last place to the playoffs in 2011-12.

They played a sturdy game backed by franchise goalie Ryan Miller. They responded to adversity. They received timely and plentiful goal scoring. And they refused to back down physically.

“It’s not something you’re going to see out of me too often,” Stafford said about fighting. “It carries over from last year. Everyone in this lineup is going to try to hold each other accountable for being hard to play against.”

A pleased Ruff said the Sabres need to keep raising their physical intensity and morph into an even tougher team.

“I think everybody’s determined to become that team, and it doesn’t happen in one game,” Ruff said. “It was great to see tonight. It’s something you got to earn after maybe five, 10 games and you can do it on a consistent basis. The other team finally says ... ‘These guys are getting really tough to play against.’”

The Sabres are also tough to defend against when they’re clicking on all cylinders.

Pominville had three assists. Hodgson, meanwhile, deserved more than a single goal.

“I thought Van was fabulous and (Hodgson) was terrific and Pommer was right somewhere between those two,” Ruff joked.

Vanek said: “I’ve got good linemates. I was a little bit lucky. At the same time, it won’t happen to me too many more times. It’s the two points (for winning) that count right now. We’ve got to keep going.”

The trio began playing together last March when Vanek busted out of a three-month slump and Pominville put the finishing touches on a strong 73-point season.

“They spent a lot of years playing together, going all the way back to the years playing in Rochester,” Ruff said about Pominville and Vanek. “I said at the start of the one-week camp that the best thing we can do is try to keep some players together that are familiar together, that you don’t have a lot of time to spend.

“Those two guys are a little bit like glue.”

Hodgson’s the wild card. The 22-year-old’s beginning his first season as one of the Sabres’ top two centers. On Sunday, he was arguably one of the two or three best players on the ice.

“We look at those guys as being our top line that can push us to that level, and Cody is getting that opportunity that he wanted to get when he left Vancouver (last season), to get out of that 12- to 14-minute range and become a one, two centerman.”

Newcomer Steve Ott’s power-play goal opened the scoring 11:07 into the contest. Sean Coururier tied it early in the second period before Claude Giroux’s power-play tally put the Flyers up briefly.

But the Sabres, who play the Maple Leafs tonight in Toronto, never blinked.

**“We kept our focus, kept our composure,” Pominville said.**

## **Grigorenko, Ott impress in Sabres debuts**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
January 20, 2013

BUFFALO – Ten minutes after the Sabres' 5-2 opening-day win over the Philadelphia Flyers had ended, Steve Ott was still thinking about that nifty chance beside the net slick rookie center Mikhail Grigorenko had created for him.

Sure, Ott was excited about his power-play goal that opened the scoring just 11:07 into his Sabres debut. But the opportunity that had gotten away was still playing inside his head at bit.

"I kind of feel bad. He set the table," Ott said Sunday inside the First Niagara Center. "I kind of almost had a gimme there on the side of the net. I wish I would've put it in for the kid. But you know what? This kid's going to be real good. Obviously, I think it started tonight. People are going to start recognizing the stamina in a heartbeat.

"Obviously, if I can stick with him for a little while, obviously I'll ride his coattails."

Ott might have a good gig for years to come.

Grigorenko, the 12th overall pick in June's NHL Entry Draft, became just the sixth 18-year-old to dress in the Sabres' opening-day lineup. At 18 years and 254 days old, only four players – Shawn Anderson, Tom Barrasso, Phil Housley and Pierre Turgeon, the team's last regular 18-year-old – have played for the team at a younger age, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Grigorenko played 11:13 over 15 shifts in his NHL debut, mostly beside Ott and Jochen Hecht. The Russian also skated 50 seconds on the power play.

He drew a penalty and was on the ice for the Flyers' first goal.

Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said Grigorenko played "steady" and "consistent."

"I probably used him as much as I wanted to," Ruff said. "I think there's going to be an opportunity to inject him in a few other places in the coming games. But (I) wanted to get him through that first game, and I thought it went well. ...

"I thought defensively, sometimes in his own end we got hemmed in a little bit. But positionally, I thought he did a good job."

Grigorenko shook off his nervousness early, never looking out of place against some opponents nearly twice his age.

"I wasn't nervous at all (the) first two shifts," Grigorenko said. "I think I was more nervous in warm-up."

The Sabres can play Grigorenko four more times before the first year of his entry-level contract kicks in.

“It was my first game, but I adjusted to this level,” Grigorenko said. “I sure hope I stay here. I really like it here.”

Ott joked he feels bigger around the 6-foot-3 Grigorenko, who he called “a beast.”

“For a young kid, he’s learning on the fly, which is fun to watch,” Ott said. “He’s handling it great. He’s handling his pressure. I thought he was dynamite for his first NHL game.”

Meanwhile, Ott, an offseason acquisition from Dallas, showcased his sturdy all-around game Sunday, being a physical pest in addition to playing on the power play, killing penalties and taking draws.

“It’s trying to find places for guys to fit,” Ruff said. “Steve’s played a lot of power plays, he’s killed a lot of penalties. He’s a good faceoff guy. I want to try to keep him involved. (We) know he can hit, know he can agitate. But it’s good to get on the score sheet. Confidence-wise, I think it’s great for him.”

Ott added: “The feeling, the crowd, the whole experience of it, you dream of that moment. For the last nine months I was worried how long it was going to take to score that goal. Obviously, to put one in in a hurry grabs a little confidence from that.”

xxx

Sabres winger Ville Leino (lower body) missed the game and is doubtful for tonight’s contest against the Maple Leafs in Toronto.

The Sabres also scratched forwards Nathan Gerbe (spine) and Cody McCormick (finger) and defensemen T.J. Brennan and Mike Weber (both healthy).

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Legendary Sabres play-by-play man Rick Jeanneret wasn’t feeling well Sunday and missed the game. Paul Hamilton subbed. Jeanneret, who’s resting at home, hopes to call games later this week, the team said.

Notes: Wingers Drew Stafford and Thomas Vanek are the Sabres’ assistants to captain Jason Pominville this season. The two rotated with Paul Gaustad and Derek Roy last year. ... Vanek’s five-point performance was the first by a Sabre since Stafford’s January 18, 2008. ... Players and team personnel greeted fans entering the building Sunday, a goodwill gesture following the 113-day NHL lockout.

## **Sabres win home opener**

By Kevin Oklobzija

Democrat and Chronicle

January 19, 2013

**BUFFALO** — Anxiety overwhelmed Steve Ott as the puck drop on Sunday's season opener for the Buffalo Sabres drew closer.

Since he was traded from the Dallas Stars in July, the veteran left winger has wanted to show just how important his on-ice snarl and snark can be to his new team.

"I was up at 2 o'clock, 3 o'clock, 6 o'clock; I was nervous," Ott admitted. "You want to do well, you want to prove yourself."

Mission accomplished — by not just Ott but the entire Sabres team.

While there were times when the rust of a 288-day layoff were very evident, the Sabres still managed to throw together a little power-play razzle-dazzle when they needed goals, especially Thomas Vanek.

The veteran left winger with the magical hands scored twice and assisted on goals by Ott, Tyler Myers and Cody Hodgson as the Sabres defeated the Philadelphia Flyers 5-2 in the matinee in front of 19,070 frenzied, NHL-starved fans at the First Niagara Center.

"How easy is it to grab energy from an anxious crowd of hockey people," Ott said about the atmosphere in the arena.

The five-point performance was the first for Vanek, who is now one game into his eighth NHL season. It was also the first by a Sabres player since Drew Stafford scored three goals and assisted on two against the one-for-the-history-books Atlanta Thrashers on Jan. 18, 2008.

"Good linemates and a little bit lucky at the same time," Vanek said. "It won't happen too many more times, I can tell you that."

Don't be so sure. OK, maybe there won't be five-point nights, but there will be production, his linemates and coach belief.

"I think we're capable of doing a lot of good things," Pominville said.

Vanek set up the game's first goal by Ott, scored the tying goal late in the second period, and then assisted on the next two in the third period — by Tyler Myers at 14:57 and Cody Hodgson with 3:47 left — as Buffalo started the abbreviated NHL season with a comeback victory on home ice.

"Every pass I made went in," Vanek said.

He then added the exclamation point to the win with an empty net goal in the closing minute.

“It was more than a solid start by Thomas,” Ruff said. “He really skated, he made some great plays. That line was the difference.”

Hodgson skated with Vanek and Pominville for seven games to close out the 2011-12 season, so there was some familiarity there. Vanek and Pominville have been together for eons, even as prospects with the Rochester Americans in 2004-05.

“Go all the way back to their days in Rochester,” Ruff said. “Those two guys are like glue.

“ ‘Van’ was fabulous and he (Cody) was terrific and ‘Poms’ was somewhere in between those two.”

Ott was welcomed into Sabres Nation when he scored the first of Buffalo’s three power-play goals. His one-timer off a pass from Pominville came 11:07 into the game and was the only goal in the first period.

“Obviously the feeling, the crowd, the whole experience,” Ott said. “You want to put that in because for the last nine months I’ve been worried about how long it would take to score that goal.”

He was traded and hulking winger John Scott (6-foot-8, 280 pounds) were part of management’s attempt to craft a tougher, meaner Sabres team. It may have worked. When Tyler Ennis was hit from behind by abrasive Flyers winger Scott Hartnell, Stafford immediately challenged him to a fight.

“What ‘Staff’ did was awesome,” Ruff said. “He addressed it, he didn’t wait for someone else to address it.”

Like Rome, a reputation for toughness cannot be built in a day, however.

“To raise a level of physical intensity and be a team that’s tough to play against, it doesn’t happen in one game,” Ruff said.

Game 1 was a pretty good start, though, in all categories on the how-to-win checklist.

## **Sabres owner Pegula apologizes for lockout**

Associated Press  
January 19, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) -- Buffalo Sabres owner Terry Pegula had more to say than usual heading into the new - and shortened - hockey season.

On Saturday, Pegula first apologized to all those affected by the nearly four-month lockout, and then announced a contract extension with general manager Darcy Regier, who is about to begin his 16th year in the position.

"We apologize to the whole hockey fan base, the media, our sponsors, and our supporters for the hardship we may have put people through," said Pegula, whose team will open the season Sunday at home against Philadelphia. "Sometimes things happen that you don't plan for. I can tell you this, we truly are excited about being back."

Pegula then threw his support behind Regier, who has led the Sabres to four appearances in the Eastern Conference finals - most recently in 2007. However, Buffalo has missed the playoffs in three of the last five seasons.

"He's a talented guy," Pegula said. "From what I read, maybe not everyone agrees with that, but he has all the resources now. We work very well together and we're looking forward to the future."

Terms of the agreement, that Pegula said was in place for quite some time, weren't announced.

"I'm very grateful and honored to be able to continue in this capacity," Regier said, "working with this ownership and people that I've had the honor to work with for a lot of years. We continue to grow and improve."

Pegula also backed the stance taken by NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman and the other club owners during the lockout that forced the season to be cut from 82 games to 48.

"I'm part of a team of owners, so I definitely felt we all needed to be united in the things we wanted to get for the league," Pegula said. "Deep down inside, you have to help some of these teams that are really struggling. That's how you keep a league, or we'll be back to the Original Six before you know it. It was worth it for the health of keeping a 30-team league. I told Gary some things that I'll keep to myself."

But he did disclose one thing he told Bettman.

"After the last work stoppage (which canceled the entire 2004-05 season), I swore I'd never watch another hockey game again," Pegula said. "I said that to (him) before this all started."

Now with the labor issues resolved, Pegula is looking forward to the on-ice developments, including the never-ending analysis of coach Lindy Ruff's performance.

"The one thing I noticed about Lindy is that he can change," Pegula said. "He coached the highest scoring team in the league a few years back and can also coach a team that is responsible defensively. He's pretty open-minded."

Pegula and Regier also looked beyond this current season, when three of their most-productive players - goalie Ryan Miller, captain Jason Pominville, and forward Thomas Vanek - will have one-year remaining on their contracts.

"We've had some conversations about the direction of the team, and obviously those players and others are involved," Regier said. "It'll be something we'll continue to work on and review as we move forward. It's obviously in our focus."

Making Buffalo a place that players will want to play in and remain in is also on Pegula's agenda.

"We do a lot of talking about how (team president) Ted (Black) mentions (us as) a hockey destination," Pegula said. "We want players to come here and stay here. We work on not only Ryan (Miller) but the guys you want to be here. We're always working on that."