



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*Thursday, January 24 2013*

## **Feisty Gerbe is itching to return**

By John Vogl  
The Buffalo News  
January 24, 2013

RALEIGH, N.C. – Nathan Gerbe watched the Buffalo Sabres' first two games with an intrigued eye. The feisty winger has always been ready to scrap, and he noticed his teammates were eager to display their physicality.

He can't wait to join them.

Gerbe will likely make his season debut tonight when the Sabres visit the Carolina Hurricanes. He felt fine Wednesday after his first full practice on a regular line and was just awaiting final clearance from doctors.

It shouldn't take long for him to show he's back. Gerbe had offseason back surgery and wants to test it right away, which fits in with his team's new style of physical play.

"I hope I'm playing," Gerbe said in First Niagara Center before flying south. "I want to get out there. I'm not going to be afraid. I want to hit someone, get some hits right away, and that's probably going to make me calm down and leave any doubt in my mind behind about the injury."

Gerbe is excited he's only missed a couple of games this season. He had surgery to remove material on his spinal cord in July. Because of the lockout, his recovery timetable almost perfectly coincided with the start of the NHL's schedule.

"It's been a very long, long, long recovery for me," Gerbe said. "Hopefully, all the hard work I put in the last six months is going to help."

"I've got to get back to my game, be physical and hopefully offensively help this team."

Based on Wednesday's skate, he'll have a chance to show his offensive skill. He skated alongside rookie center Mikhail Grigorenko and fellow wing Steve Ott.

"I watched Nathan play a little bit last year, catching games here and there," Ott said. "Small player, probably pound for pound one of the hardest-working guys in the NHL. You add that on a line, that's pretty fun to play with that skill level and that hard work."

The Sabres are at the 23-man roster limit, so if they activate Gerbe they'll need to make room. It's possible Ville Leino could head to injured reserve. A leg injury kept him out of the first two games and off the ice Wednesday.

"It just seemed like he wasn't gaining any traction by trying to skate and see where's he at," coach Lindy Ruff said. "The thought now is maybe give him a couple days off the ice and see if we can improve his situation that way."

Ruff and the Sabres' management will also continue to keep an eye on Grigorenko's situation. If he plays both games of the back-to-back set with Carolina (the Sabres host the Hurricanes on Friday), Grigorenko will have used up four games of his five-game tryout.

"I've adjusted to the speed," Grigorenko said. "Now I've just need to bring my skill to this lineup."

The Sabres say they're still deciding whether to keep the 18-year-old or return him to the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League. Quebec coach Patrick Roy told the Canadian Press he doesn't expect the center to return. Roy said he's been impressed with Grigorenko's defensive showing in the NHL so far.

"We'll really evaluate everything," Ruff said. "What's the best for him? What's the best to push him to the next level? Can he help us win? Can he help us win in the role he's at? All those things will go into consideration.

"We want to do what's the best for us to win hockey games."

Said Ott: "Points are one thing, but the Buffalo Sabres are 2-0. If they want to look at him individually that's one thing, but the consistency through the lineup I think is the most important thing."

Grigorenko insists he's not fazed by the rapidly dwindling tryout period and the impending decision.

"I don't really think about this," he said. "I just come every day to the arena and try to think about the present, just get ready for practice, get ready for next game. I don't think about what's going to happen in one week, what's going to happen next weekend or something. For now, I'm just getting ready for [today's] game."

So is Gerbe.

"Gerbs adds a lot of tenacity and fire, and it's something that every team needs," Sabres center Tyler Ennis said. "I know he's itching to get in."

## **Sabres notebook: Enroth likely to get the call tonight**

By John Vogl  
The Buffalo News  
January 24, 2013

Lindy Ruff has long been a proponent of keeping hockey secrets, especially when it comes to which goaltender he'll use. He broke out of character with a big hint Wednesday.

Backup Jhonas Enroth is expected to make his first start of the season tonight, spelling Ryan Miller when the Buffalo Sabres visit Carolina.

Miller started the first two games and would return to the crease Friday when the Sabres host the Hurricanes.

After initially being coy about who would start today, Ruff dropped the subtleties about Enroth.

"It's important to get him going," Ruff said. "We've got five games in really less than eight days. You look at it that way, we need to get him in there. At the same time, we need to keep Ryan fresh.

"The longer you wait I think it's tough on him. The sooner we get it in," said Ruff, who paused while glancing and grinning at the questioner, "the better."

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Sabres Hall of Fame broadcaster Rick Jeanneret will miss his third straight game with an illness. Kevin Sylvester will fill in for the play-by-play man for the second consecutive outing.

Jeanneret said via text message that he's "getting there," but he wasn't ready to make the road trip.

The Sabres announced that Sunday's opener against Philadelphia drew the second-highest rating in Buffalo for a regular-season game. The NBC broadcast posted a 20.1 rating and 34 share, second only to the 2008 Winter Classic.

The 20.1 rating means that 20.1 percent of television-equipped households tuned into the game. The share means 34 percent of households watching TV had the game on, which equates to about 127,000 homes.

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The Sabres hope their second road game goes better than their first when it comes to faceoffs. Toronto dominated Buffalo in the dot with a 45-19 edge.

“It’s obvious to look at the stats and say there’s something to improve on,” said center Tyler Ennis, who won just 2-of-14 draws against the Maple Leafs. “Last game, our first time on the road being the first to get in the circle, there’s adjustments. We grinded out a good win. It’s something we have to keep working on.”

The Sabres’ most crucial loss came with under two minutes to play. Cody Hodgson, who lost 17-of-23 faceoffs, was beaten in his own zone and the Leafs scored to pull within 2-1.

Buffalo had a 36-31 edge against Philadelphia in its home opener.

“If you’re not winning them, you’ve got to be able to defense them,” Ruff said. “Faceoffs, they’ve cost us a lot of possession. The late goal, the bounce off the plexiglass is kind of a tough one, but we’ve been able to defend most faceoff plays when it comes to losing them. We want to get better.

“We’re going to keep working at it. One game we were pretty good, then one game we were pretty bad. From that front we thought we’d struggle a little bit in the faceoff circle, and that’s where we’re at.”

## **Sabres' Gerbe says he's ready to play; Enroth set to make first start**

By John Vogl  
The Buffalo News  
January 23, 2013

Nathan Gerbe is excited. His back feels good, so that means he's ready to be back.

The Sabres left winger got through a full practice on a regular line today in First Niagara Center, and he feels ready to make his season debut Thursday in Carolina.

"I hope I'm playing," said Gerbe, who still had to meet with doctors to be formally cleared to come off injured reserve for his offseason back surgery.

"It's been a very long, long, long recovery for me. I've been out since basically April, and to come back this is my first game lockout or no lockout, this is about the time I'd be ready anyways, so I'm pretty excited.

"Hopefully, all the hard work I put in the last six months is going to help."

If the Sabres activate Gerbe, they'll need to clear a roster spot. It's possible Ville Leino could go on IR. He skipped practice after missing the first two games with a leg injury.

"It just seemed like he wasn't gaining any traction by trying to skate and see where's he at," coach Lindy Ruff said. "The thought now is maybe give him a couple days off the ice and see if we can improve his situation that way."

Ruff gave a strong hint that goaltender Jhonas Enroth will make his first start of the season Thursday. The Sabres play the Hurricanes on back-to-back nights, so that would give Ryan Miller an extra day of rest before the Friday home game.

"It's important to get him going," Ruff said of Enroth. "We've got five games in really less than eight days. You look at it that way, we need to get him in there. At the same time, we need to keep Ryan fresh.

"I thought he looked great that whole week of camp, and the longer you wait I think it's tough on him. The sooner we get it in the better."

## **Sabres Myers off to slow start**

By Howard Simon

WGR 550

January 23, 2013

There are a number of factors that need to play out for the Buffalo Sabres if they are, at the very least, going to make a return appearance in the Stanley Cup Playoffs and win a post season series for the first time in six years.

Among them is the play of 4th year defenseman Tyler Myers. Its only two games but the player tabbed by many of us as a "franchise defenseman of the future", has struggled out of the gates. Despite scoring a goal in the opening win over Philadelphia, Myers play and his decision making was shaky. He took a step back, at least in terms of ice time, during Monday's win in Toronto.

Myers ended up with just 18 minutes and 6 seconds of ice time, a far cry from his career average of just under 23 minutes a game. It was his second lowest ice time total going all the way back to the start of last season. Myers was on the ice for the Leafs power play goal with 1:42 left and that was the last time he was out there. With the Sabres trying to hang on to the 2-1 lead and facing a Toronto team with an extra attacker, Lindy Ruff went with Robyn Regehr, Jordan Leopold, Christian Ehrhoff and Andrej Sekera as his defensemen over the final 102 seconds.

During his weekly segment on the WGR morning show, Ruff said Myers is struggling a little on the physical side and in his battles and needed to tighten up his game inside the Sabres zone.

Myers, who turns 23 on February 1st, burst out of the gate as a rookie and was fairly consistent on the way to winning the Calder Trophy in 2010. The last two seasons he has started slowly and has dealt with extended slumps. Last season Myers game was down enough for Ruff to actually bench him.

He had 48 points and was a plus 13 his rookie season but Myers production slipped to 37 points and he was an even player two years ago. Playing only 55 games last season due to injuries, a suspension and the benching, Myers had 23 points and was a plus 5.

Despite his inconsistent play, the Sabres were a different team when Myers was on the ice. Buffalo was 31-21-4 when he played and just 8-11-7 when Myers was out of the lineup.

Youth is no longer an excuse for Myers, who is making \$12 million this season thanks to a 7 year, \$38.5 million extension signed in September 2011. He has three seasons, 219 regular season games and two playoff series on his resume. Myers needs to become a consistent force for the Sabres both in his own end and on the offensive side of the ice. You can tell Myers is on top of his game when his passes are starting plays and when he joins the offensive rush, even going down low at times.

Myers was part of one of the best draft classes ever in terms of defensemen. Drew Doughty, Zach Bogosian, Alex Pietrangelo and Luke Schenn were all drafted before him. Erik Karlsson, Jake Gardiner, Michael Del Zotto and John Carlson were selected after him in round one. Doughty and Pietrangelo have had better careers to this point and Erik Karlsson appears to have flown past Myers last season by winning the Norris Trophy. Its time for Myers to take the next step and play consistently so Ruff can trust him and lean on him for the workload that top defensemen are asked to handle.



## **Sabres' Pominville, Vanek proving to be dynamic wing combination**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
January 24, 2013

BUFFALO – Early in the second period of the Sabres' 2-1 win Monday, Thomas Vanek knocked Nikolai Kulemin down in his own zone, grabbed the loose puck and zoomed down the left wing into Toronto territory on a three-on-two break.

Vanek then laid a perfect pass over to Jason Pominville, almost without looking, as he stopped at the top of the left circle. Cody Hodgson, meanwhile, was roaring to the crease with a defender, giving Pominville an open look at the net.

A second later, the captain snapped a shot by Maple Leafs goalie Ben Scrivens.

The winning goal showcased the supreme chemistry the trio has been sharing, especially Pominville and Vanek, teammates the last nine seasons.

“We both saw Cody going to the net, which ... showed we both kind of read it the same way, that he should be open if everything goes the right way,” Vanek said Wednesday inside the First Niagara Center after the Sabres prepared for tonight's tilt in Carolina against the Hurricanes.

So far, everything's going the right way for the scorching combination, the NHL's best early-season line. Vanek already has two goals and six points. Pominville has a goal and five points. Hodgson has two scores.

“The way they play the game makes it easy,” Hodgson said. “They make the smart plays. It's not too complicated.”

Pominville and Vanek developed much of their chemistry last season, the first year they spent significant time as linemates.

They began 2011-12 dominating with Luke Adam as their center. Vanek compiled eight goals and 15 points in October. Pominville had five goals and 14 points.

The wingers performed like they had been together for years.

“We seem like we know where we're at in certain situations,” Pominville said. “We kind of read the game the same way. We both like to make plays when plays are there. At the same time, we can shoot when we have an opportunity.”

Vanek believes “our games are similar but they're not.”

What does that mean?

“I think they’re similar in the way we think the game more than anything,” he explained. “I think we see the ice a similar way, the open space, and that’s the biggest difference. When I pull up, I think he reads the same space that’s open that I read, which obviously makes it easier.”

Monday’s goal proved that.

Communication, of course, is vital. Pominville and Vanek sit next to each other all the time. They’re always talking.

“We’re in constant talk throughout the game,” Pominville said. “If we see something we like or we didn’t like, then we’ll let each other know. You have to be honest. If you’re on the same line, if you want to have success, you have to be able to communicate, whether it’s good or bad.”

Hodgson added: “It doesn’t matter where people come from or where they’re born. I think they just speak hockey. They communicate on the ice. ... (They) just know where certain plays kind of develop, where they’re going to be.

“My job is kind of to just make sure I compliment that and be in support positions. I know the creativity they have together is pretty special.”

Hodgson’s presence at center has been huge. Adam was eventually moved off the line last season and went back to the minors. Pominville went beside Ville Leino and Derek Roy late in the year. Vanek skated with Hodgson and Corey Tropp.

Pominville finished the season with 30 goals and 73 points. Vanek finished with 26 goals and 61 points as some undisclosed injuries slowed him much of the second half.

“I’ve always liked to know who you’re going to play with and most times stick to it,” Pominville said. “I think throughout last year we were fortunate that me and Thomas stayed together. ... So at least we had two guys who kind of were able to figure each other out. But if you have three, it helps even more.”

Vanek traces much of this season’s start to the brief time he spent with Hodgson last year.

“Sometimes it takes a while to score chemistry. Sometimes you just have it,” Vanek said. “... Right away you could see (Hodgson) was a smart player and I meshed with him pretty well.”

With a short training camp this season following the NHL lockout, putting Pominville and Vanek back together was a no-brainer for Ruff.

“I think we were able to carry some momentum,” Pominville said. “Me and Thomas have the chemistry. You add a Hodge, who’s been playing throughout the lockout (in Rochester). He’s excited about the opportunity. ... It’s been fun.”

## **Gerbe Not Yet Cleared to Play**

By Greg Bauch and Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 23, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Sabre forward Nathan Gerbe felt good after Wednesday's practice and hopes to return to the line-up in time for Thursday night's game in Carolina. He has not yet been cleared by doctors to play. Gerbe is recovering from a back injury. Ville Leino is not quite ready to go and will be kept off of the ice for a couple of days. If they want to play Gerbe, they can activate him and put Leino on injured reserve.

Gerbe is of course anxious to get back. He said, "Felt like the last three months I've been skating, so the mindset hasn't changed. I'm gonna work hard and get better, that's been my mindset since day one of therapy. I hope I'm playing."

Things have not been easy for Gerbe getting over the procedure done on his back, "It's more frustrating me experiencing it all year. I'm never going to use that as an excuse, it's part of the game. I'm sure everybody's playing with a lot of injuries that no one knows about, so for me I have to get back to my game, go out there and be physical and hopefully offensively help the team."

It's been a very, very, very long recovery for me, I've been out since basically April and this is my first game, lockout or no lockout. This is about the time I would've been back anyways."

Coach Lindy Ruff said that Gerbe is getting closer, "Yeah, we got him through today, on a regular line, I guess we'll see where he's at (Thursday) but, obviously, he's taken a step closer to playing."

Gerbe practiced with rookie Mikhail Grigorenko and Steve Ott. Gerbe liked the first impression he got of the 18 year old rookie, "He's a good player, high skilled so for me I have to use my speed and use my quickness, get in on the forecheck and get my chances and try to create some opportunities for him."

The Sabres have back-to-back games with Carolina Thursday and Friday. Coach Lindy Ruff said that goalie Jhonas Enroth will play in one of them. The head coach added, "I think it's important to get him going. We've got five games in less than eight days so we need to get him in there. At the same time we need to get him in there and at the same time we need to keep his mind fresh. I thought he looked great the whole week of camp and the longer you wait, I think it's tougher on him so the sooner we get it in, the better."

## **Sabres' Gerbe close to returning; Enroth to get first start**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
January 24, 2013

BUFFALO – While Nathan Gerbe still had to be cleared to play Wednesday, it appears the feisty Sabres winger could make his season debut tonight in Carolina after undergoing offseason spine surgery.

Gerbe skated on the left wing Wednesday beside 18-year-old rookie Mikhail Grigorenko and Steve Ott, his first action on a regular line this year.

“We’ll see where he’s at (today),” Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said following practice inside the First Niagara Center.

Gerbe underwent a procedure called a Discectomy L5-S1 for an L4 herniated disc in July. He won’t be tentative, however. He plans to play his regular hard-nosed style.

“I’m not shy. I want to get out there,” Gerbe said. “I’m not going to be afraid. I want to hit someone. I want to get some hits out of the way. That’s probably going to make me calm down.”

Meanwhile, backup goalie Jhonas Enroth could receive his first start of the season tonight. Ryan Miller played the first two games.

Ruff, who’s notoriously secretive about his starting netminder, said Enroth would play tonight or Friday at home against Carolina.

Then he dropped a hint.

“I think it’s important to get him going,” Ruff said. “It’s also important (because) we’ve got five games in really less than eight (days). You look at it that way, we need to get him in there. At the same time, we need to keep Ryan fresh.

“I thought (Enroth) looked great the whole week of camp. The longer you wait, I think it’s tough on him. The sooner we get him in, the better.”

Ruff then walked off smiling. He recently said Enroth would play about 10 or 12 of the 48 games.

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Winger Ville Leino (lower body) sat out Wednesday’s practice.

“It seemed like he wasn’t gaining any traction by trying to skate and seeing where he’s at,” Ruff said. “The thought now is maybe getting him a couple days off the ice and see if we can improve his situation that way.”

Leino had been skating with Grigorenko and Ott. Jochen Hecht, who centered John Scott and Patrick Kaleta Wednesday, subbed for Leino the first two games.

Now Grigorenko's getting another linemate.

"He's going to have to get used to that," Ruff said.

Grigorenko doesn't mind the changes.

"They're great players," the Russian said.

Notes: Ruff said forward Cody McCormick (finger) is "getting better." ... Matt Ellis could be the odd man out tonight if Gerbe returns. ... The Sabres' season-opening 5-2 home victory Sunday drew a 20.1 Buffalo rating and 34 share, the highest ever for a regular-season game other than the 2008 Winter Classic.

## **AROUND THE NHL**

By Brian Duff

Sabres.com

January 23, 2013

Less than a week into the 2013 season, here's a quick look at the stories that have caught my eye so far.

### **The Tampa Bay Lightning**

The first two periods against the Islanders on Monday notwithstanding, this team is fun to watch. Thanks to Canisius standout Cory Conacher adapting with relative ease to the NHL game (2-3-5 in 3 gp), the various combinations I've seen of Conacher with St. Louis, Lecavalier, Stamkos, Purcell, Malone, et al, have been consistently effective.

Adding much needed depth on the blueline with Matt Carle and Sami Salo, they look better on the back end overall as Eric Brewer has had a nice start and it's given that much more insulation around fourth-year giant Victor Hedman, who has had a quietly effective start through three games.

Anders Lindback will most likely earn the bulk of the playing time this year, but Mathieu Garon may have turned in one of the best early season performances so far in a 4-1 win over Carolina on Tuesday.

### **Ottawa Senators**

The legend of Paul MacLean (much like his stache) continues to grow in Canada's capital. Consistency and belief seem to be the hallmarks of his team, not to mention maximizing young skill (see Turriss, Kyle; and Karlsson, Erik).

It's also clear that Craig Anderson knows what is behind him in the system, and thus far has seen very little get behind him where it counts.

### **New Jersey**

Same old, same old. Working with what you have, rather than worrying about what you've lost, has often been the Devils' way. Fewer people questioning the Travis Zajac extension by the day.

Four winless teams in the East; four winless teams in the West. And among the eight teams, some pretty elite company in the Kings, Rangers, Flyers, Canucks and Coyotes.

Of course it's far too early to get really wound up about any of their predicaments, but I do wonder if it won't be an ongoing grind for the Flyers and Canucks. Injuries at key positions (most notably center ice) aren't helping their situations. And with never-ending rumors about what should or shouldn't be done with their goaltenders, this has the makings of two southbound trains that eventually meet at a mutually agreed upon terminal (also known as a place to consummate a trade) in order to keep their seasons' on the rails.

Officiating Consistency – no love for the glove

No games are ever called exactly the same way, but – much like how the game returned from the lockout in 2005 – there does appear to be a purpose and a pattern being applied by those in the stripes right now. Most notably, as Steve Ott found out Monday (and others have learned too) there is zero tolerance for covering the puck with your hand or attempting to direct the puck off a faceoff with your hand. Come to think of it, you still can't score with your hand either. Sorry, Joffrey.

That empty (net) feeling

Two games, two good looks at a late-game empty net for the Buffalo Sabres.

Thomas Vanek's approach – wait as long as possible, get as close as possible – before hammering it home was a perfect way to cap the home opener on Sunday.

Jason Pominville's attempt – from longer range, and with a little more resistance from the defense – didn't quite produce the same finality to the contest as Vanek's. The captain maintains it looked good as he let it go. A surprising outward turn at the end left him feeling a little sheepish, especially considering how hairy the game became in the closing seconds. Pominville says not to worry about merciless ribbing from his mates – he's the first one to belittle his own effort on the play.

Bottom line - any time you are shooting at an empty net in the final two minutes, your team must be doing something right. Sometimes, just a little more "right" than you would like.

## **Sabres chase 3-0 start against winless Hurricanes**

By Tal Pinchevsky

NHL.com

January 23, 2013

SABRES (2-0-0) at HURRICANES (0-2-0)

TV: MSG, SP5D

Season series: This is the first game in a home-and-home sequence for these clubs and the first of three meetings this season. Carolina held a slight edge in last season's series, going 2-1-1 against Buffalo, although Sabres forwards Thomas Vanek and Jason Pominville led all scorers in those four games with five points apiece.

Big story: While the Sabres reeled off two solid wins to start the 2012-13 campaign, Carolina stumbled badly out of the gate. The Hurricanes were dominated 5-1 against Florida in the season opener before losing 4-1 as they hosted the Lightning on Tuesday night.

Team Scope:

Sabres: Buffalo couldn't have looked much better in its season opener, as they treated the home crowd at First Niagara Center to a convincing 5-2 win over the Flyers. Thomas Vanek led the charge with his first-ever five-point night. Vanek added an assist Monday night against the Maple Leafs, but it was captain Jason Pominville who really carried the offense.

In Toronto, Pominville earned his fourth assist of the season when he set up Cody Hodgson in the first period before scoring the eventual game-winner early in the second. Toronto halved the Buffalo lead late, but Ryan Miller held the fort as the Sabres won 2-1 despite being outshot 35-20.

Hurricanes: Following an exciting offseason in which they acquired two big-name forwards in Jordan Staal and Alexander Semin, the Hurricanes' season couldn't have started much worse. Opening the season in Sunrise, Florida, against the Panthers, Carolina allowed five unanswered goals in the first 23:35 of game action before Patrick Dwyer earned the lone Canes tally in a 5-1 loss. What's more, Semin and Staal were a combined minus-2 with just three shots in the game.

Carolina looked to bounce back in its home opener Tuesday night against the Lightning, but Tampa Bay had other ideas. After the Lightning scored twice in the first period, Jeff Skinner replied in the second, with Jordan Staal and Semin earning their first points with the Hurricanes. But the Bolts scored two more goals in the third to wrap up a 4-1 win in which they were outshot 36-26.

"We need a couple more guys to raise their games just five percent and it will make a huge difference," coach Kirk Muller said after the 4-1 loss. "Just like last game, we'll



dwell on the good stuff and push that stuff. But we've got to be a tougher team to play against."

Who's hot: No one has been hotter than Vanek, whose six points in two games led the League coming into Wednesday's action. His four assists and 12 shots were also among the most in the League. ... For Carolina, Eric Staal has yet to register a point but his 10 shots lead the team. Justin Faulk has also been a steady force on defense while leading the team in ice time.

Injury report: Buffalo could be missing some forwards, as center Cody McCormick (finger) and winger Nathan Gerbe (back) are both on injured reserve while winger Ville Leino is questionable with a strained hip. ... The Hurricanes are without winger Tuomo Ruutu, who could miss the entire season following hip surgery.

## **Sabres-Hurricanes Preview**

By Taylor Bechtold

Associated Press

January 23, 2013

The Buffalo Sabres are hoping a solid start by goalie Ryan Miller is a sign of good things to come.

That's not so good for the Carolina Hurricanes, who have struggled to score coming out of the nine-month layoff.

The visiting Sabres seek their best start in four seasons and look to hand the Hurricanes their worst in 15 years Thursday night in the opener of a home-and-home series.

While Buffalo (2-0-0) aims to open with three straight wins for the first time since the 2008-09 season, Carolina (0-2-0) looks to avoid its first three-game start without a point since 1997-98.

That may be a difficult task against Miller, who will try to stay hot after stopping 34 shots in a 2-1 victory at Toronto on Monday.

"He is a very good goalie, one of the top goalies in the league for a reason," Maple Leafs captain Dion Phaneuf said.

While it's only been two games, Miller carries a 1.50 goals-against average into his matchup with the Hurricanes. The only time in Miller's nine previous seasons when he finished with a GAA under 2.50, he won the Vezina Trophy and led Buffalo to the Northeast Division title in 2009-10.

Miller, though, has lost seven of nine career starts in Raleigh, posting a 3.14 GAA. He allowed nine goals in three meetings with the Hurricanes last season, losing two.

Things could be different this time as he faces a Carolina team that has scored the fewest goals in the NHL.

The Hurricanes followed a season-opening 5-1 defeat at Florida with a 4-1 home loss to Tampa Bay on Tuesday.

"There's no panic, but we've definitely got to find a way to work harder and find a way to win games," captain Eric Staal said.

Patrick Dwyer and Jeff Skinner have scored the team's two goals. Skinner has Carolina's only goal in 11 power-play opportunities.

The Sabres scored three power-play goals in a 5-2 win over Philadelphia on Sunday but had none a day later in Toronto. They were outshot 35-20 on Monday, but Cody Hodgson scored for the second straight game and Jason Pominville notched his first goal.

"We were just able to pull it out," Hodgson said. "It wasn't the prettiest, but we'll take it."

Thomas Vanek and Pominville are off to fast starts with six and five points, respectively. Each had three goals and two assists in last season's series with Carolina as the teams split four games.

Hurricanes goalie Cam Ward is 4-0-2 with 1.98 GAA in his last six against the Sabres but enters this matchup struggling. He's allowed eight goals on 38 shots for one of the league's worst GAAs (6.00).

Buffalo has gone 4-1-2 in its last seven trips to Carolina, but that regulation loss came in its most recent visit, 4-2 last Jan. 6.

These teams meet again Friday in Buffalo.

## **NHL should adopt 48-game schedule on permanent basis**

By Bill Bruton Jr.  
Batavia Daily News  
January 24, 2013

I loved what was said recently after players and owners ratified a new collective bargaining agreement in the NHL, which meant that 2013 would see a lockout-shortened 48-game schedule.

- Every game counts;
- You won't be able to take any nights off;
- The regular season will really mean something;
- You have to be ready to play from the opening night;
- It's hard to predict what's going to happen.

It all sounds great to me.

One of the reasons people pay so much attention to the NFL is that every game really does count. With only 16 regular season games, if you lose three or four in a row, you're toast.

It's time the NHL — and the NBA for that matter — adopted that mentality.

For the most part, the regular season doesn't matter in the NHL. Normally, it's an 82-game, six-month long grind to eliminate less than half the teams in the 30-team league.

What's the payoff for a team that finishes No. 1 in its conference? You don't get a first-round bye like the NFL. No, you get home ice edge against the eighth seed in a seven-game series. Lots of times over the years that top seed has run into a hot goalie and gotten upset in the first round.

The Buffalo Sabres literally skated through the regular season the last two seasons and didn't get interested until the final month, seemingly turning it on only when it looked like they might not make the postseason. That worked two years ago, but they fell short last season.

This season, the regular season matters more than ever. It's a 48-game sprint to the finish.

Except for the sprint aspect, the NHL — and the NBA — should adopt a 48- or 50-game regular season every year.

You could start the season in the middle of October and have everybody play just two or three games a week. The regular season would only be five months instead of six, and you could start the playoffs in early March and finish by the end of April.

Players' legs would be fresher. You wouldn't have the four-games-in-five-nights deals where players are skating on fumes by that fourth contest.

While you're at it, reward the top teams with playoff byes. Right now there's not a lot of incentive in the regular season. It doesn't make that much difference if you finish first or eighth.

If you did this, you would almost guarantee a better product on the ice. And fans, who pay a small fortune to attend NHL games these days, would appreciate it as well.

It would truly be quality over quantity.

Of course, with less games, there would be less revenue for players and owners.

Which probably makes this proposal a pipe dream.

But hey, a guy can dream, can't he?