



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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'Canes break through on Sabres

By John Vogl
The Buffalo News
January 24, 2013

RALEIGH, N.C. — The Buffalo Sabres were too careless with and without the puck to keep up with Carolina. They have their first loss to prove it.

“We made some ill-advised decisions, and a lot of different guys, too,” coach Lindy Ruff said after a 6-3 loss to the Hurricanes.

It seemed everyone from captain Jason Pominville to 18-year-old rookie Mikhail Grigorenko had moments to forget Thursday night, and it led to a game to forget. Carolina, which totaled just one goal during its opening two losses, repeatedly ran away from the Sabres as the typically loud crowd in PNC Arena roared.

“It wasn’t our best game,” Sabres center Tyler Ennis said. “We didn’t do the right things with the puck. I was guilty of that, for sure. It was tough. We’ve got to bounce back and be better.”

The Sabres get an immediate chance at redemption. The teams meet at 7 tonight in First Niagara Center.

Carolina captain Eric Staal scored three times and former Rookie of the Year Jeff Skinner added two to propel the Hurricanes. They offset the now-expected contributions of Thomas Vanek, Pominville and Cody Hodgson, who combined for three goals and two assists and have reached the score sheet in every game.

That line was hardly immune from mistakes, though, as it was on the ice for five of Carolina’s six goals.

“They made some great plays and have done the bulk of our scoring,” Ruff said, “but at the same time they were on for quite a few.”

After a scoreless first period, the teams kept the scoreboard operator busy with a six-pack in the second. Carolina scored four times, including the final two in just nine seconds after Buffalo tied the game.

“It’s just unfortunate that it happens when we battle back,” Pominville said.

Skinner opened the scoring 1:02 into the period. The Hurricanes’ short-handed unit doubled the lead three minutes later, stealing a pass from Pominville. Defenseman Justin Faulk bolted out of his zone along the right wall to start a three-on-one. He got all the way to the faceoff dot in Buffalo’s end and fired a slap shot between the pads of Jhonas Enroth, who finished with 32 saves in his first start of the season.

“I’m very disappointed in myself,” said Enroth, who is winless in 12 decisions dating to Nov. 26, 2011. “I felt a little bit lost. I wasn’t really in the right position on a couple of shots.”

The Sabres answered with a pair of goals midway through the period. Hodgson made it 2-1 with 11:11 left. Pominville tied it with 9:21 to go while horizontal in the slot as he reached out his stick while falling to deflect Christian Ehrhoff’s point shot.

The tie was short-lived. Carolina’s two-goal flurry left Buffalo and its top two centers reeling.

Skinner stole the puck from Hodgson behind the net and skated out front to tuck it home before Enroth could react to the turnover. While the red-clad crowd of 18,081 was still roaring, Staal beat Ennis on the center-ice faceoff and got behind the center to accept a breakaway pass by defenseman Jamie McBain.

“They capitalized on what we gave them,” Hodgson said.

The Sabres clawed back again with 6:06 gone in the third as Vanek continued his MVP performance. The winger skated through the slot and dished a no-look backhand pass onto the tape of the driving Pominville, who pointed with glee at Vanek after the easy goal.

That was the last time Buffalo smiled. Staal went top shelf with a cross-ice pass with 10:34 to play, then added an empty-net goal with 1:28 to go to bring hats from the crowd 18,081.

Grigorenko played just 2:19 in the second period after a shaky first. He finished with a shot and a giveaway in 11:47.

“We didn’t do the right things with the puck against a desperate team,” said Ennis, who is one of eight forwards without a goal while Pominville, Hodgson and Vanek have eight of the Sabres’ 10 tallies so far. “It’s frustrating. They did everything they could offensively to get us the win. We need some secondary scoring, so our line’s overdue. We need to have a good one.”

Sabres notebook: Single rooms lead to uneasy quiet time

By John Vogl
The Buffalo News
January 24, 2013

RALEIGH, N.C. — Patrick Kaleta admits he's a little paranoid on the road now. He no longer has a roommate because of a new rule in the collective bargaining agreement, and he's worried he'll miss a meeting, team meal or bus ride to the rink.

"The past two times I've had guys make sure that I'm up," the Buffalo Sabres forward said Thursday. "It's just the paranoia of making sure you're up and not being able to rely on your roommate in case you do forget."

The Sabres have taken two trips so far, and everyone's shown up for their assignments. But the CBA addition has changed the road dynamic.

"Fifty percent of me likes it, 50 percent of me wishes I had a roommate to talk to and hang out with," Kaleta said.

The players have traded camaraderie for privacy with the new rule, which entitles every player who is past his entry-level contract to his own hotel room. While guys no longer have to deal with heavy snorers or someone who likes to sleep with the television on while they prefer silence, there's also an aspect of loneliness.

There is ample downtime on the road — especially after nighttime arrivals and between the morning skates and games — and teammates typically bonded during the breaks.

"Now it's a lot of hours where you're spending time alone," coach Lindy Ruff said. "You have nobody to talk to. We've even had one request where guys want to room together still, so I think it's funny when you're offered something and all of a sudden you're rooming by yourself and think, 'You know, this isn't as fun as it used to be.'"

"In the history of the game, you had a roommate that you could sit there for a couple hours with and kibitz, talk hockey. Now you're sitting in a room all by yourself for a couple hours, and I think that's a lot different."

The only Sabres on their entry-level contracts are forwards Cody Hodgson, Marcus Foligno and Mikhail Grigorenko. The other 20 players are free to have their own room, though Thomas Vanek and Andrej Sekera elected to share a suite in Raleigh. The old rule for a room was 600 games or 10 years in the NHL; only defenseman Robyn Regehr (905 games) and forward Jochen Hecht (789) met that criteria.

Regehr occasionally misses bonding with roommates and says players need to take steps to ensure teams stay tight.

"When I really enjoyed them was after a game," Regehr said. "You're traveling and you get into some other city, and it's very hard to get to sleep anyway because you're wound

up. We sit around, talk a little bit — we call it the hot stove — so we just sit around and have a little hot stove. You talk about whatever. Usually it is hockey, but you can just talk about whatever you feel like. Usually, you get a chance to really get to know that person a lot better.

“There is an element there that I think we’ll miss out on.”

...

Hall of Fame broadcaster Rick Jeanneret, who has not called a game this season while recovering from an illness, is not expected to return to the booth until Sunday in Washington at the earliest.

He didn’t make the trip to Carolina for Thursday’s 6-3 loss to the Hurricanes, and he will miss the rematch tonight in First Niagara Center.

...

The Sabres have placed forward Ville Leino on injured reserve with a leg injury. The move is retroactive to Sunday. Leino, who did not accompany the Sabres to Carolina, is eligible to return after seven days.

The move cleared a roster spot for forward Nathan Gerbe, who was activated from IR and made his season debut. Gerbe had a rough welcome to the lineup. He dumped the puck into the Carolina zone midway through the first period and was rudely crushed into the boards from behind by winger Drayson Bowman.

Gerbe said Wednesday he was looking forward to the first test on his surgically repaired back, but being the recipient of a boarding penalty was obviously not what he had in mind. He angrily joined a scrum after the hit to go after Bowman.

“That’s something that made me go in for the back surgery from the start,” Gerbe said. “I’m expecting to be sore. Right now it’s not too bad, but I’m sure [today] it’ll be a different story.”

...

The Sabres’ second annual “Bowl-A-Rama” will be held from 2 to 6 p.m. Feb. 24 at Transit Lanes. Entry for a team of five bowlers, age 21 and over, starts at \$1,000 and features an opportunity to bowl with a Sabres player or celebrity. See Sabres.com/bowling for details.

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Buffalo fans had a record-setting response last week to the Sabres’ 50 percent off sale to welcome back the NHL. The Sabres sold nearly 50,000 pieces of merchandise, a total that eclipsed the entire 2010-11 season. More than 8,000 jerseys and 9,000 hats were sold at the Sabres Store in the arena.

Enroth's debut was not a good one

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 24, 2013

Raleigh, NC (WGR 550) -- Jhonas Enroth struggled on Thursday in Carolina, but he got out to a solid start, making seven saves in his first period of the season. Ryan Miller's backup was tested immediately when captain Eric Staal came steaming down the right wing side, but Enroth was out in front of his crease challenging. He was also quick going post-to-post to stop Bobby Sanguinetti on a wraparound attempt.

Enroth's best save came on a Hurricanes power play. Alexander Semin blasted a laser from the left point on a one timer, but the goaltender got a pad on it causing the puck to roll wide of the slot.

The second period didn't start well. Staal fanned on a shot which put Enroth down. Jeff Skinner was allowed to go to the net alone and he roofed a backhand over Enroth's shoulder.

He let in a bad goal with 3:04 left, when Justin Faulk led a shorthanded 3-on-1 break after Jason Pominville turned the puck over trying to force a pass. Faulk simply took a slap shot that went right under Enroth's pad. That puck has to be stopped. He returned to form on a Hurricanes power play making consecutive saves on Skinner, Staal and Jussi Jokinen.

The Sabres tied the game for him, but Enroth then let it two more bad goals.

He couldn't get across on a Skinner wrap around with the puck going in off his left pad. "I thought Cody [Hodgson] would have that," Enroth said, referring to the Sabres forward. Hodgson let Skinner circle around the net and stuff the puck in on a wraparound. "I gotta be ready there for him," Enroth continued. "I gotta bail him out there. That's one I'd like to have back, too."

Following Skinner's goal, Enroth let in a real bad goal all the way around. Tyler Ennis lost the draw to Staal who skated right by Robyn Regehr. Ennis didn't hustle to stay with him. Enroth went down early and Staal slid a puck right under him. Enroth did stop Patrick Dwyer on a shorthanded breakaway and made 17 second period saves, but that period just won't do.

The Sabres started the third period very well and very fast. They also had to take chances which led to a 2-on-1. Enroth made a big save on Drayson Bowman. Andrej Sekera tried to skate the puck up ice and turned it over. Enroth again was good stopping Zac Dalpe on a 3-on-2. He couldn't get over to stop a high wrist shot by Staal from the right circle. Enroth allowed Staal's first two goals of the season.

Enroth finished with 32 saves on 37 shots. "I didn't feel rusty. I felt a little bit lost tonight," Enroth said. When I asked him to explain what he meant by "lost," he

responded, "I don't know -- just lost. I wasn't really in the right position on a couple of shots and stuff like that."

Lindy Ruff didn't see Enroth's performance coming. "Jhonas has been so good in practice," Ruff said. "Even the week at camp, he had a great week. It was a little surprising for me because I really felt that he was really on top of his game."

At the end of the day, the Sabres didn't play well in front of Enroth, but he has to be better. This game was as bad or worse than the slump he had last year.

Hurricanes earn 1st win by beating Sabres 6-3

By Joedy McCreary

Associated Press

January 24, 2013

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) -- First in shots, last in goals. Despite that statistical oddity, the Carolina Hurricanes never wavered.

Instead, they did what they do best. They kept shooting, and those pucks finally started finding the net.

Eric Staal scored three goals, Jeff Skinner added two and the Hurricanes earned their first victory of the season by handing the Buffalo Sabres their first loss, 6-3 on Thursday night.

"It's going to come. We've got good enough players, good enough skill to score," Staal said. "We just need to play the right way and play a little bit more physical and aggressive one-on-one, and we did a great job tonight."

Skinner and Staal scored 9 seconds apart during Carolina's four-goal second period that also included a short-handed score by Justin Faulk.

Jordan Staal, Joni Pitkanen and Zac Dalpe each had two assists and Cam Ward made 30 saves for the Hurricanes, who entered as one of five winless teams in the NHL.

Their beefed-up offense - which added Jordan Staal and Alexander Semin during the offseason - entered averaging an NHL-best 39 shots on goal yet managed a league-fewest two goals in their first two games.

"You've just got to stick with it," Skinner said. "You've got to be tougher, I think, around their net and today we beared down a little bit more and you stick with it, you keep putting that many pucks on the net, you're going to get a bounce here or there, and one's going to go in for you."

Jason Pominville's second goal made it 4-3 with 13:54 left. Eric Staal restored Carolina's two-goal lead by firing the puck past Jhonas Enroth at 10:34.

"Good teams do" respond, Eric Staal said. "When you have opportunities that go the other way and end up in your net, you need to regroup and refocus. Good teams find a way to refocus, and we did that tonight."

Staal polished off his 13th career hat trick with an empty-netter with 1:28 left.

Cody Hodgson also scored and Thomas Vanek had two assists for the Sabres. Enroth, who had allowed one goal in two previous career starts against Carolina, stopped 32 shots and said he "wasn't in the right position (for) a couple of shots."

Carolina outshot Buffalo 38-33 and put the puck on net a season-best 21 times during its busy second period.

The most dizzying sequence started when Skinner broke a 2-all tie by pushing a wraparound past Enroth's left pad with 6:04 left.

The Hurricanes won the ensuing draw, and Eric Staal slipped through the Buffalo defense and beat Enroth with a backhand at 5:55 to make it 4-2 and cap a frenetic period in which the teams combined for six goals.

"You've got to get big saves on those plays or they end up hurting you," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said, "and that one really hurt us."

Skinner gave Carolina its first lead of the season 62 seconds into the second with a tricky backhand over Enroth's left shoulder. Faulk then made it 2-0 with 15:54 left when he stormed down the ice on a short-handed 3-on-1 rush and blasted a slap shot by Enroth.

Then it was the Sabres' turn to get the offense going.

Hodgson pulled Buffalo within a goal at 11:10 by beating Ward with a backhand of a loose rebound, and Pominville tied it at 2 with 9:21 left with a redirection of Christian Ehrhoff's slap shot.

"I think we gave up the puck too much," Pominville said. "We battled back a couple of times . (but) we gave up too many rush opportunities and were a little too casual with the puck. It just wasn't our usual game."

NOTES: Skinner finished with his eighth career multigoal game. . The teams play again Friday night in Buffalo. . The Hurricanes' record for quickest two goals came in 1987 when Sylvain Turgeon scored twice in 6 seconds. . Buffalo didn't put a shot on goal until LW Marcus Foligno's backhand roughly 7 1/2 minutes in.

Eric Staal's hat trick gives Hurricanes first win

By Kurt Dusterberg

NHL.com

January 24, 2013

RALEIGH, N.C. -- No one said it in so many words, but the Carolina Hurricanes must be breathing an enormous sigh of relief.

After starting the season with a 5-1 clunker at the Florida Panthers and 4-1 loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning in the home opener, Carolina was desperate for some proof its revamped offense was everything it was cracked up to be.

After a solid but tentative first period against the Buffalo Sabres on Thursday night, the Hurricanes got all the evidence they needed.

Eric Staal scored a hat trick, and Jeff Skinner added two goals to lift Carolina to a 6-3 win at PNC Arena.

After Skinner found the net with a top-shelf backhand early in the second period, the Hurricanes seemed to come to life playing with their first lead of the season.

"You could just see the tension go away from our guys," Hurricanes coach Kirk Muller said. "They started to relax and play. It's nice playing with the lead."

Staal said, "It was nice to see [Skinner] get that first one and get the building going and ease the guys a little bit."

Carolina had a two-goal lead within three minutes, getting a little puck luck from defenseman Justin Faulk.

With the Hurricanes shorthanded, Jordan Staal blocked a diagonal pass that led to a 3-on-1. Faulk carried the puck up ice and beat Sabres goaltender Jhonas Enroth with a low shot. After nearly two-and-a-half games marked by near misses, Carolina cashed in on a fluky one.

"I was trying to pick a spot," Faulk said tentatively before smiling. "My stick broke and it went in the net. It wasn't necessarily the spot I was going for, but it fooled him."

The Sabres scored a pair of goals less than two minutes apart to tie the game. Cody Hodgson cleaned up a long rebound from Jordan Leopold's shot from the right point, followed by a pretty score from Jason Pominville. Christian Ehrhoff fired to the slot, where Pominville from his knees reached out to redirect the puck past goalie Cam Ward.

Ward buckled down after that, making several key saves, particularly in the third period. He finished with 30.

After giving up six first-period goals in the previous two games, his solid night was exactly what Muller was looking for.

"We kind of challenged the guys yesterday, starting with Cam," Muller said. "It was great to see how he responded."

Skinner scored his second of the night on a wraparound, to give the Hurricanes a 3-2 lead, but the spotlight quickly shifted to Eric Staal. On the ensuing faceoff, he took a pass from Jamie McBain and slid a backhand under Enroth.

The two goals came nine seconds apart.

Thomas Vanek set up Pominville's second goal with a beautiful behind-the-back pass to cut the Carolina lead to 4-3, but Eric Staal who answered. He one-timed a pass from Joni Pitkanen to give the Hurricanes a little breathing room -- and some proof that the offense could carry play.

"We've got good enough players and good skill," Staal said. "We just need to play the right way, more physical and aggressive 1-on-1, and we did a good job of that tonight."

He put the finishing touches on the game with an empty netter, giving him 13 hat tricks for his career. Only Teemu Selanne of the Anaheim Ducks has more among active players with 20.

"Our first period was better," Staal said. "We competed harder in the one on one battles, paid more of a price in front of Cam, blocked some shots. It kind of builds momentum."

The Sabres absorbed their first loss of the season after opening with wins against the Philadelphia Flyers and Toronto Maple Leafs.

"I think it was a combination of youth," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said. "I know that Cody (Hodgson) could make better plays. He did a great job keeping the puck turned up and then we ended up turning the puck over. If you don't take care of the puck, it can go the other way on you."

The teams move on to Buffalo on Friday night to complete a home-and-home series at First Niagara Center. When the Hurricanes hit the ice, they might do it with a little more confidence.

"It's taken a couple games to get our legs and play the style we want," Muller said. "It looked like tonight we're finally getting into the mix and playing that tempo. If we can do that, I think we can wear some teams down. We have to be a 60-minute team."

Staaled Out: Sabres doubled up 6-3 by Canes

By Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

January 25, 2013

Carolina 6 – Buffalo 3

Thursday, January 24, 2013

PNC Arena

GAME RECAP

RALEIGH, NC – Jeff Skinner and Eric Staal broke a 2-2 tie with two goals in nine seconds during the second period, as the Carolina Hurricanes doubled up the Buffalo Sabres 6-3 for their first win of the season. Staal later scored into an empty net for his third goal of the night, as the Hurricanes sent the Sabres back home with their first loss in three games to start the 48-game schedule. Jason Pominville scored twice for the Sabres, who battled back from an early 2-0 deficit during a wild six-goal middle period. Cody Hodgson scored for the third straight game, and Thomas Vanek picked up a pair of assists to give him eight points in a three-game point streak. Jhonas Enroth stopped 32 of 37 Carolina shots to take the loss in his first start of the season.

BEHIND THE NUMBERS

Drew Stafford played in his 400th career NHL game tonight; he becomes fourth player on current roster to play 400 games with the Sabres (Hecht, Vanek, Pominville)... Buffalo didn't record their first shot on goal until Marcus Foligno's backhand at 7:34 of first period; they trailed 6-0 at the time, and finished the first on 6-1 run... Sabres dropped to 96-64-24 all-time against Carolina in 184 games... Buffalo is 14-7-4 against Carolina since their 2006 Eastern Conference Finals series... The Sabres are now 68-61-29 all-time in the first game of a home-and-home series. They have swept the pair 32 times; been swept 25 times; and have split the other 100... Vanek leads all Sabres with 28 points (11+17) in 27 career games against Carolina.

STILL STREAKING

Points: Vanek (2-6-8, 3 gms), Pominville (3-4-7, 3 gms), Hodgson (3-0-3, 3 gms)

Assists: Vanek (6, 3 gms)

Goals: Hodgson (3, 3 gms)

BUFFALO'S REAL-TIME STATS LEADERS

Time on Ice: Christian Ehrhoff, 25:17

Shots: Jason Pominville, 7

Blocked Shots: Ehrhoff, 4

Faceoff Wins: Tyler Ennis, 7 (7-7)

Total Faceoffs: Cody Hodgson, 18 (4-14)

Hits: Steve Ott, 5

SPECIAL TEAMS

Buffalo struggled on the power play, going 0-for-6 on the night, including three missed opportunities in the first period. They only managed eight shots with the man

advantage, and are now 3/15 (20%) on the season – with all three goals coming in the first game against Philadelphia. The Sabres also gave up their first shorthanded goal of the season tonight when defenseman Justin Faulk staked Carolina to a 2-0 lead in the second period. Buffalo held Carolina's power play scoreless in four man advantage situations, bumping them up to 13/15 (86.7%) on the penalty kill over their first three games.

GRIGORENKO WATCH

In his third NHL game, rookie Mikhail Grigorenko played 3:39 in first period, including 1:45 of power play time on the right side with Tyler Ennis and Drew Stafford. His second PP shift during Eric Staal's first period holding penalty was probably his best as a Sabre, controlling the puck down low and working the half wall with Ennis to maintain possession. Grigorenko's ice time dropped to 2:19 on three shifts in the second period, but he played almost six minutes in the third, and even started the period in the middle between Marcus Foligno and Stafford. He finished the night at 11:47 with one shot on goal, and had another three attempts blocked. He was 1/3 on faceoffs, the first time in three games he didn't finish on the positive side of the ledger.

NOTABLE

Nathan Gerbe returned to the lineup after starting the season on Injured Reserve while recovering from offseason back surgery. He had one shot on goal in 10:01 of ice time... To make room for Gerbe, Ville Leino (leg injury) was placed on IR today, retroactive to last Sunday... Defensemen TJ Brennan and Mike Weber were healthy scratches for the third game in a row, along with forward Matt Ellis.

UP NEXT

- * Friday vs. Carolina, 7 p.m.
- * Sunday @ Washington, 3 p.m.
- * Tuesday vs. Toronto, 7 p.m.

Break offers chance for Amerks, Sabres to set rosters

By Kevin Oklobzija

Democrat and Chronicle

January 24, 2013

Rochester Americans coach Ron Rolston won't have any decisions to make when it comes to determining his lineup Friday night.

He has just enough healthy players to fill the 18 spots: 12 at forward and six on defense for the 7:05 p.m. home game against the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins.

Because of injuries to Zemgus Girgensons (concussion) and Drew Schiestel (knee), and with defenseman Matt MacKenzie (concussion/personal leave) still unavailable, there are no extras.

The lack of flexibility is hardly ideal for Rolston, but help could be on the way next week following the American Hockey League All-Star break.

The Amerks play just the Friday game this weekend, then are idle again until the following Friday when the Toronto Marlies come to town. They begin the All-Star break following the game.

"It would be an issue if somebody gets hurt," Rolston said. "but we're at a good spot where we have the break. A lot of things still have to be ironed out in Buffalo."

Indeed, NHL roster moves will eventually be necessary with the parent Sabres. They already have two extra defensemen (T.J. Brennan and Mike Weber haven't been playing). When Ville Leino (lower body) and Cody McCormick (hand) come off injured reserve, there will be two extra forwards.

Leino went on IR Thursday, retroactive to Sunday, as Nathan Gerbe was activated.

There also has not been a decision on what will be done long term with 18-year-old rookie center Mikhail Grigorenko. He is eligible to return to his junior team. If the Sabres keep him for more than five games, then the clock starts counting down on his entry-level contract.

If the Sabres keep Grigorenko and don't make a trade to alleviate their logjam on defense, then they will need to expose players to waivers in order to clear roster space.

That, of course, assumes they aren't impacted by more injuries. But in the shortened season, with 48 games jammed into a 97-day calendar template, they fear that there will be more injuries than in a normal season.

All of which would impact the Amerks. Rolston said there have been discussions on whether moves need to be made to fortify the AHL roster, but that they are in more of a wait-and-see mode going into the All-Star break.

In the meantime, goalie David Leggio just keeps playing. Friday will be his 13th consecutive start. With so few games on the schedule — just two each of the past two weeks and just two in each of the next three weeks — it's impossible to keep two goalies sharp.

So Rolston has chosen make sure Leggio gets the necessary work. Rookie Connor Knapp must make the most of practice time.

Leggio leads the AHL in wins (20), minutes played (2,001:30) and saves (1,003). He has a 2.91 goals-against average and .912 save percentage.

Hodgson looks sharp with Buffalo Sabres

Brampton Guardian

January 24, 2013

Cody Hodgson scored a goal in Buffalo's 2-1 victory over the Maple Leafs on Monday, and it was a special moment for the Markham native.

But after the win, the former Brampton Battalion star echoed sentiments from around the Buffalo dressing room centring on the difference in this Sabres team compared to last year's.

Monday's win ended Buffalo's five-game drought in visits to Toronto, including an 0-3 mark last year that became a huge factor in the team's failure to make the playoffs.

"The organization did a good job adding the players it did," said Hodgson, referring to agitator Steve Ott and 6-foot-8 enforcer John Scott. "You need that type of physical personnel on a team, they were great additions that added to our overall toughness."

Hodgson recalled the exit meetings with the coaching staff and team management last spring that followed an emotion-charged season that fell apart on several fronts.

One issue centred on the now-infamous (in Buffalo) altercation early last season between goalie Ryan Miller and Boston's Milan Lucic that called into question the team's toughness.

Buffalo had spent big money on free agents Ville Leino and Christian Ehrhoff, and while those additions added star power to the lineup, the club never completely gelled under them. Meanwhile, the toughness question continued to hover over the team all season. After two games and two wins this season, the Sabres appear to have addressed that problem. Scott and Ott have looked solid so far this year after joining the Sabres in the off-season as free agents.

"You know, I looked at the scoresheet after two periods and there's Steve Ott with seven hits," coach Lindy Ruff said after Monday's win. "Those are the kind of things that add up and make us a tougher team to play against."

Asked whether last year's lineup might have lost Monday night against the Leafs, Ruff handled the question diplomatically.

"The answer he (a member of the media) is looking for is yes, but I don't want to give it to him," Ruff said to laughter during the post-game scrum.

Hodgson, meanwhile, has scored two goals already this season playing on the top line with Thomas Vanek and Jason Pominville.

Vanek has six points in two games while Pominville was the other goal-scorer for Buffalo on Monday night.

"When you're having three players like that play well, then it's only going to help the team," Ruff said. "Cody was around the net on that first goal and he got rewarded for it. They're three pretty good offensive players . . . and if they get five or six good scoring chances a game, then they should see some goals."

Bettman 'grateful, excited' about NHL start

By John Ourand

Sports Business Journal

January 24, 2013

Early TV and attendance numbers suggest that fans have started returning to the National Hockey League, a development that has allowed league Commissioner Gary Bettman to breathe a sigh of relief.

Bettman told the SportsBusiness Daily, "We could be hopeful all we wanted, but we didn't take anything for granted. We are grateful and we are excited."

NBC saw its highest regular-season TV audiences (excluding the Winter Classic) for its opening games on Saturday, and all local NHL ratings posted a collective 32 percent increase versus the same number of games at the start of last season.

The Buffalo Sabres reported a record viewing audience for their home opener on Sunday, Jan. 20, drawing a rating of 20.1 for the game against the Philadelphia Flyers that was broadcast on NBC.

Bettman, who has been to four games in five nights, credited the NHL clubs with effectively reaching out to the fans.

"We really thought that it was most important initially that the fans reconnect with their teams," he said. "We took out ads in every market nationally in Canada and the U.S. But we thought it was more important initially that all of our efforts be focused on backstopping the clubs as they reached out."

Bettman pointed to clubs' efforts to discount tickets, food and merchandise for helping draw a connection to the fans.

"The major effort and focus we thought needed to be at the club level. So far, that seems to have been the right approach," he said. "All of our clubs have been doing special things in their markets and they've all been tailored to their fans and the reaction has been phenomenal, and we're grateful."

Canes beat Sabres 6-3 for first win of season

By Chip Alexander

Raleigh News Observer

January 24, 2013

RALEIGH -- It was easy to criticize the Carolina Hurricanes after the first two games of the season, both losses.

The Canes weren't scoring goals. They never had a lead. They had too many turnovers, too many defensive breakdowns. Cam Ward was a little too shaky in goal.

But there was little to complain about Thursday against the Buffalo Sabres.

Eric Staal had a hat trick, Jeff Skinner scored twice and Ward was solid enough in net as the Hurricanes won 6-3 at PNC Arena for their first victory of the season. Justin Faulk had a shorthanded goal, the defense was stout, the penalty-killing flawless and the win well-earned against a team that had gotten off to a 2-0 start.

Granted, Ryan Miller was not in goal for the Sabres as coach Lindy Ruff gave backup goalie Jhonas Enroth his first start. But the Canes were flying and could have given Miller — or anyone else — a test.

Jordan Staal, Zac Dalpe and Joni Pitkanen each had a pair of assists for the Canes, who got goals from Skinner and Eric Staal nine seconds apart in the second period and took a 4-2 lead after a scoreless first period.

"We challenged the guys (Wednesday), starting with Cam," Canes coach Kirk Muller said. "It was great to see how we responded. It's tough for goalies starting off the season (and) all the onus goes on them, but he had a great game.

"The guys played really hard in front of him and our big boys came up with big games."

Eric Staal was without a point after the first two games, losses to the Florida Panthers and Tampa Bay Lightning. He missed on several scoring chances but didn't get overly anxious.

The hat trick, capped by a late empty-netter, was the 13th of the captain's career.

"We liked some good things we did the first two games," Staal said. "Obviously we needed to get more physical in our end and more physical one-on-one with our puck battles. We had a good practice (Wednesday) and the guys were ready to play.

"We competed hard on pucks, 'Wardo' made some big saves for us and 'Skins' had some big goals early for us."

Skinner had the only goal in the 4-1 loss to Tampa Bay on Tuesday, scoring on a backhand. His first goal Thursday was a near replay, giving the Canes their first lead of the season.

“You could just see the tension kind of go away from our guys,” Muller said.

Added Eric Staal: “It let us play more aggressive, on our toes.”

Faulk’s shorthanded goal, on a bullet of a shot from the right wing, pushed the lead to 2-0. But the Sabres answered with goals from Cody Hodgson and Jason Pominville, causing Canes fans in the crowd of 18,081 to grow uneasy.

Then Skinner struck again. Then Eric Staal, nine seconds later.

Skinner was on the ice and furious after Pominville’s goal, a tip of a Christian Ehrhoff shot. On an ensuing shift, he grabbed the puck behind the Buffalo net, wheeled past Hodgson and stuffed it past Enroth for a 3-2 lead.

“I was pretty fired up,” Skinner said.

Eric Staal won the next faceoff. Streaking into the Buffalo zone, he beat Enroth with a backhand shot to make it 4-2 with 5 minutes, 55 seconds left in the second.

Pominville scored again about six minutes into the third, but Eric Staal soon picked up his second goal. After a Pitkanen takeaway and a well-executed pass, Staal ripped a shot from the right circle to make it 5-3.

“Huge goal,” Skinner said. “It kept the momentum for us and (Ward) had some huge stops.”

Ward gave up eight goals on 38 shots in the first two games. But he had 30 saves against the Sabres, including a key stop on a Hodgson shot just after Pominville’s second goal.

The two teams go at it again Friday in Buffalo to complete the home-and-home set. Miller will be back in net for the Sabres.

And Ward? Muller smiled when asked about his starter but didn’t commit.

“We pushed the pace tonight,” Muller said. “Buffalo’s a good team and has played well. We’ve got a group that has taken a couple of games to get our legs and play the style that we want. We have to be a 60-minute team.”

This night, for 60 minutes, the Canes were a good team.

Canes improvement enough ... for now

By Luke DeCock

Raleigh News Observer

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RALEIGH -- Well, all that's left is the Stanley Cup now.

The way some Carolina Hurricanes fans were abandoning ship after the two season-opening losses, Thursday's win may provoke the same kind of overreaction. The Canes looked awfully good in the 6-3 win over the Buffalo Sabres, with Jeff Skinner scoring twice, Jordan Staal setting up a pair and Eric Staal clinching his 13th career hat trick with an empty-netter.

Those names were expected to be on the scoresheet early and often this season, and seeing them in so many spots Thursday offered some positive reinforcement that the Hurricanes are on the right track.

The thing is, the Hurricanes were on the right track anyway. They didn't play drastically differently than they did in the two losses to open the season. They finished the chances they created. They got the horrible blunders out of their game. Cam Ward was much sharper.

Their improvement wasn't dramatic. It was merely incremental. That was enough to move from the wrong column to the right one. After getting shelled in the first period of the first two games, it was scoreless at the first intermission. The Hurricanes couldn't have been happier with the way they were playing, even before they broke through with four goals in the second.

"That was absolutely it," Jordan Staal said. "Going into the second, we knew we had a great first. We finally came out strong, strong enough to put them on their heels and do the things that we need to do to create chances to score goals."

There is naturally still work to be done, and Buffalo's first two goals suggested the same areas for attention -- too many bodies in front of the net, too many unobstructed shots from outside into that traffic -- but the Hurricanes were largely able to avoid the ill-timed turnovers and defensive gaffes that proved so damaging early in the first two games.

"We had some good stuff in the first couple games," Hurricanes coach Kirk Muller said. "I know we didn't have the results and we didn't deserve it. But we knew if we could elevate our game and tighten things up and play better defensively, the other stuff would take care of itself."

Jamie McBain came into the lineup and played well, as did Bobby Sanguinetti, who looked to be on his way out when Muller decided to sit Joe Corvo instead. It was a curious, but thoughtful, decision on Muller's part, sending a message of accountability to the veterans while bolstering Sanguinetti's wounded confidence. Muller can also take

partial credit for Skinner's performance, a second straight solid game after the coach criticized his admittedly poor opening-night play.

It's important to remember that in most years, the Hurricanes would be halfway through the preseason right now. It's just too soon to make any kind of assessment about this team, positive or negative. The timing is still a fraction of a second off, both for individuals and as a team. The older players who weren't playing competitively during the lockout were surprisingly rusty, from the Staal brothers and Ward on down, but if Thursday is any indication, they're starting to round into form.

These two teams will go at it again Friday night in Buffalo, and after that game it'll be a little clearer what kind of team this really is. With each game, the veil will lift a little bit, until the full picture is revealed, four, five, six games from now. When that happens, the Hurricanes will hope it looks an awful lot like this.

Stars shine in Canes' victory over Sabres

By Andrew Jones

FS Carolinas

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RALEIGH, NC — The stars came out Thursday night for the Carolina Hurricanes.

The team made a concerted effort to add more offense last summer. Too often Carolina came up short a season ago, failing to win games when it got quality goaltending and solid play in front of Cam Ward.

So the team went out in the offseason and signed Alexander Semin and traded for Jordan Staal, the younger brother of Canes' star Eric Staal. The newbies may not have netted any goals on Thursday against the Buffalo Sabres at PNC Arena, but they were active and played crucial roles in the club's holdover stars having big games in the 6-3 Carolina victory.

Eric Staal netted a hat trick by scoring once in the second period and twice in the final 10:34 of the contest, the latter goal an empty-netter with 1:28 left. It was the 13th hat trick of his career.

Jeff Skinner, who had one of the team's two goals entering the contest, netted two in a wild second period in which six goals were scored by the teams; four by Carolina.

And second-year defenseman Justin Faulk slapped one in a shorthanded goal in the second period to complete the Canes' scoring.

"It's nice because it looks like they're starting to get their timing and their hands," Hurricanes' coach Kirk Muller said about seeing the big guns getting going. "Staalsy and Skins and these guys are going to get those opportunities, so you need to start capitalizing. It was good to see those guys score."

Eric Staal is a perennial All-Star, Skinner was in his rookie season, and Faulk took part in the All-Star weekend Skills Competition as a rookie last season. Carolina needs its stars to produce. An organization that just can't go out and toss money around, general manager Jim Rutherford must be frugal and creative in how he builds the team.

That's why when the Hurricanes spent so much money last summer — they inked Jordan Staal to a 10-year, \$60 million deal that begins at the end of this season — some eyebrows were raised around the league and locally.

Anticipation for the season built even during a three-month lockout. So when the team finally hit the ice in Florida last Saturday and lost 5-1 then followed that up with a 4-1 defeat at home Tuesday to the Tampa Bay Lightning, one can only imagine the frustration among everyone with an interest in the organization.

Muller made some line changes after the first game, and even though he said there was no reason to panic following Tuesday's loss, the second-year coach shifted around the lines again. In the short 48-game season, each loss is essentially like losing two in a row in a normal 82-game slate. And while Muller spoke of positives against the Lightning — Carolina had 36 shots on goal — the team needed to win a game and score while doing so. Eric Staal said it's all about battling.

"We like to do the things we did in the first two games, but obviously we needed to be a little more aggressive and be more physical one on one with our battles," Eric Staal said. "We had a good practice and came ready to play tonight."

Jordan Staal registered a pair of assists on the night and Semin applied pressure with some lasers and even trying to set up the older Staal [Eric] early in the game, only to see the puck bounce off Staal's stick.

Muller and the coaching staff preached that the team needed to stay the course. Even though he did some redecorating, the approach wasn't changing. The stars would eventually shine.

"It's taken a couple of games to play the style that we want," Muller said. "But it looked like tonight that we're finally getting into the mix and (learning) how to play that tempo. If we can do that we can wear some teams down and get a 60-minute type team."

The Hurricanes return the game to Buffalo on Friday night, so the newness of the team will be tested by a club that now has a game of experience against Carolina.

Eight goals in three games isn't enough of a sample size to come to any conclusion, but the way things played out Thursday, it's a sign the team badly needed.