



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Sabres eye another big target in Penguins

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 17, 2013

It will take more than a couple of wins for the Buffalo Sabres to get where they want to be. If those victories come against two of the NHL's elite teams, however, it'll bring the Sabres a lot closer to their happy place.

They have the opportunity.

After knocking off division-leading Boston on Friday, the Sabres welcome another of the Eastern Conference's best to First Niagara Center this afternoon. The Pittsburgh Penguins are in town for a nationally televised 12:30 p.m. matinee, and they brought Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and the league's fourth-best record.

The Sabres have had a start to forget this season, but back-to-back wins over powerhouses just might change the mood and outlook in Sabreland.

"It was a good step against Boston, and Pittsburgh's always an elite team," Sabres center Tyler Ennis said Saturday. "If we can knock off both of them and make a statement, it would be good for our confidence and good just to get us back in the win column."

Buffalo needs to string wins together. Based on games in hand on teams below them, the Sabres are essentially in 29th place in the 30-team league. They have a long road to travel with more than 30 percent of the schedule already played.

A winning weekend would be welcomed.

"It's good to get a win and hopefully go from there," right wing Patrick Kaleta said. "It's only one, but it's a good start and we've got to build off it."

The Sabres beat Boston by playing one of their best periods of the season, scoring three times in the third for a 4-2 comeback. They'll likely need three periods to topple Pittsburgh.

The Penguins are 7-2 on the road. They entered Saturday's schedule with the second-ranked power play at 27.6 percent. James Neal was tied with Thomas Vanek for the goal-scoring lead with 11. Crosby was tied with Tampa's Martin St. Louis atop the assist chart with 15.

"We know that they're playing well," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said. "They've probably got as much team speed as Boston. I think the depth of their lineup is just as deep as Boston. Maybe the Boston defenders have a slight edge when it comes to the back end, but I think overall they're one of the teams that you're going to have to deal with if you want to get to the top in the East."

The Sabres changed their fortunes against Boston by taking care of the puck. The early passes that became turnovers transformed into rush-inducing assists. The miscues that kept the Sabres hemmed in their zone became clean breakouts that put the Bruins on their heels.

“A lot of it is execution with the puck when you look at it,” Ruff said. “You don’t make an errant pass or leaving the zone you make a little quicker play, and you get to play in their end a little more. That turnover game is going to play a big part.

“They’re going to create a number of chances on their own. They have that gift. You’re going to have to defend against those. You’re going to have to ask for a couple saves. What I’m talking about is don’t hand them those extra opportunities. Don’t make that big mistake. Don’t make that errant pass. Don’t give them that extra opportunity without them working for it.”

The Penguins flew to Buffalo on Saturday, practiced in the arena and made themselves feel at home. They always fill the visiting locker room with signs bearing their team logo and organizational slogans. Based on their success away from Pittsburgh, it helps.

So does scoring first. In all seven of their road victories, the Penguins opened the scoring and quieted the home crowd.

“That has been the common thread,” coach Dan Bylsma said. “We have gotten off to good starts. We have scored first and maybe set the tone in those games, but we’ve played well defensively. We’ve been fine in some tough places to play against good teams and tough buildings.”

The Sabres are just 3-3-1 at home, but the latest game has them feeling a little better.

“I’m sure they’re going to try and build off that win,” Bylsma said. “We have a mind of our own when it comes to what we want to do on the road and where we need to go. We’re still building. We’ve had some success on the road, and we’re going to try and continue that against the Sabres.”

Inside the NHL: Sabres' playoff push must start now

By Bucky Gleason

Buffalo News

February 17, 2013

The Sabres have two victories over the Bruins in three meetings this year, proving that Buffalo can beat the NHL's best teams on a given night. Boston is deep, balanced, talented and tough and, in my book, the strongest team in the Eastern Conference no matter what the standings showed.

For whatever reason, whether Milan Lucic raises their desperation level or they flip the "ON" switch when playing their superior division rival, the Sabres' best performances have come against the best. Ryan Miller has a 24-7-7 career record against Boston. The Sabres are the only team to beat Boston in regulation once, let alone twice, this season.

It doesn't mean much until the Sabres validate their performance against the Bruins with the same intensity and intelligence against other teams. Sid and the Kids roll into town today for a matinee at First Niagara Center. The Penguins are expected to be another stiff test for the Sabres in a short season filled with them.

The tough hike up the standings became infinitely more difficult with a terrible start that included a 1-6-1 stretch. The eighth-place Rangers were on pace for 55 points. If that's the magic number for the final playoff spot, and it will be in that neighborhood, the 6-8-1 Sabres need 44 points in their final 33 games to have a sniff.

It means finishing with a 19-10-4 record, or the equivalent. It shouldn't be a tall order for a team worthy of making the playoffs, but it leaves little room for error between now and the season finale April 26. Another 6-8-1 stretch would likely end their season. And with one-third of the season gone after today, the clock is ticking.

Buffalo cannot afford another slump.

The Sabres had a 31-16-11 record against Western Conference teams the previous three years, which contributed to them overcoming slow starts and making the playoffs in two of them. The biggest reason they finished ninth last season, and not worse, was their 11-6-1 record against the other conference.

It's a tougher climb this year with teams playing only within the conference, especially when several teams are ahead. It becomes even more difficult when other teams have played fewer games. Only Buffalo, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia will have played 16 games after today. Several others will have two games in hand.

On Thursday, when all the tiebreakers were added up, the Sabres dropped from 12th to last while sitting on the couch. The deeper a team falls, the more teams ahead of them will play one another. With two points built into matchups not involving the Sabres, the winner is guaranteed to move farther ahead.

Buffalo moved from 15th to 11th place with the win Friday over Boston, but it was hardly grounds for celebration. Toronto and Ottawa had the sixth and seventh spots in the conference. Both were three points ahead of Buffalo. Their matchup Saturday ensured one of them pulling five points ahead.

Montreal was playing Philadelphia. Do you root for the Canadiens to pull six points ahead or the Flyers to move two points ahead and push Buffalo to 12th or worse? Similar dilemmas emerged with Tampa Bay playing Florida and New Jersey playing the New York Islanders. Every game that reaches overtime makes matters worse.

Anyone can examine the numbers and break down schedules from dozens of angles. Save yourself a splitting headache. The Sabres need to stack victories before another season gets away from them. Their fate could be determined in the next 10 games even though 33 contests remain on the schedule.

Buffalo plays Winnipeg, Toronto and the Islanders this week and Tampa Bay and Florida next week. March begins with New Jersey, the Rangers, Carolina and New Jersey again.

If they win six or more of their next 10 games, the postseason will remain within reach. If they win five or fewer at the most critical point of the season, against a handful of teams they need to beat, they don't deserve to make the playoffs.

JVR not bitter at Philly

If you didn't already appreciate former Sabres killer James van Riemsdyk as a player, you may respect him more as a classy person after he blew past Luke Schenn and scored for the Maple Leafs last week against the Flyers.

JVR and Schenn were traded for one another with the Leafs looking for size and scoring up front and the Flyers needing help on defense. The swap allowed Schenn to play with his brother, talented forward Brayden Schenn. Van Riemsdyk's two brothers, Trevor and Brendan, play at the University of New Hampshire.

"Luke Schenn's a great player and I'm happy for him and Brayden that they get to play together," van Riemsdyk said. "Hopefully, that kind of karma follows around me and my brothers where we get to play together.

"I'm happy that those guys get a chance to play together. I think both of them are probably the prototypical Philadelphia Flyers with how they play. With the toughness and physicality and they're obviously great players. I'm sure they're going to have great careers in Philadelphia." Howson firing was expected

The timing for the change was strange, but nobody should have been surprised when John Davidson fired GM Scott Howson last week. The move had been expected since Davidson took over as president of hockey operations in Columbus.

Davidson hired Jarmo Kekalainen to take over the managerial duties with the idea the Blue Jackets can rebuild as the Blues did. Kekalainen, who becomes the first European to become a GM, was a respected scout who contributed to the turnaround in St. Louis. Hiring a new coach in Ken Hitchcock also helped.

"I want guys to understand that this is not a status quo organization," Davidson said. "We have to get better. That's not just a message to the players, but everybody. We're in the business of winning. So are 29 other teams. We have to get better because we haven't won enough. History shows that."

Did he say "status quo?" Interesting.

Thlusty's surprise punch

Enigmatic winger Jiri Thlusty has found a home on the Hurricanes' top line, giving them scoring punch from an unexpected source. He had five goals and nine points in his first 13 games while playing mostly with Eric Staal and Washington import Alexander Semin.

Thlusty had career highs of 17 goals and 36 points in 79 games last season and could surpass both despite playing the short season. He was on pace for 18 goals and 33 points over 48 games going into the weekend. He played on a line with boyhood idol Jaromir Jagr and close friend Tomas Plekanic in the Czech Republic during the lockout.

"It's been unreal," Thlusty said. "Jagr was my hero. To play with him for my hometown team, well, that was amazing. ... Now I'm here playing with Eric again. We played on the same line toward the end of last year. Now, Semin is on the line too. It's been great."

Staal had eight goals and 17 points during an 11-game scoring streak going into the weekend. Semin, criticized for being lazy and uninterested in defense in Washington, had three goals and 10 points and was plus-11 in his first 13 games in Carolina.
Kennedy returns, scores

The Sharks were desperate for offense after scoring 29 goals in their first seven games and eight in the seven games that followed. They didn't have an even-strength goal in more than 261 minutes before South Buffalo native Tim Kennedy scored in a 4-1 loss to childhood friend Patrick Kane and the Blackhawks.

Kennedy was summoned from AHL Worcester, where he had a team-high 13 goals, 37 points and plus-8 rating in 37 games. The goal against Chicago was his first in the NHL since Oct. 22, 2011, when he was with Florida. He now has one more goal in two games with the Sharks this season than Jochen Hecht has in 15 games with the Sabres.

San Jose rattled off seven straight victories to start the season but is 0-4-3 in February.
Blues' Elliott struggling

Brian Elliott led the NHL with a 1.56 goals-against average and .940 save percentage while pushing Jaroslav Halak for playing time. So what happened when Elliott was handed the top job with Halak sidelined with an injury? He flopped.

Elliott allowed four goals or more in four straight games going into the weekend and 20 overall on 105 shots over five games. He was 41st with a 3.57 GAA and 43rd with a .849 save percentage. The Blues were 0-4-1 over that stretch.

"His responsibility is to work through this," Blues General Manager Doug Armstrong said. "It's pro sports. I mean, you have to work through these things."
Quotable

Flames GM Jay Feaster on whether they were planning for life after Miikka Kiprusoff, who was sidelined with a knee injury: "Conspiracy theorists are just awesome. The Oliver Stones of the world are just wonderful. I wish I was that bright, that I had all that time to sit around and conspire and think. Obviously, we all recognize where Kipper is in his career. But it isn't a matter of standing around, saying, 'Wouldn't it be great if Kipper got hurt for three weeks? Then we could test out what life would be without him.'"

Around the boards

- Popular veteran winger Ryan Smyth was a healthy scratch against Dallas last week, a first for him since the 1999 playoffs. Smyth is still a gamer at age 37, but his legs are showing signs of wear. “There’s no room for feelings in a season like this,” Oilers coach Ralph Krueger said. “Whether I’m popular or not, isn’t the driving force.”
- P.K. Subban had two goals and two assists on the power play in the first seven games after his contract dispute. The bad news is that Montreal was just 5 for 39 in that situation with him after going 9 for 33 with Raphael Diaz manning the point. Diaz had eight points before Subban returned, one point in the seven games afterward.
- Jets defenseman Zach Bogosian played 25 minutes in his season debut Friday. Because he had offseason wrist surgery, he received his \$3 million salary during the lockout. He should be in the lineup Tuesday in Buffalo, one of his favorite stops. His godfather is former West Seneca West and Syracuse football star Dennis Hartman.

Sabres notebook: Worrying would be pointless for Vanek

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 17, 2013

Thomas Vanek could have easily added another goal and assist to his impressive totals last game. He shot twice at an empty net late and set up Jason Pominville on the doorstep early.

Nothing clicked as the NHL's top scorer failed to increase his lead. Instead, Vanek enters today's game against Pittsburgh with zero points in his last three outings.

He's not worried. The Buffalo Sabres' offensive star is confident he and linemates Cody Hodgson and Pominville can find the net in First Niagara Center.

"I'm feeling good," Vanek said Saturday. "Obviously, the three of us had a good run, but I think we're practicing well, figuring things out, and we'll be back on the score sheet."

It would have been unrealistic to expect Vanek to keep up his ridiculous pace. He had 11 goals and 23 points in his first 11 games. But when he fails to show up on the stat sheet in three straight, it gets noticed.

"He's not hurt," coach Lindy Ruff said after practice. "He didn't go well the last couple. I still think he made a great play to Pominville early in the game. I think it hit a crossbar, and he obviously had the empty-net opportunity. Sometimes it's one or two games that you get a little out of sync. I think you'll see him right back on track."

The Penguins certainly don't view Vanek as slumping.

"He's been very hot this season, and every year I think he's always a threat offensively," Pittsburgh goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury said. "He's got a quick release, good shot and is always in the right spot around the net it seems. He's certainly a guy we have to keep an eye on."

...

One of the Sabres' biggest question marks entering the season was how well their young centers would perform against the league's best middle men. Tyler Ennis and Hodgson were looking forward to the challenge, and they've got a monumental one today against Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin.

"You look at Malkin and Crosby, you're looking at the cream of the crop," Ruff said. "Obviously, we're a little bit younger in that area, but I think that both those guys at times have shown they can handle it. At times there's been a little bit of chaos, but for the most part they've been able to wrap their arms around that."

Ennis and wingers Drew Stafford and Marcus Foligno are coming off their best game. They displayed an ideal mix of strength and playmaking against the Bruins to combine for five points, including Stafford's first goal of the season.

"Marcus did a great job hitting and forechecking hard, using his size," Ennis said. "Staff was making plays. It was nice to see him get that one and get the monkey off his back. The mojo is coming a little bit, and we just need to continue it against Pittsburgh.

"Those guys are phenomenal," he said of Crosby and Malkin, "and we're going to have to do a great job defensively against them. They're two of the best players in the world. They do incredible things on the ice, and we're going to have to really focus on our coverage in the D-zone and be aware whenever those guys are on the ice."

...

Sabres defenseman Andrej Sekera (charley horse) skipped practice and is doubtful for today. The only other change during the Sabres' workout came in the middle of the third and fourth lines.

Jochen Hecht rejoined wingers Steve Ott and Nathan Gerbe on the third line, while rookie Mikhail Grigorenko skated with Patrick Kaleta, Cody McCormick and John Scott. Grigorenko started the Boston game in the middle of Ott and Gerbe but played just 8:08.

"I just thought that Grigo got off to a tough start," Ruff said. "Jochen skated well, had two or three opportunities. We needed to match their speed. It wasn't going well for him, and that's all part of the process.

"That's all part of what we're trying to do with him here, get him the extra work, get him stronger, have him work with our skating coach, try to go through the details that are going to make him a more powerful skater and a more efficient skater. He's only 18. He's pretty good for 18, and I think if you do things right he should be a heck of a player in a couple years."

Sabres score three in third to beat Bruins

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 15, 2013

Like his team, Drew Stafford went from frigid to sweltering. The turnaround got them off the beaten path.

Stafford, who'd been plodding through a career-worst slump, scored the opening goal and helped key a third-period rally that gave Buffalo a 4-2 victory over Boston on Friday. After getting booed off the ice following the second period, the Sabres scored three times in the third to bring life to First Niagara Center.

"It's just a character win against a team like that," Stafford said. "It always feels good to beat them, and it's definitely a statement by us to be able to come back. I think in the third period we were by far the better team."

Stafford was by far the best dressed.

During the postgame celebration, the right winger donned a dark brown fur coat emblazoned with a Sabres logo on the back. After being given the cold shoulder by many during his slump, he was the center of attention in the dressing room. As sweat poured off his face, he was ready to go back into the shadows.

"This jacket's really hot, so I kind of want to get this over with," he said with a smile to the pack of media personnel.

Stafford had every reason to celebrate after scoring the first goal, but the Sabre with the biggest drought kept it calm – on the outside, anyway.

"That's something I've been working for, and finally it's nice to get rewarded," said Stafford, who went 17 games without a goal. "I've been waiting for it to happen. Finally, it went in. It was a good feeling.

"More importantly, it's not about me in here. It was a great win by the guys, and I was glad to contribute and hopefully continue."

Stafford's first goal since March 31, 2012, gave Buffalo the lead just 3:24 in. Boston's Dougie Hamilton closed an evenly played opening period by scoring his first NHL goal with 2:04 left.

Boston took over following intermission. The Sabres fell into their typical second-period slump. They entered the night with a league-worst 24 goals allowed in the second, and Boston's Rich Peverley quickly struck for the 25th.

The Sabres went through the motions for the rest of the period and were booed off the ice at the end of it. The Bruins enjoyed a 17-6 shot edge during the 20 minutes. They

could have easily skated into the second intermission with a bigger lead, but Miller made 16 of his 30 saves during the period to keep the Sabres close.

“That’s what you’ve got to do in this league. You’ve got to stay there,” Miller said. “The guys played a great third period. We really stepped up and did a nice job.”

Tyler Myers, benched twice last weekend, knotted the game 2:03 into the third. Boston goalie Anton Khudobin stopped Jochen Hecht on a two-on-one, but Myers swooped in for the rebound.

The Sabres continued their rally and reclaimed the lead with 10:58 to go. Tyler Ennis and Stafford entered the Bruins’ zone with speed. A save of Stafford’s shot ended up on the stick of Christian Ehrhoff, and the defenseman ripped home the winner from the high slot to get the sellout crowd of 19,070 in a believing mood.

“The good part is we came out at the start of the third and came right after them, and we took control of the game,” Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said.

Myers sent Boston to just its second regulation loss – both at the hands of the 6-8-1 Sabres – when he carried the puck deep into the Bruins’ zone and fed Cody Hodgson for a tap-in at the post with 8:15 left.

“Just hopefully we learn from that period and apply it to a whole game,” said Miller, who returns to the ice Sunday afternoon against Pittsburgh and took extra contentment in beating the Northeast Division leaders Friday. “We recognize the rivalry. I know the guys recognize it as a measuring stick. They’re one of the elite teams. We step on the ice, you want to prove you belong. That’s what it comes down to for me. I think it’s a shared feeling around the room.”

Sabres Notebook: Myers returns to good form

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

February 15, 2013

This version of Tyler Myers was a much closer facsimile to the guy who won the Calder Trophy three years ago. To the guy the Buffalo Sabres gave a \$38.5 million contract to prior to last season. To the guy the Sabres hope someday could be in Norris Trophy talk as the NHL's best defenseman.

Physical in his own end and free-wheeling in the offensive zone, Myers had his best all-around game of a rugged season in Friday's 4-2 bounceback against the Boston Bruins.

Myers scored the tying goal at 2:03 of the third period, backhanding home a Jochen Hecht rebound, and made a great play down low to set up Cody Hodgson for a tap-in at 11:45 that gave the Sabres their two-goal cushion.

Myers entered the game with just one point, a goal in the opener Jan. 20 against Philadelphia. He also had an ugly minus-9 rating, one off the worst in the NHL. So a two-point, plus-2 night was a huge boost for him in his second outing after a two-game benching.

"There's a lot of good things to take from it," Myers said. "I think the most important thing is I continue, not let this be a one-game thing. A lot of it is confidence. It's coming back."

The 6-foot-8 Myers' big finish to this one was a huge talking point afterward.

"When he's skating and moving, he's a tough man to keep track of," said coach Lindy Ruff. "I thought his energy in the game was maybe as good as I've seen this year."

"He's got range, he's got physical attributes not a lot of people have," goaltender Ryan Miller said. "And I've been trying to be positive with him, reminding him he's a big guy: 'Everyone has to come through you to come to me so let's work together.'"

Myers played 20 minutes, 47 seconds Tuesday at Ottawa and was largely crisp with the puck in his own end. He was at 18:40 Friday and said his time in the press box definitely helped.

"It never hurts to get up there and watch a game," he said. "It slows things down quite a bit, allows you to really study the game and learn."

Myers' goal was a perfectly-timed decision to follow a 2-on-1 that Hecht and Nathan Gerbe built going into the Boston zone. Myers quickly swooped in on a rebound after Anton Khudobin stopped Hecht from point-blank range.

“In previous games, I would try to do that at the wrong time and it would get me in trouble,” Myers said. “Especially the last two games, I’m starting to make better decisions on when to jump and when not to. It’s just a matter of balancing it.

Myers’ primary thrill, however, was that his big night came in a big win.

“You look at that third period and it was one of the best periods I’ve seen from us in a long time,” he said. “It was really good to see. A huge step. I’m tired of hearing about potential though. It’s time we realize what we’re capable of and it’s time we start playing like it.”

...

The Sabres have likely lost defenseman Andrej Sekera for a few games due to a severe charley horse suffered when he was checked into the boards by Boston’s Shawn Thornton late in the third period. Mike Weber sat out as a healthy scratch Friday and will almost certainly return to replace Sekera.

...

- Defenseman Christian Ehrhoff’s two-point night was his first multi-point affair since March 7, 2012 against Carolina. He played 26:58 on Friday, his third-highest total of the season.
- Winger Steve Ott was credited with 11 hits, the first Buffalo player in double digits since Paul Gaustad had 10 against Pittsburgh in the first Winter Classic at Ralph Wilson Stadium on Jan. 1, 2008.
- Pittsburgh Penguins defenseman Brooks Orpik, formerly of East Amherst, played his 600th career NHL game for the Pens on Friday night in Winnipeg. No. 601 will come here in Sunday’s nationally televised 12:30 matinee.

Black says everyone with Sabres under scrutiny

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

February 15, 2013

With the Buffalo Sabres wallowing at the bottom of the Eastern Conference, no one in the organization is above scrutiny, team president Ted Black insisted Friday during an interview at The Buffalo News.

Speaking with News sports columnist Bucky Gleason on “The Bucky & Sully Show” at Buffalo-news.com, Black said both he and owner Terry Pegula are showing patience but would not pinpoint if the team needs a roster shake-up or a change at the top. General Manager Darcy Regier and coach Lindy Ruff are both in their 16th year and coming under increasing fire from fans and media.

“It’s probably a little bit of everything in terms of everyone needing to do their jobs better,” Black said. “I think Steve Ott said after the last game, ‘We need to look in the mirror.’ I don’t need to put that on the players. I think all of us need to do that. Good is not good enough. Darcy has had some very good moves that we’ve looked at and said, ‘Boy that’s a great move.’ On ice, it hasn’t translated. When we win, everything is going to look very easy. ... But when you’re losing, no one escapes scrutiny.”

Regier received a contract extension from Pegula that was announced last month on the day before the season opener. The deal has received growing derision from fans and media in the wake of the team’s troubles.

“The extension that Darcy got is more of an affirmation that we trust the job he’s doing right now,” Black said. “It’s not in perpetuity. It’s not a perpetual contract. It’s more of a ‘We want you to continue to work hard at your job without something being a distraction to you for one, and for two, to show we have our full faith in you to do your job. Go out and do it as best as you possibly can.’ ”

Black said Regier has Pegula’s backing to change the roster.

“The paradigm has shifted,” Black said. “If there’s an opportunity to improve our team with a player transaction, Darcy has free reign to do that. It takes two to tango. I really wish we could pull back the curtain and let everyone know the types of transactions we’re trying to make. ... That shouldn’t be mistaken for a lack of will or a lack of effort.”

Black would not directly respond to a question about the possibility of replacing Ruff.

“I support our coach,” Black said before admitting “everyone has one” when asked if there’s a breaking point. “But at what point do you give up on Joe Smith the player? I believe that should not be a public answer.”

Black said the organizational mandate is to make the playoffs every year, something the team has failed to do in six of the last 10 years.

“Looking forward and saying, ‘We’re going to miss the playoffs so many times in the next 10 years’ makes me want to vomit,” Black said. “Our goal needs to be we make the playoffs every year.

“Darcy is encouraged to make mistakes. If [injured winger] Ville Leino turns out to be a mistake, no one’s head is going to get chopped off for it. ... We’ll say, ‘Try harder, reach higher.’ That is a winning culture.”

The Bucky & Sully Show airs at 10 a.m. every Friday at Buffalonews.com. The video archive of Friday’s 18-minute session with Black is available at the website on the Sabres Edge blog.

Sabres Vanek not run down

WGR 550

February 17, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- I know, some of you are in a panic over Thomas Vanek being pointless in three games. Before that, he had 11 goals and 12 assists for 23 points in 11 games. Going into Saturday's games, Vanek still leads Patrick Kane and Sidney Crosby by two in the overall NHL point race.

When the Penguins come in Sunday afternoon, Crosby will have six goals and 15 assists, Evgeni Malkin will have three goals and 14 assists while James Neal will have 11 goals and three assists.

At 10-5, Pittsburgh's .667 winning percentage is 6th in the NHL. Buffalo's .433 is 24th. The Pens are 6th in goals scoring and 7th in goals against.

The Sabres have cut down the chances and the shots against, but they're still a league worst giving up 33.7 shots per game which is six more than Pittsburgh.

Getting back to Vanek, I wondered if he was fighting an injury since to me he looks like he's been laboring lately. Both he and Lindy Ruff said no. Ruff did say, "He didn't go well the last couple. I still think he made a great play to Pominville early in the game that I think hit the crossbar and he had the empty net opportunity. Sometimes it's one or two games that you get a little bit out of sync, but I think you'll see him right back on track again come tomorrow." From Vanek's point of view he said, "I'm feeling good. I think early on, our first shift, Poms and I had a 2-on-1 and he just missed it there. Playing against Chara is always a tough task, he doesn't give you much. At the same time, I thought defensively we didn't give up much as a line. The three of us had a good run, I think we were practicing well, figuring things out and we'll be back on the score sheet."

Hodgson did score last game, but he has just that one goal in six games. In that time he had just three points. Pominville has not had a point in five games after picking up 14 points in 10. He has one goal in eight games.

The good news is while this line is slumping, the team is 3-2 so that means some other players are getting on the score sheet. Vanek said, "Right and that's what you need. We talked about that, other guys stepping up, I mean Staff has been playing well and got rewarded finally, but I'll just talk for my line, we know we've got more, teams are playing us tighter so we just have to figure out a different way."

Vanek does not show well against Pittsburgh scoring just nine goals and six assists in 26 games.

For Pittsburgh, Marc-Andre Fleury has played five out of six games including the one Friday in Winnipeg. In 18 games vs Buffalo he's 11-4-2 with a 2.69 goals against and .905 save percentage. His backup is now Tomas Vokoun. In 22 games against Buffalo

he's 8-10-3 with a 2.66 goals against and .915 save percentage. Crosby feasts on the Sabres with 29 points in 21 games. Malkin has 28 points in 21 games vs Buffalo.

Andrej Sekera is still day to day with a charlie horse and did not skate on Saturday. Ruff kept the team on the ice for about 35 minutes.

Join Pat Malacaro Sunday for the pregame when he'll be joined by Lindy Ruff, Thomas Vanek and Alex Sulzer.

Pardy's Presence Could Allow Sabres to Make a Move

By Matthew Coller

WGR 550

February 16, 2013

When the Buffalo Sabres acquired Steve Ott and Adam Pardy from the Dallas Stars in exchange for Derek Roy, most people in Western New York had heard of Ott but didn't know anything about Pardy.

His 183 NHL games had been spent in either Calgary or Dallas – not exactly the top two teams on Sabres fans' radar. He probably didn't know much about WNY either having come 1,800 miles from home in Newfoundland and played minor league hockey in Omaha, Las Vegas and Quad City.

It's only been a few weeks since Pardy began calling the Eastern time zone home, but he's played a major role in the Rochester Americans' post-lockout success. Since Pardy – almost inexplicably – passed through waivers, the Amerks have won six of the seven games in which he's suited up. They had won his first six before a 3-1 loss to the Houston Aeros on Friday night.

To Sabres fans, he's still somewhat unknown. The 6-2, 220-pound stay-at-home defenseman, who was waived to Rochester after a one-week training camp, has only played one game with the Sabres so far this season. But fans who have seen him in Rochester will tell you the Sabres' defensive depth is in good hands. In fact, many would argue the organization's fifth or sixth best Dman is in the Flower City – not the Queen City.

“It's tough,” Pardy said after Friday night's game. “Sometimes you wonder when this marry-go-round is going to end. It's always a difficult thing to deal with mentally because over the last two years, it feels like I haven't been part of one team. It's challenging, but you have to roll with it.”

The seven games Pardy has played in the American Hockey League are the most since he's played in the minors since 2007-08. He's been an NHL regular in between, but his time in Dallas included a shoulder injury that held him to only 36 games last season.

All hockey players are aware that they only have so many years to live the dream. For an NHL regular to be traded then sent to the minors, it's more than just a demotion, it's a day, month or year wasting away. It's easy – and human - to float a little more or zone out at practice.

Thing is, Pardy knows he's one blocked shot or twisted knee away from going from wasting away to playing a crucial role in the NHL. His effort in Rochester insists he isn't leaving anything to chance when the Sabres decide on who should be called up first.

“It's kind of painful sometimes,” the Amerks' D-man said. “But I have to use it. I have to use it to get better. There's only one way I'm going to get back to the NHL and that's

improving my game. Sitting and sulking about it or crying about it or pouting isn't going to get me anywhere.”

The road to the highest level of hockey has never been the easiest. Pardy has had to earn every ounce of playing time in the NHL – it never came for free with pedigree or status. He was selected in the sixth round of the 2004 draft. Only six players from that round ever made the NHL and only two – including Patrick Kaleta – have played more NHL games.

How rare is he? On his 2005-06 ECHL team, only four of his teammates ever ended up playing a game in the NHL. The rest stayed in the minors or played over seas. As a competitor, however, he won't settle for just having made it farther than his counterparts. After a tough loss on Friday night, the D-man said he will have trouble sleeping.

While Pardy is frustrated, the Sabres are pleased to have him as defensive depth – a player clearly too good for the AHL. General Manager Darcy Regier said on WGR he would be interested in making a deal involving defenseman if possible because he's so confident in that depth. After Pardy's first game, Regier made a special trip into the locker room to congratulate his new defenseman on a job well done.

Don't be surprised if Pardy is somewhere in the NHL by the end of the year – whether it's in Buffalo because of injuries or a trade or he's the one that is dealt.

“I've been in professional hockey now for eight years,” Pardy said. “I've seen a lot of things go both ways. It's a crazy game, it's a crazy life. You just have to roll with it.”

But for the time being, he is making the Amerks' defense look a heck of a lot better than it was before the lockout.

One Liners...

Brian Flynn – Went down with what looked like a head injury. Ron Rolston said it didn't appear to be a long-term injury, but you never know after that type of hit. Flynn would be a big loss.

Zemgus Girgensons – Was still out of the lineup, but is expected to be back in within the next week or two.

Nick Tarnasky – Would fit in pretty well with Patrick Kaleta and Cody McCormick on the fourth line. He scored the Amerks' only goal Friday night. He has some skill and is tough. Really tough

Matt Ellis – Has his excellent reputation for a reason. Despite his recent send-down, he was putting in a full effort in an Amerks uniform

David Leggio – Was strong stopping 30 of 32 in the loss. He's up to a .917 save percentage this season and .949 in February.

Mark Pysyk – Has looked calmer in his own zone over the past month. He also fired an impressive quick slap shot that rung the post.

Phil Varone – Is getting more ice time and scoring more of late. Since the exit of Hodgson, he's gotten more opportunity. He didn't score Friday, but was around the puck often.

Mark Mancari – Had six shots and an assist. He is one of the veterans whose efforts have to have younger players working harder all the time to keep up with him.

Sabres' Ennis, Foligno and Stafford trying to recapture magic

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 17, 2013

BUFFALO – The NHL's hottest late-season line lasted four games before an awful start – zero goals – forced Sabres coach Lindy Ruff to scatter Tyler Ennis, Marcus Foligno and Drew Stafford earlier this year.

Prior to the season, the thought of the trio skating together for a full campaign had Sabres fans drooling.

Then, by Jan. 27, the line was done.

Now, the combination's back together, showcasing some of what helped it compile a whopping 21 goals and 49 points during the final month of 2011-12.

A strong forecheck from Ennis and Foligno created Stafford's first goal since March 31 in Friday's 4-2 win over Boston. Ennis and Stafford later assisted on Christian Ehrhoff's third-period winner.

Afterward, Ruff called them the Sabres' best line.

"I think because of the way we played (last season) people just maybe thought we'd been together a while," Ennis said Saturday after the Sabres prepared for this afternoon's tilt against the Pittsburgh Penguins inside the First Niagara Center. "But it was still new and fresh. There's learning curves. We're having fun with it, though. We need to keep improving."

Foligno added: "We've only played together a certain amount of games. It hasn't been a year or two we've played with each other. There's going to be ruts."

The Sabres need the line, which Ruff reunited recently, to produce consistently.

Despite their first slump this season, the Cody Hodgson, Jason Pominville and Thomas Vanek trio has still scored 23 of the Sabres' 42 goals, 54 percent of the scoring.

But they're starting to slow down. Vanek's pointless in three straight games after scoring 11 goals and 23 points in his first 11 appearances. Pominville's pointless in the last five games. Hodgson scored Friday, breaking a two-game point drought.

Ruff said Vanek, who battled a muscle strain last month, isn't hurt and simply "didn't go well the last couple."

"Sometimes it's one or two games that you get a little bit out of sync," Ruff said. "I think that you'll see him right back on track here (against Pittsburgh)."

Ennis has quietly compiled five goals and 12 points at center, giving the Sabres some much-needed secondary scoring. But the power wingers haven't produced much.

Foligno has one just goal and eight points. Stafford only has Friday's score and seven points.

"You always want some sort of balance," Stafford said. "You don't want one line carrying the line the whole time. Also, you don't want to see them go completely cold. ... Hopefully, we can make up for it right now if they're not having a night where they're producing."

Before Friday, the line had been gaining momentum, narrowly missing some nice chances.

But what happened in January? Why couldn't the three score early on?

"I think when you really break it down, last year we really had a lot of our opportunities on odd-man rushes, a lot of two-on-ones, breaks, transitions," Stafford explained. "I think maybe teams were a little more aware of that, maybe shut that down a little bit, made it a little bit more difficult for us to have any kind of attack on the rush. It took a little bit of an adjustment period for us to get that going."

"Obviously, the last few games it seems like we've been getting a few more chances. Production's finally coming. Hopefully, it's just the start."

Ruff sees the linemates getting inside to the dirty areas in front of the net, setting themselves up for rebounds. The speedy Ennis is also helping to create a more north-south style, he said.

The trio's ability to hold the puck tells Ennis the combination's clicking.

"When we haven't been doing as well we haven't had the puck as much," Ennis said. "That's because we haven't been getting it to the right spots in the neutral zone. We haven't been in the right spots in the offensive zone. So when we have the puck and we're on the forecheck, that's when you know we're going."

Stafford, a notoriously streaky player, believes his first goal in 18 games could get him going. The 27-year-old assistant captain thinks he handled his long slump well, staying positive throughout the ordeal.

"It comes with maturity, it comes with age," Stafford said. "It's one of those things where I've been through it before unfortunately. But everyone's gone through it before. It's just a matter of keeping the right attitude. If you're coming around the rink and you have a bad attitude and you're sulking around, it's just going to rub off on other guys, and we don't need that right now."

Crosby impressed by Sabres superstar Vanek

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 17, 2012

BUFFALO – With three straight pointless games entering this afternoon’s tilt against the Pittsburgh Penguins, Sabres superstar Thomas Vanek is struggling a bit for the first time this season.

Still, the slick winger’s 11-goal, 23-point start has been dynamic. Count Penguins superstar Sidney Crosby among those who’ve noticed Vanek’s exploits.

“I’m pretty aware of how consistent he’s been,” Crosby said Saturday after the Penguins prepared for the Sabres inside the First Niagara Center.

In Crosby’s mind, what makes Vanek so good?

“I think there’s a lot of different things,” Crosby explained. “He’s got a great shot. He doesn’t need much time or space to put the puck in the net. He goes to the tough areas. He’ll go to the front of the net and score those gritty goals that you have to score. He’s patient. Sometimes he’ll hold the puck it seems like forever and then dish it off or find some way to kind of tuck it around the goalie.

“So his patience, when I think of him as a player, the patience that he has really sticks out in my mind.”

xxx

Sabres defenseman Andrej Sekera, who left Friday’s 4-2 win over Boston after suffering a charley horse midway through the third period, will likely be out today.

“He’s doing OK today,” Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said. “I’d say doubtful for (the Penguins.)”

It’s likely Mike Weber will return to the lineup after getting scratched Friday.

xxx

Afternoon games are becoming regular for the Sabres. They’ve already played four of the nine on their 48-game schedule.

“I think you just get used to them,” Ruff said. “I know that some players like them. From our standpoint, we’ve never had a lot of them, never had a lot of them here. But I look at it like we play a game early, get to enjoy the rest of the day. You come to the rink ready to play right off the bat. You don’t have that extra trip. So it’s a quicker day.”

xxx

Ruff, whose Sabres are playing on NBC today as part of “Hockey Day in America,” recalling what the team’s legendary trainer said to the Sabres’ other Americans in the early 1980s: “Frank Christie, who was one of the greatest, used to tell (Phil) Housley and (Mike) Ramsey, ‘You know, us Americans got to stick together.’”

The Sabres have seven Americans on the roster now.

Notes: The Bruins have allowed eight third-period goals all season. Seven have come against the Sabres. ... Ruff moved assistant coach Teppo Numminen, a former defenseman, behind the bench Friday, something he had tried once earlier. “Part of it was we went with a little different game plan,” Ruff said. “I wanted him to be able to talk to players after shifts.”

Sabres fans fall for ticket scam

By George Richert

WIVB

February 15, 2012

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - Some Buffalo Sabres fans hoping to see the team play at First Niagara Center were in for a surprise when they went downtown - the tickets didn't exist.

The fans who paid money for the tickets saw an posted Thursday morning on Craigslist offering four tickets to the Sabres game for \$150. The victim who alerted News 4 about the ad says he called a man who identified himself as John Bradley and the two arranged to meet at the Boulevard Mall.

When the two met, the victim handed over the cash and was told to pick up the tickets at the will call window at First Niagara Center under the name "Presley Elvis."

When the victim showed up at the will call window hours before the game, he was told there are no tickets on hold under that code name, and the person at the counter says he wasn't the only one who fell for it.

While News 4 was near the ticket counter preparing our story, we stumbled across another group of four dejected fans. They didn't want to talk on camera but said they also had responded to that Craigslist ad, arranged to meet the same man at a different location and was also told to pick them under Presley Elvis.

At least four groups of four people that we know of handed over \$150 each in this scam.

The Sabres organization recommends Stubhub if you must buy through a third party.

Peggy Penders of the Better Business Bureau said, "There are ticket holders that need to sell their tickets for a variety of reasons, but they should be able to have information about that seller. Certainly there are some questions that you might ask of the seller and certainly you don't want to pay for anything unless you have the property in your hand."

Scam artist leaves fans holding the bag

By Don Glynn
Niagara Gazette
February 17, 2012

Niagara Gazette — If you're a sports fan looking forward to that next Buffalo Sabres game, you need to be extra careful where you buy tickets.

In case you haven't heard, the scam artists are at work again, as evidenced by the ripoff from a guy who reportedly told a buyer he could pick up the four tickets Thursday at the will-call window at the First Niagara Center. They were to be left under the name of "Presley Elvis," which should have raised eyebrows before the buyer handed over more than \$150.

According to a WIVB report Saturday, at least four groups of fans fell for the scheme that was initially advertised on Craigslist. Obviously it's a reminder how risky it is to purchase tickets from perfect strangers.

No doubt the scalpers (scam artists as well) will be out in full force on April, 2, when the Toronto Blue Jays host the Cleveland Indians in the already sold-out home opener at Rogers Centre (the former SkyDome). "The single-game tickets that went on sale to the general public Friday were gone within minutes," said Stephen Brooks, the Jays' senior vice president.

A club spokesman confirmed that some 2,500 tickets for the opener had been sold on Stubhub, a re-sale site. The cheapest seats (\$14) were selling for \$57 with the most expensive going for \$1,620. The Blue Jays dislike the idea of fans paying such inflated prices but, as one official said, "it's the unfortunate reality of the ticket world." That's a comforting thought, eh?

For the record, interest in the Jays soared this year in the wake of strong trades that General Manager Alex Anthopoulos pulled off. Signs are that the total attendance in 2013 could reach the three million mark, matching the fan base in the early 1990s when the Jays won back-to-back World Series.

The sharp hike in ticket sales also has inspired the players. Cy Young winner R.A. Dickey, scheduled to pitch on opening day, said that it was now up to him and his teammates to perform on the field. The pitcher said it was exciting to be part of an organization that has so much excitement around it.

The Jays officials anticipate more fans from Western New York as a result of the new partnership with the Buffalo Bisons, the prime Triple-A franchise. Anthopoulos noted that fans interested in keeping tabs on players they watched at Coca-Cola Field in Buffalo can see them just 82 miles away in Rogers Centre, when they move up to the major league,

A number of motorcoach companies in the Buffalo-Niagara area have already received inquiries from groups planning baseball excursions to Toronto. In the past, the New York Yankees were a key factor in boosting ticket sales but this year it appears the Jays might stand on their own.

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REPORT READY: Just a reminder, the long-awaited draft scoping report for the northern section of the Robert Moses Parkway, the area between Main Street in Niagara Falls and the Village of Lewiston, will be available for the public to see Wednesday, from 3 to 7 p.m. in the Cataract Room at the Conference Center Niagara Falls, 101 Falls St. Project consultants will be present to answer any questions.

Copies of the report will also be available later at the Niagara Falls City Hall, at the libraries in the Falls, Lewiston and Youngstown and at regional parks administration building in the Niagara Falls State Park.

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FACE THE FACTS: Overheard in Mom's Coffee Shop, Military Road and Niagara Falls Boulevard: "She got her good looks from her father. He's a plastic surgeon" — a know-it-all customer.

Penguins-Sabres Preview

By Taylor Bechtold

Associated Press

February 17, 2012

With one of the league's stingiest defenses, the Pittsburgh Penguins have been quite comfortable playing on the road.

The Penguins, however, may have a difficult time making themselves at home on Sunday when they visit a Buffalo Sabres team looking to build off a big win.

Although it faced a road-heavy start to the lockout-shortened schedule, Pittsburgh (10-5-0) has won seven of nine away from home to move just behind New Jersey for the most points in the Eastern Conference.

The Penguins rank near the top of the East in goals allowed (2.33 per game) overall, but they've given up among the fewest (2.00) in the NHL on the road.

Marc-Andre Fleury has been a major catalyst to the road success. He made 25 saves in a 3-1 win at Winnipeg on Sunday, improving to 4-1-0 with a 1.58 goals-against average in five starts away from home.

Fleury has enjoyed success against Buffalo lately, winning six of his last seven starts with a 2.15 GAA and a shutout.

Sidney Crosby should also be happy to see the Sabres. He has seven goals and 13 assists during a 13-game point streak in the series, notching at least a point in all 12 career games at Buffalo.

This time, though, Buffalo (6-8-1) figures to be riding high following a 4-2 home victory over Northeast Division-leading Boston on Friday.

Christian Ehrhoff scored the game-winner as the Sabres rallied for three third-period goals en route to their third win in five games.

"We got a couple of good shifts in early in the third period," Ehrhoff said. "We rode from there, like a snowball effect."

Although the Sabres are last in the Northeast, they have handed the rival Bruins their only two losses in regulation.

After totaling 11 goals and 23 points in his first 11 games, Buffalo's Thomas Vanek has been held off the scoresheet in his last three contests. He does have a point in each of his last four games against Pittsburgh.

Also struggling lately is captain Jason Pominville, held without a point in five consecutive games after collecting six goals and eight assists in his first 10.

The Sabres also haven't gotten much out of the power play, converting 1 of 30 in over their last eight games.

It's been a much different story for the Penguins, who have scored on the power play in seven straight contests. They've gone 10 for 27 (37.0 percent) during that stretch, and rank near the top of the league (27.6) on the season.

James Neal leads the league with seven of his team-best 11 goals on the power play. He has six goals in his last six games and five in that same stretch against the Sabres.

Craig Adams scored his first two goals of the season Friday to key the team's second straight win.

"If I had more nights like this I would make a better living," Adams said.

The Penguins would do well to get off to a fast start, having won nine of 12 when scoring first. They've done so in an NHL-best 12 games, including all nine on the road.

While Buffalo's Ryan Miller has a 2.01 GAA in his last four starts, he's 1-5-0 with a 4.06 mark in his last seven against the Penguins.

Pittsburgh has won eight of 10 against the Sabres, including three of four in Buffalo.

Penguins Notebook: Sabres hope to feed off comeback victory

By Shelly Anderson

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

February 17, 2012

BUFFALO, N.Y.-- The Buffalo Sabres, mired near the bottom of the Northeast Division, Eastern Conference and overall NHL standings at 6-8-1, might have reached a turning point Friday night.

They were booed off the ice by their home crowd at the end of the second period, when they trailed by a goal, but came back with three third-period goals to beat division-leading Boston, 4-2, and end a two-game losing streak.

The Sabres figure playing a highly skilled team such as the Penguins -- who visit First Niagara Center today -- is a good way to forge ahead.

"Against a team like Boston, one of the top teams in the league, they're extremely good with back pressure," said winger Drew Stafford, who broke a slump Friday with his first goal this season.

"They're extremely good with high-skilled forwards. A lot like Pittsburgh. We're going to have our work cut out for us.

"[Friday] night's game was a huge statement win for us, a huge character win for us. We want to stick with it, come back against a team like that. We know we're going to have the same kind of game [from] Pittsburgh, and we have to be ready for that."

Things had been going so badly that defenseman Tyler Myers, a 2008 first-round draft pick, was benched for two games.

He had one of the third-period goals in the win against Boston.

"It was one of our best periods as a team," Myers said. "Really, in the last two years, even when we took the lead, we've been known to sit back a lot. But we took the lead and we kept pushing, but in a smart way, which was really good to see. It's exactly the way we have to play to win."

Asked to compare the Penguins with Boston, Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said, "We know that they're playing well. They've probably got as much team speed as Boston.

"I think their lineup is just as deep as Boston.

"Maybe Boston defenders have a slight edge when it comes to the back end.

"Overall, they're one of the teams you're going to have to deal with if you want to get to the top in the East."

Bennett enjoys the moment

Penguins winger Beau Bennett doesn't have text service in Canada, so, when the team landed Saturday afternoon in Buffalo, his phone nearly exploded.

He made his NHL debut the night before in a 3-1 win at Winnipeg. The team opted to spend the night there, then fly to Buffalo.

"I talked to a lot of people and thanked a lot of people for all they've done to help me along the way," Bennett said. "I have some more to go, but I got to most of them."

Bennett had one shot, one hit, two blocked shots and no points in 11 minutes, 37 seconds of ice time.

"It was really exciting," he said. "The jitters were going a little bit, but, after a couple of shifts, I kind of settled down."

"That first time playing in a Canadian rink with that crowd, it's definitely different than what I'm used to. It was louder. But you enjoy it. That's what you play hockey for. That's what I always kind of dreamt of growing up."

Bennett, a first-year pro recalled Thursday from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton of the American Hockey League, said he hasn't been subjected to much rookie hazing. Yet.

"I'm sure something will come," he said. "But just the normal stuff -- helping out with some stuff and sitting near the front of the bus."

Bucking an old trend

It's a cliché that coaches worry about their own teams' play more than that of their opponents, but Ruff broke away from that when asked about Penguins star centers Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin.

"Well, those guys do some stuff really well ... " Ruff said.

Tip-ins

Penguins coach Dan Bylsma stopped short of naming Marc-Andre Fleury his starting goaltender for today, but did acknowledge that, with a schedule that's not as cramped as it sometimes is this lockout-shortened season, he can consider riding a hot goalie rather than sticking to a preset rotation. Fleury has won the past two games, giving up three goals. ... Sabres winger Thomas Vanek led the NHL with 23 points before Saturday, but he has had no points in his past three games. ... Buffalo defenseman Andrej Sekera (charley horse) did not practice and is doubtful for the game.

Penguins notebook: Sabres' Vanek's scoring touch poses problems

By Josh Yohe

Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

February 16, 2012

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Sabres left wing Thomas Vanek has always been among the NHL's most tantalizingly talented players.

This season, he has played with a consistency that has never been his hallmark.

Vanek will enter Sunday's game against the Penguins as the NHL's leading scorer with 23 points.

“Vanek has started off extremely hot,” Penguins coach Dan Bylsma said. “It's not something new. He's a dangerous player, a skilled player. He can make plays, score goals.”

Bylsma said that any reputation Vanek has garnered for merely being a perimeter player is unwarranted.

“He doesn't have the reputation for doing it inside, but he is good at the net,” Bylsma said. “He's a dangerous guy that you have to watch.”

Flower power

Marc-Andre Fleury has played in six of the Penguins' past eight games and might continue seeing a heavier workload.

Fleury played a terrific game in Winnipeg, and given that the Penguins' schedule isn't quite as busy as it was in January, Bylsma might alter his plans and let his starter play more than planned.

“The first two weeks were easy to map out,” said Bylsma, explaining that back-to-back games made splitting responsibilities between Fleury and backup Tomas Vokoun easier.

“Right now, there's a little more flexibility. We've certainly got it mapped out. But you see that Flower has played two really strong games in a row. You do look at that.”

Disco fever

Penguins radio broadcaster Mike Lange asked Bylsma if Craig Adams' two-goal performance in Winnipeg was a “Dan Bylsma” kind of game.

Bylsma's skills as a player were similar to Adams' during the former's playing days, but Bylsma waved off the suggestion.

“Any time somebody gets two goals,” Bylsma said, “it takes a Dan Bylsma game out of the story.”