



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Firing brings Ruff era to startling end

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

February 21, 2013

Buffalo Sabres coach Lindy Ruff came to First Niagara Center for practice Wednesday, meeting some of his players and looking at video before heading to a news conference to honor high schoolers who will take the ice downtown next week. It was like any other day in Sabreland.

Ruff then worked his struggling team hard on the ice, a 90-minute practice that was one of the longest of the season. He met the media for 4 minutes, cutting off questions a little earlier than on most days this season. Then he headed out to his home in Clarence.

But General Manager Darcy Regier soon came over with some startling news. After nearly 16 years as the coach of the Sabres, many of them glorious and many of them maddening, Ruff was fired.

Regier said Ruff took the news professionally and asked if he could speak to his players as they gathered at the Northtown Center at Amherst for a bus ride to Toronto for tonight's game against the Maple Leafs. Ruff boarded the bus and gave the players the word that sent shock waves throughout the National Hockey League when the Sabres released it on their official Twitter feed at about 3 p.m.

"We're not playing great hockey, and there's a lot of pressure on the organization," goaltender Ryan Miller told The Buffalo News in a phone conversation from Toronto. "I can imagine right now ownership or management need to do something. It's unfortunate. I feel like it's a situation we put the coach in."

"We weren't executing. If we were executing but still losing, I think that's one thing. But we're not playing the game the right way. It's too bad. Lindy's a good guy, loyal guy, good coach. I just feel bad."

In a packed news conference early Wednesday evening in First Niagara Center, Regier said Rochester Americans coach Ron Rolston will become the Sabres' interim coach for the rest of the season.

Rolston was to meet with the Sabres in their Toronto hotel Wednesday night and will coach his first NHL game tonight in Air Canada Centre. He will take the ice with them for the first time during their morning skate there at 11:30.

The Sabres are 6-10-1 and mired in 13th place in the Eastern Conference. They are last in the Northeast Division and 27th overall. Ruff's final game was Tuesday's 2-1 loss to the Winnipeg Jets, a defeat that saw First Niagara Center fans loudly boo the team for long stretches.

Ruff called the loss “embarrassing” and, when asked about the fans’ reaction, said, “We’ve got to take a hard look at everything.”

That sent the front office into urgent talks about the coach Wednesday morning. Ruff, meanwhile, was on the ice running practice, trying to fix a team that is one of the worst in the league defensively and has too much of its scoring coming from one forward line.

“I think the last game was, quite honestly, a tipping point,” Regier said. “It was evident to me that we were searching for answers to too many questions.”

Ruff, who was a rookie player with the Sabres in 1979 and ascended to become team captain, was an assistant with the Florida Panthers when he replaced Ted Nolan with the Sabres on July 21, 1997. He turned 53 on Sunday and is the first NHL coach fired this season.

Ruff leaves after the longest run in the Sabres’ 43-year history. He led them to four trips to the Eastern Conference finals and to the 1999 Stanley Cup final, where they lost in six games to the Dallas Stars. He had a career regular-season record of 571-432-84 with 78 ties.

Earlier Wednesday, Sabres owner Terry Pegula declined an interview request by The News to speak on the state of the team in the wake of Tuesday’s disheartening loss. After Ruff’s firing, only Regier met with the media, while Pegula issued a written statement.

“The hockey world knows how I and the entire Buffalo Sabres organization feel about Lindy Ruff not only as a coach but also as a person,” Pegula said. “His long tenure with the Sabres has ended. His qualities have made this decision very difficult. I personally want Lindy to know that he can consider me a friend always.”

A red-eyed Regier, his jaw quivering at times as he spoke, accepted responsibility for the decision. Regier, a disciple of the Bill Torrey-Al Arbour management team that led the New York Islanders to four Stanley Cups in the 1980s, has been loath to consider firing Ruff despite the struggles in recent years.

It’s clear Pegula, team President Ted Black and senior adviser Ken Sawyer were all involved in making sure the GM, whose own status is tenuous as well, made the call to end the longest-running coach/GM combination in Buffalo sports history.

“I made the decision, but these things are not done in a vacuum,” Regier said. “I’m in conversations with Terry, with Ted Black at times, with Ken Sawyer. Like a lot of things here. But if it was Lindy or I and ownership and myself, we’re working as a team.”

Ruff was the second-longest tenured coach in North American pro sports next to Gregg Popovich of the National Basketball Association’s San Antonio Spurs. But Popovich has won four NBA titles. Ruff got to his league’s final only once, and hasn’t been close since co-captains Daniel Briere and Chris Drury left via free agency July 1, 2007.

The Sabres have missed the playoffs in three of the five seasons since and lost in the first round in the other two. They enter tonight's play 4 points out of the final playoff slot, but Tampa Bay and the New York Rangers both have 17 points and two games in hand on Buffalo.

Many of the Buffalo players have never had another head coach in the NHL.

"I never thought this day would come," captain Jason Pominville told Rogers Sportsnet upon the team's arrival in Toronto.

Added winger Thomas Vanek, the NHL's leading scorer: "He's a top free agent out there right now, and any organization that's going to get him is going to get a great coach."

Rolston, 45, is in his second season in Rochester after the Sabres plucked him from his role as coach of USA Hockey's National Team Development Program in 2011. The Amerks are 27-18-2-1, tied for seventh place in the American Hockey League's Western Conference. Last year, they were 36-26-10-4 and finished seventh in the West.

"His teams play with structure and discipline," Regier said. "They have a good work ethic. He has a good hockey club down there right now, and he has them playing good hockey. I think you'll see those strengths."

Regier deflected a question about whether he was angry at the players for underperforming so badly in a season in which their owner has spent nearly \$65 million on payroll.

"I'm disappointed in myself. I'm disappointed for Lindy," Regier said. "When I see the players, I'm disappointed for them, too. We should all be disappointed. As far as anger. We have too much work to do. We can't go there."

After his rough practice Wednesday, Ruff was gruff with his answers and made the unusual admission that things had to change.

"If we're going to be like this, it isn't working the way we're going," he said. "I think the indication today is, we're going to have to try some things, and that's what we're talking about."

No one knew that a new coach was going to be one of the items on the agenda.

Sabres' slide costs Ruff after 26 years with franchise

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 21, 2013

Lindy Ruff dreamed of holding the Stanley Cup in his adopted town of Buffalo. He pictured himself skating around Memorial Auditorium with the chalice over his head. He envisioned himself clutching the Cup on the bench in First Niagara Center.

He held onto the dream for half of his life. Now he has to let it go.

Ruff's run in Blue and Gold came to an end Wednesday when the Sabres fired the longest-tenured coach in the NHL. Ruff, who turned 53 on Sunday, spent 26 years in the Sabres' organization. He coached the team for the last 16 years and also played in Buffalo for a decade.

The lengthy, memorable ride came to its conclusion with the Sabres near the bottom of the league with a 6-10-1 record.

"First and foremost, I would like to thank Lindy as a player, as a great coach and an outstanding citizen in this community and for all the work that he has done for the organization," said Darcy Regier, who hired Ruff on July 21, 1997, just a month after becoming general manager. "Unfortunately, the coaches too often pay the price. It's something that I not only avoided but made every effort to avoid in the past."

The decision had become unavoidable, however. Even Ruff's closest friends could see it.

Larry Playfair skated alongside Ruff for seven seasons with the Sabres, beginning in Ruff's rookie year of 1979-80. Playfair also worked with Ruff often as the president of the Sabres' alumni association.

He sensed their time together in the organization was coming to an end following an uninspired 2-1 loss to Winnipeg on Tuesday night.

"I watched Lindy's press conference after the game, and it's as down as I've seen him in a long, long time," Playfair said Wednesday night in First Niagara Center during a Junior Sabres game. "I don't typically do it, but this morning I watched it again on Sabres.com. You can just see he's tried everything he can try and the guys aren't responding. If he's out of answers, I look at it as maybe my friend Lindy Ruff gets a break now."

"I know he came here in hopes of winning a Stanley Cup. I think he put a lot, lot more pressure on himself than anybody else did. I'm thinking maybe this might be just a chance for him to catch his breath."

Ruff will no doubt get another opportunity to coach in the NHL. He'll bring a resume filled with accomplishments and disappointments.

Named Coach of the Year in 2005-06, Ruff holds the Sabres' record for most wins (571) and games coached (1,165). Those totals are second only to Al Arbour for most with a single franchise. Arbour coached the New York Islanders to 740 victories in 1,500 games.

"I think back to the interview," Regier said while choking back tears. "I called Scotty Bowman about him. I said, 'Scotty, who would you compare him to?' And he said, 'Darcy, he's a lot like Al Arbour,' for you older fans here, 'with a sense of humor.' I think Scotty was right."

Ruff guided the Sabres to four Eastern Conference finals appearances (1998, 1999, 2006, 2007), and they went for the Cup against Dallas in 1999 but lost in six games. He also appeared in the conference finals as a rookie before losing to the Islanders, one of seven trips to the postseason as a player.

He asked for a trade in 1988-89 but returned for his first head coaching opportunity after four seasons as an assistant in Florida.

"It was intriguing to him to come back to Buffalo," Playfair said. "He played here. He was the captain of our team here. We never won."

"He went on and got involved in coaching and then got the opportunity. I think he looked at it as, 'You know what? I didn't win as a player, but maybe we can pull this off as a coach.' Boy, he came close."

The Sabres won the Presidents' Trophy as the NHL's top team in 2006-07. Before falling to Ottawa in the conference finals, they beat the Islanders and New York Rangers. They were Ruff's final postseason victories.

Ruff and the Sabres have missed the playoffs three of the last five years. They also lost in the first round to Boston (2010) and Philadelphia (2011). They sat home during the postseason in six of Ruff's 14 seasons and were on their way toward doing it again.

"As a coach he can be demanding, but he cares a lot," goaltender Ryan Miller said by phone from Toronto, where the Sabres play tonight. "That's what you want. You want somebody there who cares, is going to put the time in and be professional."

"I don't have any doubts that Lindy's not done coaching. Certainly, his career will continue somewhere else. It's just unfortunate that the organization he cares so deeply about has to end."

Although Ruff had immediate success behind the bench, including four straight playoff appearances, he initially had naysayers because he replaced popular Coach of the Year Ted Nolan. Ruff won most of them over with his quick wit, intense attitude and designer suits and ties.

“He’s been the face of the team for a long time,” said retired defenseman Jay McKee, who played nine seasons under Ruff. “I respect him tremendously. He was a guy that not only was the coach here for a long time, but he played here. He’s just a legendary figure as a Buffalo Sabre.”

Ruff’s demeanor changed this year. Players expressed displeasure with his public criticisms at the end of last season, so the coach eased up.

“He was actually more fiery in his younger years,” McKee said. “I wouldn’t say he got soft. He still has an edge and brings it out, but it’s not all the time. He picks his spots maybe a little bit more than he used to during my career with him.”

The change didn’t work. The Sabres kept losing no matter which Ruff showed up for meetings and news conferences.

“He didn’t lose the team in any way with respect to communication,” Regier said. “In fact, communication has never been better. There were huge strides done in that regard.

“Unfortunately in this case, that change I think created a risk that didn’t pay off.”

Ruff’s career with the Sabres is over, but it’s unlikely his time in the area is finished. His four children grew up in Western New York, and his son Brian plays for the Junior Sabres. The Alberta native became a Buffalo guy.

So although his dream of bringing the Stanley Cup to town has ended, it won’t fade easily. He’s been carrying it for too long.

“My guess is wherever Lindy Ruff ends up going,” Playfair said, “Buffalo will still be a big part of his life.”

Jerry Sullivan: Firing Ruff is too late, and it's too little

By Jerry Sullivan

Buffalo News

February 21, 2013

Darcy Regier arrived 20 minutes late Wednesday to announce that he had fired Lindy Ruff as his head coach. It was fitting, because like so many of the general manager's moves, this one was long overdue.

Among NHL types, there was a sense of amazement that Ruff has lasted so long in a head job. There's perhaps even more astonishment over Regier's continued employment. But that's how it goes in sports, where GMs build flawed teams but coaches are usually the first to fry.

Ruff could have been fired many times over the last 16 years. He certainly should have been jettisoned last spring, when several of his veterans questioned his abrasive methods in an animated meeting after the team missed the playoffs.

It would have been merciful to fire Ruff then, allowing him to find another town in which to prove himself. Instead, Regier waited, as he has done so many times at the trade deadline. Ruff set about "reinventing" himself. He stuck around until the situation had become unbearable, with the home crowd booing throughout Tuesday's loss to the Jets and Ruff fielding questions afterward about how the fans hated his team.

Evidently, that humiliation made it obvious even to the fawning owner, Terry Pegula, that it was finally time for Ruff to go. Regier said it was his decision, but there's no way this 16-year coach/GM union could be ripped apart unless Pegula demanded it.

Still, I was surprised when it happened. Ruff had been the Sabres' coach for so long, and become such an entrenched figure in the local sporting culture, that I thought he might coach forever. It was hard to remember the Sabres without Ruff as the coach. Marv Levy was still coaching the Bills when Ruff succeeded Ted Nolan in July 1997. I've covered eight Bills head coaches during that time.

Ruff became a winter fixture. He was one of us, a former Sabre entrusted with one of our civic treasures. He became a Buffalo guy, content to settle in the community. He played or coached in more than half the games in the team's history. Ruff coached through some of the franchise's most turbulent times, and under all four ownerships.

People forget that Ruff was reviled at first, because he took over for the beloved Nolan. Early in his first season, around Christmas, he was booed by a bunch of kids at an open skate. But he won the fans around soon enough, by winning games.

He was a first-time head coach, and people wondered if his message might be too new. At the end, it was a matter of his voice becoming too old and stale. It happens in sports, especially in hockey. It's no disgrace. The amazing thing is it took Regier this long to see it.

It's not always fair. But you can't fire the roster, and GMs have more cover because they're closer to the top of the chain. But Buffalo was more than fair to Ruff, who was the longest-tenured coach in the NHL and would have been long gone in almost every other community.

Ruff got the benefit of the doubt in this town, more so than many of the men who quickly fell out of favor with the Bills. It's rare indeed for an NHL coach to see his kids grow up in one place.

Perhaps that made Ruff too settled and complacent, like his teams in later years. Regier is ultimately responsible for the team's soft competitive character. But Ruff had power; if he couldn't get the kind of roster that reflected his tough guy ethos, he should have resigned.

Staying too long diminished him. Ruff talked about reinventing himself, but that should have happened sooner, and elsewhere. The record he leaves behind is uneven, filled with more failures than triumphs.

Ruff's teams won five playoff series in his first two seasons in Buffalo. They have won a total of five playoff series in 13 seasons since then. The Sabres have not won a playoff series since 2007. As I said, the man got more than a fair bargain here.

His record is also Regier's, of course. Despite his shortcomings, Ruff is a better coach than Regier is a GM. There has long been a belief that Regier would never fire his old friend, and that the two of them would only go out together.

That's all changed now. At some point, a dreadful on-ice product and a vocal, disenchanted fan base will spur even Pegula to take action.

Friday will be the second anniversary of Pegula's inaugural news conference as owner of the team. Many people remember it as the day he cried at the sight of his hero, Gil Perreault.

I recall it as the day Pegula sat with our editorial board and accused us of hurting the team with negative coverage. He said Ruff and Regier "ain't going nowhere" and scoffed when we suggested that he should consider replacing them, or at least bring in an outside personnel man.

Pegula refused to acknowledge he had a problem. Two years later, the problem persists. The Sabres are a joke. Ruff is gone, but Regier remains. The man who is ultimately responsible for this sorry team is still in charge. But he is one step closer to the door.

There are no more excuses for Regier, or for the players who helped get Ruff fired. If this roster is really so talented, it's time for them to show it. Regier said some changes might be in order. He needs to back it up with some significant roster changes.

Pegula perpetuated the dysfunction two years ago, when he behaved like some starry-eyed fan and threw his unconditional support to Regier and Ruff. He lost precious time. The question now is how desperately the owner wants to be right about his general manager – after handing him a contract extension on the eve of the opener.

My feeling is the same as when the new owner came to town. Regier is the root of the problem. I wouldn't trust Regier to move this team forward. There's no way he should have the say on the next head coach.

Regier didn't have any answers Wednesday. He couldn't explain why the team had struggled. He insisted that the players hadn't tuned out Ruff. He said everyone in the organization shared responsibility, but as always, there was a sense that no one was being blamed.

Ruff is gone, but there's still a suffocating sense of denial. Maybe the Sabres will get a jolt of energy from their coach's firing. Players are motivated to show the coach really was holding them back.

A coaching change can lead to amazing things, as the Los Angeles Kings showed last season.

Firing Ruff is a good thing, if long overdue. Pegula might be figuring things out at last. He's half-right, which is a start.

Bucky Gleason: Lindy's time was up – but what a time it was

By Bucky Gleason

Buffalo News

February 21, 2013

My first thought when hearing Lindy Ruff had been fired probably wasn't what you expected. In fact, it wasn't even what I expected.

Ruff's dismissal was a long time coming, so it wasn't a major shock when the Sabres announced they were replacing him Wednesday. He was in his 15th season, plus one during the lockout, a lifetime in professional sports. The Sabres had missed the playoffs three times in five years, six times in 14 years. The facts roll off your tongue.

Last year, I suggested that the Sabres find another head coach. It was obvious that they needed a new voice. Another terrible start this season provided more evidence that a change was in order. If it wasn't clear already, and it was, there was no denying he needed to be replaced after the debacle against Winnipeg.

And yet when it actually happened, my first thought wasn't about the Sabres finally making a bold move that they owed their fan base. I wasn't thinking about who would replace him. Strangely enough, it was about how much I owed Lindy Ruff, knowing that I could never repay him.

You don't spend 16 years around a man in a professional setting and not form personal opinions about him. Ruff unwittingly taught me more about the X's and O's in hockey than he ever imagined. He was patient and entertaining, a terrific coach and a better human being than most will ever realize.

Somehow, it became lost in the turmoil.

One thing that was never lost was his effect on my life. His relationship with me lasted 16 years, but my relationship with him goes back 33 years.

Ruff, you see, introduced me to sports writing during the 1979-80 season. I was 12 years old and watching a game from the standing-room only section, adjacent to the press box in Memorial Auditorium. Ruff, a healthy scratch, invited me up the catwalk for a quick glimpse. I remember, clear as day, on that day, making a career choice.

So it was strange, when he was hired in 1997, that I covered the news conference in which he was introduced. I told him the story about our encounter. He mentioned that he did the same for a few kids. Small world. And I told him, if I ever called for his firing, he would only have himself to blame.

And we laughed.

In fact, we had plenty of laughs. Ruff's sharp sense of humor and quick wit had a way of putting people at ease. He's a gifted storyteller and practical joker who enjoyed the daily

give-and-take, especially when his team was playing well. If I had a nickel for every person who enjoyed his act, I would have retired long ago.

Still, there was always a line that separated us. We understood the inherent boundaries that came with our job titles. At times, it became blurred as we came to trust one another with information about our personal lives.

The line prevented us from becoming true friends, but we remained friendly the best we could while keeping a safe distance from one another. We had a few battles, of course. You don't spend that much time around someone and not have differences, too.

Ruff spent 26 years, nearly half of his life, working for the Sabres as a player and a coach. He wanted to win a Cup for himself. Mostly, he wanted to win a championship, in Buffalo, for you. To me, that meant something.

We spoke numerous times about how much it meant to him. Imagine, he would say, what this city would be like if the Bills or Sabres ever won it all. If you closed your eyes and listened, he sounded like any other tortured Buffalo fan. Western New York is his home. His wife, Gaye, loves it here. His children grew up here.

For years, he was an ideal fit.

Over time, we came to understand what the other was thinking. I'll say it again, he knew my questions before I finished asking them, and I knew his responses before he finished answering them. Looking back, I guess there was a point in which I stopped listening to him, too, the same way his players did.

Ruff's critics had called for his firing years ago. I was a late arrival, but it had nothing to do with my childhood encounter with him or my respect for him. It had everything to do with my opinion of him as a coach. He was respected across the league for his work under trying circumstances in Buffalo.

Simply, I didn't think he was the problem. What changed? Well, that was the problem. Not enough changed in recent years. The Sabres looked mostly the same with their lackluster efforts and poor results. It became obvious last season that a coaching change was necessary. The Sabres needed to try ... something.

Calling for his job was a joyless, uncomfortable experience. Nobody wants to see a good guy get fired, but there was no ignoring the fact that Ruff had plenty of chances.

He was out of time in Buffalo. It was clear to everybody but the people making the decisions. He was forced to endure the indignity that came with getting canned 17 games into the season.

The bigger shame in his firing was that General Manager Darcy Regier wasn't sent packing before him. Ruff enabled Regier to keep his job for years, not the other way

around, while getting average teams to overachieve. Ruff was particularly effective in the playoffs, but he needed the right personnel to get there.

It would have been interesting to see whether Ruff would have accomplished more without Regier, who should have been fired no later than 2004. There was a good chance any incoming general manager would have retained Ruff and made changes that would have given him a better chance to succeed and maybe win it all.

We'll never know.

In the end, Ruff made the mistake of staying in one place too long. That's all. If that's his biggest blunder in life, he'll die a happy man. There are no guarantees his dismissal will pump life into his sorry former hockey team. Another team will snap him up sooner than later, and he might win a Cup somewhere else.

In fact, it's expected.

Hopefully, I'll be there if it does.

Sabres name Rolston interim head coach

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News (blog)

February 20, 2013

Darcy Regier has just named Ron Rolston interim coach of the Sabres for the rest of the season.

Regier said he will join Rolston in heading to Toronto tonight.

"This is professional sports. He understood it," Regier said of Ruff. "He was extremely professional. It was a tough day."

"For whatever reason, we couldn't get any traction, especially defensively. ... It was really hard to get a grip on it."

Regier said Ruff came to the bus at 3 p.m. at the Northtown Center in Amherst before the team left for Toronto.

"I believe they'll respond," said Regier, who added Kevin Porter has been called up from Rochester.

Darcy on the team: "When I see the players, I'm disappointed for them too. We should all be disappointed. As far as anger, we have too much work to do. We can't go there."

With Ruff fired, who's out there for Sabres to hire as coach?

By John Vogl
Buffalo News (blog)
February 20, 2013

The Sabres haven't had to search for a coach since the summer of 1997. Needless to say, the candidates have changed since then.

So who's out there now that the Sabres have fired Lindy Ruff?

*Patrick Roy: Well-respected agent Jay Grossman almost immediately mentioned Roy, the Hockey Hall of Famer who is coaching Quebec of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League. Roy is in his eighth season with the Remparts and was the coach for Sabres prospect Mikhail Grigorenko. The Remparts are 34-19-4.

UPDATE: As of 4:15 p.m., the Sabres had not contacted Roy to talk about replacing Ruff.

*Jon Cooper: I wrote about Cooper in June as a possible replacement if the Sabres ever fired Ruff. The proven winner has continued to add to his resume. He has the Syracuse Crunch atop the American Hockey League's Eastern Conference at 30-14-6.

*Dallas Eakins: The former NHLer is in his fourth season guiding the Toronto Marlies of the AHL. They reached the finals last year before losing to Cooper-coached Norfolk. The Marlies are 26-17-5.

*Ron Rolston: The Amerks coach is highly thought of inside the Sabres' organization. He is in just his second season as a professional coach. The Amerks reached the playoffs last season and are 27-18-3 this year.

*Phil Housley: The former Sabres defenseman boosted his resume by leading the United States to the world junior championship in January. He has no NHL experience, however.

BULLETIN: RUFF FIRED AS COACH

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

February 20, 2013

Lindy Ruff is out as coach of the Buffalo Sabres.

In a stunning end to the 16-year reign of the NHL's longest-tenured head coach, general manager Darcy Regier announced via the team's Twitter account that Ruff has been relieved of his duties shortly after 3 p.m. today.

There is no immediate word on a replacement for Ruff.

UPDATE: Regier is slated to meet the media at 5 p.m.

John Vogl has a list of possible candidates to replace Ruff at this post.

The Sabres' next game is Thursday night in Toronto. They return home to host the New York Islanders on Saturday night.

The Sabres are 6-10-1 and mired in 13th place in the Eastern Conference. They are last in the Northeast Division and 27th overall in the NHL. Ruff's final game was Tuesday's dreary 2-1 loss to the Winnipeg Jets, a loss that saw First Niagara Center fans loudly boo the team for long stretches.

Ruff, who was a rookie with the Sabres in 1979 and ascended to become the team captain, took over as coach of the team when he replaced Ted Nolan on July 21, 1997. He turned 53 on Sunday.

Ruff led the Sabres to four trips to the Eastern Conference finals and to the 1999 Stanley Cup final, where they lost in six games to the Dallas Stars. He had a career regular-season record of 571-432-84 with 78 ties.

Ruff was the second-longest tenured coach in North American pro sports next to Gregg Popovich of the San Antonio Spurs.

There was no indication anything was amiss today as Ruff ran a hard, 90-minute practice in the FNC. Afterward, he acknowledged, "If we're going to be like this, it isn't working the way we're going. I think the indication today is we're going to have to try some things and that's what we're talking about."

Reporters took that to mean more roster moves were coming in the wake of the waiving of popular tough guy Cody McCormick earlier in the day. There was no indication Ruff was in any trouble, despite the team's record.

Players continued to brush aside questions about Ruff.

"It's players," defenseman Robyn Regehr said today. "Coaches don't win hockey games. Players do."

Regier has long said he believed in Ruff as his coach and as recently as Feb. 6 said, "It won't be the coach" when asked by The News if changes in the offing would include a move behind the bench. Most observers who regularly cover the Sabres felt Regier would never fire Ruff and that both men would have to be replaced by owner Terry Pegula for there to be changes atop the Sabres' organization.

Pegula has also been a staunch Ruff supporter from the day he took over the team. During his introductory press conference on Feb. 22, 2011, Pegula famously said Ruff "ain't going nowhere" when asked about the status of his coach.

Still, Ruff's teams have struggled mightily in recent years. The Sabres have not won a postseason series since 2007 and have missed the playoffs entirely in three of the last five years. On locker cleanout day after last year's playoff miss, players such as Derek Roy and Thomas Vanek were critical of Ruff's methods and said the coach treated players too harshly.

Ruff said this year he had "reinvented" himself after summer meetings with the team's top players and he had been noticeably more patient with his team and the media this year than in the past.

The Sabres won their first two games this season but have been a disaster ever since with brutal play from their defense and inconsistent scoring from all but their top line. Ruff has scratched veteran defensemen Tyler Myers and Jordan Leopold and constantly shuffled his lines. He's also scratched rookie center Mikhail Grigorenko, the team's No. 1 draft pick for the last two games.

Ruff seemed out of answers after Tuesday's loss, a game he called "embarrassing". Pressed on what needed to happen, Ruff said, "We've got to take a hard look at everything," coach Lindy Ruff said. "That's what we have to do. We really do."

Ruff said today that look had taken place. There was no indication it was going to land on him until word came out of the decision by Regier that was clearly influenced by Pegula.

Ruff captains obvious on the SS Sabre: 'It isn't working the way we're going'

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News (blog)

February 20, 2013

The Sabres made one move by the the time their 90-minute practice ended today, putting forward Cody McCormick on waivers. But stay tuned. Lindy Ruff made it pretty clear that's not all-systems-go on the SS Sabre for long.

"If we're going to be like this, it isn't working the way we're going," Ruff said of his team, which is last in the Northeast Division, 13th in the Eastern Conference and 27th in the NHL overall standing. "I think the indication today is we're going to have to try some things and that's what we're talking about."

Ruff made an exit-stage right from his meeting with reporters at that point, but had answered questions for about four minutes. So what does it mean?

A simple move could be to bring up Kevin Porter from Rochester for Thursday's game in Toronto. But there's plenty of indication GM Darcy Regier is heating up trade talks, given the dire straits his team is in.

As for McCormick, he's got another year left on his deal at \$1 million and has no points in eight games this year. He gave the Sabres eight goals, 20 points and 142 penalty minutes two years ago after being acquired from Colorado to replace Andrew Peters but hasn't approached those totals since as he's battled concussions and a severe finger problem that kept him out of the first eight games this season.

McCormick apparently became expendable now that the Sabres have John Scott. The fourth line in general is providing absolutely nothing offensively. That's certainly not their job but other teams do get some push from that trio and the Sabres have not.

"Part of it with John there, we're crowded at that position," Ruff said. "And with Pat Kaleta on the right side, I tried to put Cody at center. We've got too much of almost the same thing."

Ruff said Christian Ehrhoff and Tyler Ennis both sat out today for maintenance and should play tomorrow in Toronto. Click below to hear Ruff's meeting with reporters today (2:20 update: The Sabres confirm Terry Pegula will do no interviews today).

Sabres Ruff had run out of answers

By Howard Simon

WGR 550

February 20, 2013

On Thursday night, Sabres fans will experience something for the first time in more than 21 years. They'll see how their team responds to an in season coaching change.

You have to go back to December 11, 1991 to find the last time the Sabres fired a coach during a season. Rick Dudley was let go with the team mired in an eight game winless streak and with a 9-15-4 record. Then General Manager Gerry Meehan made the move and announced John Muckler, who was the Director of Hockey Operations, would take over behind the bench. There was no magic turnaround as the Sabres went 22-22-8 the rest of the season.

Clearly, current General Manager Darcy Regier and the Sabres brass are hoping this firing will have a different impact and keep the Sabres from missing out on the playoffs for the fifth time in the last seven seasons.

I was listening to Schopp and Bulldog when they announced the news of the change, which had been tweeted by the Sabres. My first reaction was "wow" even though many of you were probably not surprised. I didn't think the team would fire Ruff during the season and I expected Regier to make player moves before even considering the removal of the man he hired in July of 1997.

I'm never happy to see anyone lose their job but this was a move the Sabres had to make. Quite simply, it was time. In fact, it was probably past the time.

Watching the game with Winnipeg on Tuesday and then listening to what Ruff had to say after the 2-1 loss, for the first time I felt he had run out of answers. Not once during his weekly Tuesday segment with Jeremy White and me did I feel that way but he sounded different after the loss to the Jets. He sounded resigned to the fact he wouldn't be able to fix the problems.

Ruff has always had a defiant side to him and was resolute last season when we would ask him about whether he could win with that team and turn the season around. He would bristle at the idea of giving up and would take it personally when asked if he thought he could be fired.

Yet that defiant side was nowhere to be found in his post game press conference Tuesday night when he was asked if he realized the fans hate this team. I thought his reaction to that question was very telling.

It was almost like that game was Ruff's last stand. He finally benched defenseman Jordan Leopold for the first time in his Sabres career, even though it should have happened weeks ago. Ruff moved a struggling Drew Stafford all the way down to the fourth line and played him alongside Cody McCormick and John Scott. He bumped up

Pat Kaleta, who has yet to score this season to the second line with Tyler Ennis and Marcus Foligno. He changed back later in the game.

Nathan Gerbe got some shifts on the top line in place of Thomas Vanek. Foligno, who was taken off the power play completely in the loss to Pittsburgh, was back on the power play and with the top unit. But when all was said and done, an uninspired Sabres team ended up losing for the 10th time in regulation in 17 games.

In hindsight, you can make the case the Sabres looked exactly like the Washington Capitals did last season when they lost at First Niagara Center in what turned out to be the last game for Bruce Boudreau.

I don't know if anyone will ever find out the truth but my guess is Regier had to be convinced to make this move. Either Terry Pegula realized the fan base was fed up and his franchise was suffering or perhaps someone persuaded Pegula that it was time to release the man who, when Pegula bought the team two years ago, said "ain't going nowhere."

I will say this, I do have a renewed sense of energy to watch this team. I'm eagerly anticipating the game in Toronto to see if the Sabres look like a different group of players. Over the last two weeks its been increasingly difficult to watch this team play and see the same defensive breakdowns, bad passes, and lack of physical play.

I'm sure there are players who are very happy to see Ruff leave but I'm sure there are guys who enjoyed playing for him. Either way, I expect a different voice leading the way will create a more inspired hockey team. After all, the blame can no longer be placed at the feet of the head coach so its up to the players to now perform.

Bulldog: So where were you when you heard that the Buffalo Sabres had fired Lindy Ruff?

By Chris Parker

WGR 550

February 20, 2013

So where were you when you heard that the Buffalo Sabres had fired Lindy Ruff? I don't think that I'll ever have any trouble remembering where I was. That's because I was live on the air in the middle of a rant about how obvious it was that Ruff needed to be fired.

I have to tell you, that was more than a little weird. While I've been saying for weeks that I thought the Sabres had a real problem brewing with their head coach, hearing that he had been fired was still shocking.

This is partly because many of us who cover or follow the team regularly had felt for a long time as though Ruff would never get fired. For quite a long time I admired that about the Sabres and General Manager Darcy Regier in particular. Not allowing the millionaire players to get the coach fired works for me in theory and in practice it worked for the Sabres for a time.

Like many fans, I grew up with Lindy Ruff being a part of the Sabres. He fought Billy Smith of the Islanders who was the dirtiest goalie I ever saw. He yelled No Goal at a rally after the Sabres lost in the Stanley Cup Finals. He made Ken Hitchcock, then the coach of the Flyers, swear at him during a playoff series. He almost fought Ottawa coach Bryan Murray when Chris Neil of the Senators cheap shotted Chris Drury. He was one of us and that worked for us for a time as well.

That time ended, maybe as long ago as a few years ago according to some observers. This past spring there was a lot of talk from the Sabres as they went their separate ways that Ruff was too harsh at times. Derek Roy was on the front line of the criticism and perhaps for his trouble, was traded to Dallas in July. One veteran player who has played for at least one other team in his NHL career told our Paul Hamilton that Ruff was the harshest coach he had ever experienced. So the signs were there. Rather than act on them over the summer, the Sabres engaged in meetings with certain players in an effort to improve communication and perhaps not have players who have been with Ruff for so many years be so fatigued by his methods.

It didn't take. Watching the games and failing to see the consistent effort, especially in the less glamorous aspects of the game led me there. The rest of the opinion is filled out by some information from a few well placed sources telling me that certain veteran players on the team had reached a breaking point with Ruff. Last night, Ruff sounded exhausted and at his wits end to explain the performance of his team. Add it all up and the time had come. Even in Buffalo.

HAMILTION: The time has come for Ruff

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 20, 2013

I never thought I would see the day that Darcy Regier fired Lindy Ruff, but that's exactly what has happened.

To say I'm shocked is an understatement. Regier has told me numerous times that as long as he was here, Lindy Ruff would be his coach.

There is no question this move needed to be made. Ruff was obviously out of answers, and, for a team to play as poorly as this team has this season, his message was no longer being heard.

Ruff was accused, by players, of being too tough during locker clean out day in April of last year, and he was told by Terry Pegula during the summer to get it straightened out. Ruff did and has used a softer and gentler approach this season, but, it didn't work.

Ruff took the Sabres to the Stanley Cup Finals once and to the Eastern Conference Finals four times. On the other side of that coin, they haven't made the playoffs six of the last 10 seasons.

I have always thought Ruff is a good coach, and I still do, but the greatest coaches in the history of the game have been fired too.

You can't coach a team that plays like this team does, game after game, and tell the fans it's OK and status quo.

I'm rather surprised Ruff ran practice on Wednesday and even spoke to the media.

Ruff is a very well respected coach around the NHL, and I'm sure he will be hired to coach another team, and likely will do well.

He spent many years in this community. As a player and coach he's been here over 24 years.

On the ice this organization has been stuck in the mud. The core of this team needed to be broken up and it was. Tim Connolly, Derek Roy and Paul Gaustad all have been removed, yet the team has not gotten better.

As I sit here and reflect on Ruff's years it doesn't seem like it's been since 1997. This has been Ruff's only job as a head coach. He was an assistant in Florida before coming to Buffalo.

I remember Ruff hanging over the boards yelling at Gary Bettman as he presented the Stanley Cup to the Dallas Stars after Brett Hull scored a goal that shouldn't have counted.

I remember him promising the fans they'd be back down in front of City Hall.

I remember a man who wanted things done his way on the ice. He never really wanted a strong captain. It didn't work out with Michael Peca or Chris Drury or Craig Rivet. He was more comfortable with guys like Stu Barnes or Jason Pominville who wouldn't challenge him.

Let's get back to the relationship between Regier and Ruff. Darcy Regier has told me numerous times that he believes in what the New York Islanders did with Al Arbour and Bill Torrey. He felt Ruff was his coach and they would navigate the waters together. They did for many years, probably too many years.

I never thought Regier would outlast Ruff. The GM got a contract extension in the off season. Terry Pegula has said he was comfortable working with Ruff. I guarantee he didn't take this decision lightly.

I can't imagine what that room was like this afternoon when Ruff was told. Whether you like these men or not, this may have been the worst day in Darcy Regier's career with the Sabres.

What this does to the team, only time will tell. Leaving this community will be tough for Ruff and his family, he's always known this could happen at some point.

Moving forward will be interesting.

Sabres Fire Head Coach Lindy Ruff

WGR 550

February 20, 2013

The Buffalo Sabres have announced that they have fired Head Coach Lindy Ruff. The team made the announcement Wednesday afternoon before the team was to depart for Toronto for a game against the Maple Leafs Thursday night.

There is no word yet on who will be Ruff's replacement will be. He was the longest tenured coach in the NHL. The Sabres are off to a slow start in a shortened season, sitting in last place in the Northeast Division, sitting at 6-10-and-1.

Sabres waive F Cody McCormick

By Greg Bauch and Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 20, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Buffalo Sabres have waived forward Cody McCormick. He left the ice during Wednesday's practice at the First Niagara Center. The move may have been made to clear room on the roster to call up a player from Rochester. Lindy Ruff said, "Part of it is with John there, we're crowded at that position and with Pat Kaleta on the right side, I tried to give him a look at center. We've just got too much of the same thing."

TSN.ca in Canada reports that the Sabres tried to trade McCormick before making this move.

Sabres fire Ruff; Rolston is the interim coach

By John Wawrow
Associated Press
February 20, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) -- Lindy Ruff is out as coach in Buffalo, meaning the slow-starting, inconsistent and sometimes lethargic Sabres have now become Ron Rolston's mess to clean up.

Rolston was promoted from the Sabres' minor-league affiliate, AHL Rochester, to finish out the season as Buffalo's interim head coach Wednesday.

The move was made hours after Ruff was fired amid growing criticism for the team's early season struggles.

And it came less than a week after Ruff had defiantly said he wasn't done trying to "clean up this mess."

The turnaround never came for Ruff and the Sabres (6-10-1), who are in the midst of a 4-10-1 slump following a 2-1 home loss to the Winnipeg Jets on Tuesday.

It was a game in which the Sabres were booed several times for their turnover-filled and inconsistent effort.

"I think the last game was quite honestly a tipping point. And it was evident to me that we were searching for answers to too many questions," general manager Darcy Regier said. "I think we were making some strides, but in the end, for every two steps forward, it was one step back, and sometimes not that."

Ruff's dismissal ends his 16-season tenure in Buffalo, during which he became the franchise's winningest coach (571-432-162) and the NHL's longest active-serving coach with one team.

Among North America's four major pro sports, Ruff's tenure was second only behind Gregg Popovich, who's been coach of the NBA's San Antonio Spurs since 1996.

In the NHL alone, there had been 170 coaching changes since Ruff was hired on July 21, 1997.

"I'm disappointed for myself. I'm disappointed for Lindy. And when I see the players, I'm disappointed for them, too." Regier said. "We should all be disappointed. As far as anger, we have too much work to do."

The decision to fire Ruff came shortly after he oversaw a 90-minute practice and was preparing to travel with the team for Thursday's game at Toronto.

Regier went to Ruff's home to inform the coach of the decision. He then allowed Ruff to visit with players as they boarded a bus to travel to Toronto.

Rolston is in his second season with the Rochester Americans. He was scheduled to arrive in Buffalo on Wednesday evening and then join Regier in traveling to Toronto for his first meeting with Sabres players.

Regier said he'll use the remainder of the season to determine whether Rolston deserves taking over the job on a full-time basis.

Before taking over in Rochester, Rolston spent seven seasons as coach of USA Hockey's National Team development program. During that time, he became the first coach to lead the U.S. Under-18 team to win three gold medals (2005, 2009, 2011).

Rolston is also familiar with numerous Sabres, including center Cody Hodgson and forward Marcus Foligno. He spent the first half of this season coaching both, who played in Rochester during the NHL lockout.

Rolston went 36-26-10-4 last season in leading Rochester to the playoffs. This season, the Americans (27-18-2-1) are in second in the North Division and sixth in the Western Conference.

"His teams play with structure, discipline. They have a work ethic," Regier said, of Rolston. "He has them playing very good hockey, so I think you'll see some of those traits."

Regier said Rolston will have input on the status of the Sabres current assistant coaches.

The news of Ruff's firing came as a surprise only because Sabres management, including team president Ted Black, had spent much of the past week voicing support of Ruff.

Team owner Terry Pegula was also regarded as a big fan of Ruff.

Pegula, however, was running out of options in his bid to turn the Sabres into a Stanley Cup contender, an objective he made clear upon purchasing the team two years ago. Ruff's firing comes nearly two years to the day Pegula formally took over as the Sabres owner on Feb. 22, 2011.

"The hockey world knows how I and the entire Buffalo Sabres organization feel about Lindy Ruff not only as a coach but also as a person," Pegula said in a statement released by the team. "His qualities have made this decision very difficult. I personally want Lindy to know that he can consider me a friend always."

Under Ruff, the Sabres made the playoffs in each of his first four seasons and eight times overall. That included a surprising run to the Stanley Cup finals in 1999, when Buffalo was eliminated by Dallas in six games.

The Sabres, however, haven't been the same since reaching the Eastern Conference finals - losing both times - in both 2006 and '07. Buffalo has missed the playoffs in three of the past five seasons.

Last season, the Sabres were one of the NHL's biggest busts in missing the playoffs with a high-priced roster. The previous offseason, Pegula committed nearly \$140 million in salary to add talent and re-sign players.

The high expectations coupled with the team's slow start in a lockout-shortened 48-game season were both factors in Ruff's dismissal.

Regier acknowledged that Ruff was having difficulty identifying the reasons behind the Sabres struggles. At no point, Regier said, did he feel players had tuned out their coach.

"Communication has never been better, so there were huge strides he had done in that regard," Regier said. "Unfortunately, it didn't translate to the ice."

Ruff's 571 wins rank second in the NHL with one team, trailing only Al Arbour, who had 740 wins with the New York Islanders.

Ruff's ties to Buffalo go back to his days as a player. Selected in the second round of the 1979 draft by the Sabres, Ruff made the team later that year. In November 1986, he replaced star Gilbert Perreault as the Sabres captain.

Rolston set to take over after Sabres fire Ruff

By John Wawrow
Associated Press
February 20, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) -- A month into the NHL lockout in early October, Rochester coach Ron Rolston was preparing to open the American Hockey League season eagerly anticipating the opportunity to incorporate several Buffalo Sabres players into his lineup.

Some five months later, Rolston has inherited the entire Sabres team.

Rolston will make his NHL debut as the Sabres interim head coach Thursday. That's when Buffalo plays at Toronto, a day after coach Lindy Ruff was fired amid growing criticism for the Sabres (6-10-1) sputtering start.

It was an abrupt move for a franchise that hadn't changed coaches since Ruff was hired in the summer of 1997. And the decision to fire the franchise's winningest coach (571-432-162) came after Buffalo's high-priced lineup blundered through a 2-1 home loss to Winnipeg on Tuesday, drawing boos for its lethargic play.

"I think the last game was quite honestly a tipping point. And it was evident to me that we were searching for answers to too many questions," general manager Darcy Regier said. "I think we were making some strides, but in the end, for every two steps forward, it was one step back, and sometimes not that."

The loss was Buffalo's 10th in 15 games (4-10-1), and occurred days after Ruff defiantly addressed his critics by saying he wasn't done trying to "clean up this mess."

Now, that cleanup job falls to Rolston, the younger brother of former NHL star Brian Rolston.

He'll have the interim title for the remainder of the season, during which he'll be judged as a candidate to take over the job full time.

Rolston, who was in his second season coaching Rochester, was scheduled to join Regier on Wednesday in traveling to Toronto for his first meeting with Sabres players.

Some of them, he's already familiar with.

Center Cody Hodgson, forward Marcus Foligno and defenseman T.J. Brennan played for Rochester during the lockout. On Wednesday, the Sabres also called up center Kevin Porter, who was leading the Americans with 44 points (15 goals, 29 assists).

Rolston went 36-26-10-4 last season in leading Rochester to the playoffs. This season, the Americans (27-18-2-1) are second in the North Division and sixth in the Western Conference.

Before Rochester, Rolston spent seven seasons as coach of USA Hockey's National Team development program. During that time, he became the first coach to lead the U.S. Under-18 team to win three gold medals (2005, 2009, 2011).

"His teams play with structure, discipline. They have a work ethic," Regier said, of Rolston's Americans.

Those were traits lacking in the Sabres for much of the past two seasons under Ruff.

Last season, despite owner Terry Pegula committing more than \$140 million in salary to add and re-sign players, Buffalo was one of the NHL's biggest busts in missing the playoffs for the third time in five years. Not much appeared to have changed a month into this season.

The Sabres were sloppy and lacked cohesion. Their power-play was anemic, having converted just 8 of 62 opportunities to rank 29th in the NHL. And they were 26th in the league in allowing an average 3.29 goals.

"I think there are a lot of unknowns with our team right now," Regier said. "We believe in the players, that they can achieve certainly more than where we currently are. Hopefully, it's a lot more, but time will tell."

Under Ruff, the Sabres made the playoffs in each of his first four seasons and eight times overall. That included a surprising run to the Stanley Cup finals in 1999, when Buffalo lost to Dallas in six games.

Ruff was the NHL's longest active-serving coach with one team. Among North America's four major pro sports, Ruff's tenure with Buffalo was second only behind Gregg Popovich, who's been coach of the NBA's San Antonio Spurs since 1996.

In the NHL alone, there had been 170 coaching changes since Ruff was hired on July 21, 1997.

Ruff's 571 wins rank second in the NHL with one team, trailing only Al Arbour, who had 740 wins with the New York Islanders.

Ruff's ties to Buffalo go back to his days as a player. Selected in the second round of the 1979 draft by the Sabres, Ruff made the team later that year. In November 1986, he replaced star Gilbert Perreault as the Sabres captain.

The decision to fire Ruff came shortly after he oversaw a 90-minute practice. Regier went to Ruff's home to inform the coach of the decision. He then allowed Ruff to visit with players as they boarded a bus to travel to Toronto.

"I'm disappointed for myself. I'm disappointed for Lindy. And when I see the players, I'm disappointed for them, too." Regier said. "We should all be disappointed."

Sabres waive McCormick; Ruff hints at more changes

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

February 20, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) -- The Buffalo Sabres have placed fourth-line forward Cody McCormick on waivers, and coach Lindy Ruff hints more changes could be coming to shake up his slow-starting team.

McCormick became the odd-man out Wednesday because Ruff said the team has enough toughness already. He added a decision hasn't been made on how the Sabres will fill the roster spot before their game at Toronto on Thursday.

Ruff then cut short his availability with reporters after suggesting more changes could be on the horizon because "it isn't working the way we're going." He didn't specify what those changes might be.

The Sabres (6-10-1) are in the midst of a 4-10-1 slump following a 2-1 loss to Winnipeg on Tuesday.

McCormick, an eight-year NHL veteran, had no points in eight games this season.

Sabres' regression ultimately doomed Ruff

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 21, 2013

BUFFALO – Darcy Regier walked in looking shaken. The Sabres general manager broke down a couple times while discussing the difficult decision to fire his close friend Lindy Ruff, the NHL's longest-tenured coach.

Regier and Ruff had been synonymous with each other since 1997, when a rookie GM gave a young coaching prospect his dream job. Together, they experienced all the highs and lows of the NHL, somehow managing to keep their gigs despite limited success in recent seasons.

But Wednesday afternoon, with the Sabres (6-10-1) mired in 13th place in the Eastern Conference and last in the Northeast Division, Regier drove to Ruff's home in Clarence and relieved him of his duties after 15 seasons.

Rochester Americans coach Ron Rolston is the Sabres' interim coach for rest of the season.

"Very difficult. Extremely difficult," Regier told a packed media room at the First Niagara Center about his conversation with Ruff. "But this is professional sports. He understood it. He was extremely professional. It's a tough thing. It really is."

Why did this happen now? The Sabres have been struggling for weeks, even years, having missed the postseason three times in five seasons, including last year.

"It was made for the goal of making the playoffs," said Regier, who noted the team's high expectations. "Unfortunately, (we had) a lack of progress. I think we were making some strides. But in the end, for every two steps forward it was one step back and sometimes not that.

"Unfortunately, this is the time of year when the coaching is probably the thing that's evaluated the most."

Regier called Tuesday's embarrassing 2-1 loss to Winnipeg, a game in which the home crowd constantly booed the Sabres' wretched effort, the "tipping point." The defeat proved to Regier the Sabres were "searching for answers to too many questions."

Still, Ruff led a 90-minute practice Wednesday and addressed the media.

Ruff's last quote as coach, a response to a question about winning with the team's current \$65 million lineup, sounds ominous.

“If we’re going to be like this, it isn’t working the way we’re going,” Ruff said. “I think the indication today is we’re going to have to try some things, and that’s what we’re talking about.”

But as that was going on, Regier was meeting with the Sabres’ brass.

Regier didn’t feel comfortable letting Ruff coach again tonight in Toronto against the Maple Leafs.

After Regier fired Ruff, the former coach drove to the Northtown Center, where Sabres players had boarded a bus for Toronto. Ruff got on, addressed his old team a final time and then left. Some handshakes and hugs followed.

Ruff, who played 608 games for the Sabres, coached another 1,165 (571-438-78-84) and took the team to the 1999 Stanley Cup final, then began a new part of his hockey life.

NHL teams changed coaches 170 times during Ruff’s tenure, which began July 21, 1997. His 571 wins with one team stand second only to Al Arbour’s 740 with the Islanders.

“A lot of guys are emotional,” Sabres captain Jason Pominville told Sportsnet in Toronto. “It was a tough go.”

How does Regier want Ruff remembered?

“As a great coach,” he said.

Regier then began fighting back tears.

“First of all, I think he’ll get an opportunity if he wants to quickly,” he said. “I think people who’ve been fired, you have an opportunity to use it as a springboard. I suppose you can sit on the springboard if he wants to. He’ll have lots of opportunities.”

Sabres goalie Ryan Miller called Ruff someone who’s always been an influence and “been there and believed in us.”

“He’s been a Sabre for such a long time we feel bad this is how it played out for him,” Miller said. “We had much higher expectations and much higher goals. We still hope to reach them but obviously he’s not going to be a part of that. I just feel really sorry for that because no one cares more than Lindy.”

Conversations about Ruff’s future with higher-ups, including owner Terry Pegula, got serious “as of late,” Regier said. He was still speaking with Ruff about the team, too.

Ultimately, Regier insisted, “it was my decision” to fire Ruff.

“I made this decision,” he said. “But these things are not done in a vacuum. So I’m in conversation with Terry, with (president) Ted Black, at times with Ken Sawyer, who’s a senior advisor. ... You’re working as a team.”

Regier, who wouldn’t discuss his future, believes Ruff was still reaching his team despite its terrible record, poor defensive play and the regression of some players, most notably Tyler Ennis, Marcus Foligno and Drew Stafford, the NHL’s best line late last season.

“He didn’t lose the team in any way in respect to communication,” Regier said. “In fact, communication has never been better. So there were huge strides done in that regard. Unfortunately, it didn’t translate to the ice.

“For whatever reason, we couldn’t get any traction, especially defensively. He felt at times it was ... really hard to get a finger on.”

Nonetheless, Regier said everyone should feel responsible for Ruff’s dismissal.

“I’ll start with I’m a part of it,” he said. “Players are a part of it. There’s really no one in the organization (that isn’t).”

In Regier’s mind, Ruff’s a legend. He recalled phoning Scotty Bowman, hockey’s all-time winningest coach, when he interviewed Ruff. Bowman said Ruff reminded him of a four-time Cup winner.

“I said, ‘Scotty, who would you compare him to?’ and he said, ‘Darcy, he’s a lot like Al Arbour ... with a sense of humor,’ and I think Scott was right.”

Sabres tab Rolston to replace Ruff on interim basis

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 21, 2013

BUFFALO – When word began spreading Wednesday the Sabres had fired Lindy Ruff, the hockey world immediately started wondering who would succeed the NHL's longest-tenured coach.

Would the Sabres hire an unproven young NHL assistant or an AHL coach? Would they try to make a big splash? Or would they simply turn to James Patrick, Ruff's most-trusted assistant?

The Sabres' decision to promote Rochester Americans coach Ron Rolston and award him the interim label for the rest of the season surprised some observers.

The 46-year-old has no NHL coaching or playing experience. The Sabres recruited him from Team USA's development program in 2011 to lead their top affiliate club. He's still new to the professional game, having coached only 124 AHL games.

But if Rolston impresses, he could take over for Ruff permanently.

"It will provide him and us an opportunity to get to know each other," Sabres general manager Darcy Regier said Wednesday inside the First Niagara Center. "Assuming things go well, he will have an opportunity to become the head coach."

Regier drove up to Toronto, where the Sabres play the Maple Leafs tonight, with Rolston on Wednesday night. The two planned discuss how Rolston would handle Ruff's coaching staff.

Rolston brings a new style.

"He will coach his way, and it is different," Regier said. "Is it drastically different? Probably not. But there are some differences."

Regier added: "His teams play with structure, discipline, they have a work ethic. He has a good hockey club down there right now."

Rolston coached four current Sabres with the Amerks. Sabres goalie Ryan Miller played on one of Rolston's Michigan select teams as a teenager.

"There's a familiarity with him in that regard," Miller told Sportsnet in Toronto. "... He's a smart guy and we'll see what he can do with this crew."

Rolston played collegiately at Michigan Tech before serving as an NCAA assistant coach at Lake Superior State, Clarkson, Harvard and Boston College.

Rolston's brother, Brian, recently retired after 1,256 NHL games.

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The Sabres waived gritty forward Cody McCormick on Wednesday and recalled center Kevin Porter from Rochester, where the 26-year-old Amerks captain had 15 goals and 44 points in 48 games.

Teams have until noon today to claim the 29-year-old McCormick, who plays center and wing and can take a regular shift and fight.

McCormick was practicing Wednesday before the Sabres pulled him off the ice.

Tough guy John Scott and agitator Patrick Kaleta, two wingers, made McCormick expendable, Ruff said before he was fired.

McCormick played 81 games two years ago, emerging as an asset while compiling eight goals, 20 points and 142 penalty minutes. He was by far the Sabres' best fighter.

"He's a warrior, just plain and simple. The guy's a warrior," Sabres winger Steve Ott said. "It's tough when he's willing to fight and lay his body and his game on the line for the guys in here. When there's lack of success, it's always hard to see when it's put upon a different teammate."

But McCormick struggled last season after earning a three-year, \$3.6 million contract. He battled concussions and a finger injury that bothered him into the current season.

He has only one goal and four points in 58 games over the last two years, including zero points in eight contests this season.

He's been a frequent healthy scratch, although he played the last two games and fought Pittsburgh's Tanner Glass on Sunday.

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Sabres owner Terry Pegula released the following statement after Ruff's firing: "The hockey world knows how I and the entire Buffalo Sabres organization feel about Lindy Ruff not only as a coach but also as a person. His long tenure with the Sabres has ended. His qualities have made this decision very difficult. I personally want Lindy to know that he can consider me a friend always."

Sabres relieve Ruff of coaching duties, name Rolston

By Chris Ryndak

NHL.com

February 20, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- After 1,165 games coached and 571 wins behind the bench, the Buffalo Sabres relieved Lindy Ruff of his duties Wednesday.

General manager Darcy Regier held a press conference at First Niagara Center to discuss his decision to fire the longest-tenured coach in the NHL.

Regier said he recently had conversations with Ruff about where the team is headed while trying to find out why it has gotten off to a 6-10-1 start this season.

Buffalo's 13 points are the fewest in the Northeast Division and tied for third-fewest in the Eastern Conference. After opening the season 2-0, the club is on a 4-10-1 slide and sits four points out of the top eight in the Eastern Conference standings.

After discussions with team owner Terry Pegula, team president Ted Black and senior adviser Ken Sawyer, Regier fired Ruff after practice Wednesday morning.

"Ultimately, it was my decision," Regier said. "I made the decision, but these things are not made in a vacuum."

Ron Rolston, the coach of the Rochester Americans, Buffalo's American Hockey League affiliate, will serve as Sabres coach on an interim basis for the rest of the season.

Ruff was named coach on July 21, 1997, and since then, 170 coaching changes have been made around the NHL. Only Gregg Popovich, the coach of the NBA's San Antonio Spurs, has been employed as a head coach longer in the four major North American professional sports (he started in 1996).

The Sabres are the only team Ruff has served as coach, and he has more wins than any coach with his first NHL team.

Ruff finished in Buffalo with a record of 571-432-162. He won the Jack Adams Award following the 2005-06 season.

His 571 wins are second-most by a coach with a single franchise, trailing only the New York Islanders' Al Arbour (740).

Barry Trotz of the Nashville Predators, now the longest-tenured coach in the League, was hired two weeks after Ruff in 1997.

Under Ruff, the Sabres won a Northeast Division title in 2009-10 and the Presidents' Trophy in 2006-07. They reached four Eastern Conference Finals (1998, 1999, 2006 and 2007) and the 1999 Stanley Cup Finals, where they lost to the Dallas Stars.

Unfortunately for Ruff, the Sabres have failed to win a Stanley Cup Playoff series since 2007 and have missed the postseason in four of the past five years.

Ruff played for the Sabres from 1979 to 1989 and served as captain. Regier was clear to point out Ruff's connection to the community when announcing the dismissal.

"I would like to thank Lindy as a player, as a great coach and an outstanding citizen in this community, and for all the work that he has done for the organization, and as I said, for Western New York," Regier said.

Pegula released the following statement regarding Ruff's firing:

"The hockey world knows how I and the entire Buffalo Sabres organization feel about Lindy Ruff not only as a coach but also as a person. His long tenure with the Sabres has ended. His qualities have made this decision very difficult. I personally want Lindy to know that he can consider me a friend always."

Ruff ran a nearly 90-minute practice Wednesday morning and spoke with the media afterward, preparing to coach Thursday night in Toronto against the Maple Leafs.

Regier went to Ruff's home Wednesday afternoon to give him the news. Ruff then asked to address his players one last time as they prepared to board a bus for Toronto. Ruff talked to the players and Regier said there were some handshakes and hugs exchanged.

Regier was adamant that the communication between Ruff and the players was very good.

"He didn't lose the team in any way with respect to communication. In fact, communication has never been better," Regier said. "There were huge strides done in that regard. Unfortunately, it didn't translate to the ice and, for whatever reason, we couldn't get any traction, especially defensively."

The Sabres have allowed 56 goals, tied for second-most in the League. A 2-1 loss at home to the Winnipeg Jets on Tuesday proved to be the final straw.

"It was evident to me that we were searching for answers to too many questions," Regier said.

Regier also said if he can make more changes to improve the team, he would look to do so.

The Sabres have gotten off to a slow start in each of their past three seasons, and Regier said this season's 48-game schedule played a part in making a coaching change now.

"The shortened season is impacting decisions like this around the League, I believe," Regier said. "I think it's measured against expectations, and expectations were high and are high here. It influenced the decision, certainly."

Rolston will travel with Regier to Toronto and meet with the players Wednesday night. Decisions about the future of the rest of the coaching staff will be made on that trip.

Regier said though he couldn't get into specifics, he said there are differences in the way Ruff and Rolston approach coaching.

"[Rolston] will coach his way and it is different. Will it be drastically different? Probably not, but there are some differences," Regier said.

Regier said he doesn't think Ruff will have a difficult time finding another coaching job in the League if that's what he wants. Ruff is the first coach to be fired this season.

"I think that people who have been fired, you have an opportunity to use it as a springboard or I suppose you can sit on the springboard," Regier said. "He'll use it as a springboard if he wants to. He'll have plenty of opportunities"

Regier then fought back tears as he recalled a story from when he interviewed Ruff in 1997. He asked legendary coach Scotty Bowman to whom he would compare Ruff.

"And he said, 'Darcy, he's a lot like Al Arbour,' for you older fans here, 'with a sense of humor,'" Regier said. "I think Scotty was right."

Asked how Ruff should be remembered as coach of the Sabres, Regier was quick to answer.

"As a great coach," he said.

Ruff spent successful quarter-century with Sabres

By John Kreiser

NHL.com

February 20, 2013

For the first time since the end of the 1996-97 season, someone other than Lindy Ruff will be coaching the Buffalo Sabres when they play the Toronto Maple Leafs on Thursday night.

Ruff, the longest-tenured coach in the NHL and a fixture in Buffalo for 25 years as a player and bench boss, was fired Wednesday, one day after a 2-1 home loss to the Winnipeg Jets dropped the Sabres to 6-10-1, leaving them 13th in the Eastern Conference and in danger of missing the Stanley Cup Playoffs for a second straight season.

Ruff's 15 seasons in Buffalo yielded a trip to the 1999 Stanley Cup Final, a Presidents' Trophy in 2006-07, and back-to-back trips to the Eastern Conference Finals in 2006 and '07.

With a 571-432-162 record, Ruff was the winningest coach in franchise history; only Al Arbour, who won 740 games with the New York Islanders, has more NHL victories with one team.

NHL.com takes a closer look at Ruff's time in Buffalo as a player and coach:

Aug. 9, 1979 -- The Buffalo Sabres choose Ruff, a highly regarded defenseman with the Lethbridge Broncos of the Western Hockey League, in the second round (No. 32) of the NHL Draft.

Oct. 11, 1979 -- Ruff makes his NHL debut and scores an empty-net goal that wraps up Buffalo's 6-3 home victory against the Washington Capitals on opening night. He goes on to score five goals and 16 points in 63 games and is named the team's rookie of the year.

November 1986 -- Ruff is named captain of the Sabres following the retirement of Gilbert Perreault. He goes on to become a 20-goal scorer for the only time in his career, though the Sabres miss the playoffs.

March 7, 1989 -- The Sabres trade Ruff to the New York Rangers at the deadline for defenseman Richard Smehlik, who later plays for Ruff in Buffalo. Ruff stays with the Rangers through the 1990-91 season, then returns to the Sabres organization for a season with their American Hockey League farm team in Rochester.

Aug. 24, 1992 -- Ruff signs with the San Diego Gulls of the International Hockey League. He plays 81 games, scores 10 goals and adds 32 assists along with 100 penalty minutes in what turns out to be his final season as a player.

July 1993 -- The expansion Florida Panthers sign Ruff as an assistant coach under Roger Nielson, who coached Ruff in Buffalo. Ruff spends four seasons with the Panthers, helping to run their defense and penalty-killing. In the spring of 1996, Ruff becomes part of a Stanley Cup Finalist for the first time when the third-year Panthers won the Eastern Conference championship, though they are swept in the Final by the Colorado Avalanche. He remains as an assistant through the 1996-97 season.

July 21, 1997 -- Ruff is named the 15th coach in Sabres history. He leads the team to the Eastern Conference Finals in his first season. He earns his first NHL victory on Oct. 1, 1997, when the Sabres defeat the St. Louis Blues, 3-1, and leads Buffalo to the Eastern Conference Finals for the first time since 1980.

May 31, 1999 -- Third-period goals by Eric Rasmussen and Dixon Ward give the Sabres a 4-2 victory against the Maple Leafs and send Buffalo to the Stanley Cup Final for the first time since 1975. The Sabres lost to the Dallas Stars in six games, with Brett Hull scoring a controversial Cup-winning goal in the third overtime. Ruff is the second coach under the current format to lead his team to the conference finals in his first two seasons.

April 3, 2002 -- Ruff coaches the Sabres in a 1-1 tie with the Islanders to pass Scotty Bowman for the most games coached with the Buffalo franchise.

April 5, 2006 -- The Sabres defeat the Ottawa Senators 5-4 in overtime to give Ruff his 300th coaching victory. He's the 31st NHL coach to reach the 300-win mark, the 16th to win that many games with the same team. The Sabres finish second to the Senators in the Northeast Division with 110 points and win two playoff rounds before losing a seven-game series to the Carolina Hurricanes in the Eastern Conference Finals. Ruff is rewarded by winning the Jack Adams Trophy as coach of the year.

April 8, 2007 -- Despite a 4-3 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers, the Ruff-coached Sabres complete the best season in franchise history, amassing 53 wins and 113 points to win the Presidents' Trophy as the NHL's best regular-season team. The Sabres defeat the Islanders and Rangers in the first two rounds of the playoffs before losing to the Senators in the Eastern Conference Finals.

Oct. 15, 2008 -- The Sabres defeat the Rangers 3-1 to give Ruff his 400th victory. He becomes the 23rd coach to reach the 400-win mark, the seventh to win 400 with one team. However, the Sabres miss the playoffs in 2007-08 and 2008-09.

Feb. 28, 2010 -- Ruff, an associate coach with Canada, earns an Olympic gold medal when the Canadians defeat the United States 3-2 in overtime to win the championship game. Back in the NHL, Ruff leads the Sabres to 100 points and into the playoffs for the first time in three years, though they lose in the opening round.

Jan. 6, 2011 -- The Sabres blank the San Jose Sharks to give Ruff his 500th coaching victory. He's the 16th man to win 500 games, the second to do so with one team. Two nights later, the Sabres defeat the Phoenix Coyotes 2-1 to make Ruff the winningest

coach in NHL history to coach for one team -- he passes Hall of Famer Toe Blake, who won 500 games with the Montreal Canadiens. The Sabres finish with 96 points and make the playoffs but lose in the first round.

April 29, 2011 -- Ten weeks after billionaire Terry Pegula buys the Sabres, Ruff signs a multiyear contract extension. However, the team misses the playoffs the following season.

Feb. 20, 2013 -- With the Sabres off to a 6-10-1 start, general manger Darcy Regier announces after practice that Ruff has been relieved of his duties. Ron Rolston, who had been coaching the Sabres' AHL farm team in Rochester, is named interim coach. Ruff finishes his time in Buffalo with a record of 571-432-162.

Rolston getting test, but Sabres could look elsewhere

By Dan Rosen

NHL.com

February 20, 2013

Ron Rolston will get at least 31 games to prove he should be the next full-time coach of the Buffalo Sabres. Several other potential candidates will be watching.

Rolston, 46, got the call-up from the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League (Buffalo's top minor-league affiliate) Wednesday to become the interim replacement for longtime Sabres coach Lindy Ruff. He'll have his hands full with a team that is at least seven points behind every other team in the Northeast Division and sitting in 13th place in the Eastern Conference.

The Sabres are coming off a dismal 2-1 home loss to the Winnipeg Jets, one that general manager Darcy Regier called "the tipping point" in the decision to fire Ruff.

Rolston is leaving a team in Rochester that is seventh in the AHL's Western Conference with a 27-18-3 record. He guided the Americans to a playoff berth following a 36-26-14 season as a rookie coach in the AHL last season.

Prior to arriving in Rochester, Rolston spent seven seasons coaching the United States National Team Development Program in Ann Arbor, Mich. That came after he spent the better part of 14 years as an assistant coach at the NCAA level at Lake Superior State, Clarkson, Harvard and Boston College.

"I saw his team play in Hamilton the other afternoon and his teams play with structure, discipline -- they have work ethic," Regier said. "He has a good hockey club down there right now and he has them playing good hockey. So, I think you'll see some of those traits."

But Rolston doesn't have any security beyond this season. Regier made it clear he is in Buffalo only as an interim coach. The GM said Rolston has an opportunity to win the full-time job, but it'll be an ongoing evaluation for the rest of this season.

So while Rolston gets himself ready to coach his first NHL game Thursday night in Toronto, let's take a look at some of the other coaches who could be keeping a keen eye on his progress in Buffalo, perhaps wondering if they could be next in line to take over as the Sabres first full-time coach not named Ruff since 1997.

After all, Rolston is a candidate to be Ruff's full-time replacement, but he's not the only one. Here are six more to consider:

Jon Cooper

Cooper, 45, reportedly was under consideration for some NHL jobs this summer after he led the Norfolk Admirals to the Calder Cup last spring. He is in his third season behind

the bench of the Tampa Bay Lightning's top minor-league affiliate. This season it is the Syracuse Crunch.

The move to Syracuse hasn't changed Cooper or his team. They are first in the AHL's Eastern Conference with a 30-14-6 record entering their game Wednesday against the Toronto Marlies.

Cooper led the Admirals to 55 wins and 113 points in the regular season in 2011-12 to be named the AHL's Coach of the Year. In his two-plus seasons behind the bench in the AHL, Cooper's teams are 124-58-24.

Cooper won a championship in the United States Hockey League with the Green Bay Gamblers in 2010.

Dallas Eakins

The almost 46-year-old fourth-year coach of the Toronto Marlies is arguably the hottest name among potential candidates for NHL coaching jobs.

Eakins led the Marlies to the 2012 Calder Cup Finals, where they were swept by Cooper's Admirals in four games. His graduation rate has improved this season with ex-Marlies Nazem Kadri, Korbinian Holzer, Matt Frattin, Leo Komarov, Mark Fraser, James Reimer and Ben Scrivens occupying important roles with the resurgent Toronto Maple Leafs.

Eakins arguably could be an NHL coach right now, but his contract stipulates he remain with the Maple Leafs' organization at least through the end of the 2012-13 season.

The Marlies are 26-17-5 entering play Wednesday night after going 44-24-8 last season.

Eakins was formerly the Maple Leafs' director for player development and an assistant coach from 2004-06.

Mike Sullivan

Sullivan, who turns 45 in a week, is an assistant to John Tortorella with the New York Rangers. He's the only assistant on the bench with Tortorella and primarily manages the defense.

He was considered a possible candidate for some of the openings in the NHL last season but never landed anywhere.

Considered a taskmaster and tough but also a teacher, Sullivan coached the Boston Bruins for two seasons from 2003-06 and compiled a 70-56-38 record. He led the Bruins to the Stanley Cup Playoffs in 2004 but was fired after they struggled in the first season following the 2004-05 lockout.

Sullivan has coached the AHL's Providence Bruins and was an assistant with Tortorella for the Tampa Bay Lightning before joining him in New York in 2009.

Mike Haviland

Haviland won the Stanley Cup in 2010 as an assistant on Joel Quenneville's staff with the Chicago Blackhawks. His firing after last season came as somewhat of a surprise in Chicago, but it was a decision ultimately made by Quenneville, who said there was "some dysfunction to our coaching staff and we need a change."

Haviland, 45, who was once considered a candidate to be the coach of the Winnipeg Jets, landed as the associate coach of the Norfolk Admirals. He coached the Admirals from 2005-07 and was named the AHL Coach of the Year in 2007 after guiding them to a 50-22-8 record. They lost in the first round of the Calder Cup Playoffs.

He won two championships in his four seasons as a coach in the ECHL.

Craig Ramsay

If Rolston falters, Ramsay, 61, an assistant coach for the Florida Panthers, could join the discussion because of his longevity in the League and his ties to the Sabres.

Simply put, the guy is a Sabre. He spent his entire 14-year playing career in Buffalo and compiled 672 points in 1,070 games. Ramsay was the interim coach of the Sabres for 19 games in 1986-87 and worked in the organization until 1992, when he left to become an assistant with the Panthers.

As the interim coach of the Philadelphia Flyers, Ramsay led the club to the Eastern Conference Finals in 2000. He was fired after a slow start the following season.

Ramsay also was coach of the Atlanta Thrashers in 2010-11, but he was not retained when the franchise relocated to Winnipeg.

In addition to his assistant coaching duties with the Panthers, Ramsay has been an assistant coach for the Ottawa Senators, Flyers, Lightning and Bruins.

Patrick Roy

The Sabres would certainly shake things up if they contacted Roy, the Hall of Fame goaltender who has been coaching the Quebec Remparts of the QMJHL since 2005 -- and has made the playoffs every season he's been behind the bench. Roy won the Memorial Cup in 2006 as a rookie coach.

Sabres top prospect Mikhail Grigorenko, who had a goal and two assists in 14 games under Ruff, played for Roy in the QMJHL.

Roy is 341-157-36 as Remparts coach, including a 34-19-4 record this season. He's 47 years old.

In addition to Grigorenko, San Jose Sharks defenseman Marc-Edouard Vlasic and former Nashville Predators forward Alexander Radulov are two of Roy's top graduates to the NHL in his time with the Remparts.

Ron Rolston earns chance at NHL coaching job

By Adam Kimelman

NHL.com

February 20, 2013

When Buffalo Sabres interim coach Ron Rolston meets his new players Thursday, he'll see a familiar face in forward Nathan Gerbe. And when he looks out at the ice from behind the bench at Air Canada Centre on Thursday night, he'll see another familiar face in Maple Leafs forward Phil Kessel.

Those are just two of the numerous American players Rolston played a role in developing during his time as a coach with the United States National Team Development Program.

Rolston spent seven seasons as a coach with the USNTDP, alternating years with the program's under-17 and under-18 teams.

"Ron has had a tremendous influence on the continued rise of American players through seven successful years at the NTDP," Jim Johannson, assistant executive director of hockey operations at USA Hockey, said when Rolston left the program in July 2011 to coach the Sabres' American Hockey League team in Rochester. He led the Americans to the Calder Cup Playoffs last spring and has them in the top eight in the Western Conference this season.

General manager Darcy Regier introduced Rolston as an interim coach, but said he'll have a chance at the full-time job.

"I saw his team play in Hamilton the other afternoon," Regier said. "His teams play with structure, discipline. They have a work ethic. He has a good hockey club down there right now and he has them playing real good hockey so I think you'll see some of those traits.

Rolston certainly has an impressive record at developing talent.

His first season with the USNTDP was 2004-05, and he capped it by guiding the U-18 team to a gold medal at the World Under-18 Championship. The three leading scorers on that team were Kessel, Gerbe and Florida Panthers forward Peter Mueller. In all six players from that U-18 team were picked in the first round of an NHL Draft -- forwards Kessel, Mueller and Jack Skille, and defensemen Jack Johnson, Erik Johnson and Mark Mitera.

Rolston worked the following season with the USNTDP U-17 team, and when that group graduated to the U-18 level, he went with them. Emerging from that group were nine players who went on to be first-round NHL picks, among them Toronto forward James van Riemsdyk, Nashville Predators forward Colin Wilson and St. Louis Blues defenseman Kevin Shattenkirk.

The following season he inherited a new group of players, and after a season of grooming them with the U-17 team, he helped them emerge as a championship group at the U-18 level, taking home the gold medal at the 2009 World Under-18 Championship.

That wasn't the only gold medal that group won. Just nine months later, seven members from Rolston's U-18 champions -- forwards Jerry D'Amigo, Jeremy Morin, Ryan Bourque and Jason Zucker; defensemen Cam Fowler and John Ramage; and goaltender Jack Campbell -- won the United States' second-ever gold medal at the 2010 World Junior Championship.

Rolston had one more golden run in him, leading the U.S. to another gold medal, at the 2011 World U-18s. Much like the previous group he led to U-18 gold, the 2011 group wasn't satisfied with winning only one medal. Just last month, 10 players from that U-18 championship team -- forwards J.T. Miller, Rocco Grimaldi, Tyler Biggs, Blake Pietila and Cole Bardreau; defensemen Seth Jones, Jacob Trouba, Connor Murphy and Jake McCabe; and goaltender John Gibson -- captured the gold medal at the 2013 World Junior Championship.

Ruff learned his coaching fate at home

By James Fink

Business First

February 20, 2013

Lindy Ruff's long career as Buffalo Sabres coach ended not at First Niagara Center, but in the living room of his Clarence home.

General Manager Darcy Regier, who hired the coach back in 1997, delivered the news that Ruff had been relieved of his duties as the now-former coach was packing and preparing to take his team to Toronto for Thursday night's game against the Maple Leaf.

The decision to fire Ruff, the Sabres head coach since 1997, came a day after team's disappointing a 2-1 loss Tuesday night to the Winnipeg Jets at First Niagara Center. During the lackluster performance, the hometown crowd loudly booed the Sabres. The defeat left Buffalo with a 6-10-1 record and the head coach in search of answers.

Regier said the Winnipeg loss was the "tipping point."

"Expectations here were high and that impacted the decision," Regier said.

Regier said the decision was "ultimately my decision," but it made after talking with team owner Terry Pegula and top Sabres officials Ken Sawyer and Ted Black.

"There's a lot of sides to it," Regier said. "Sometimes coaches pay the price."

Since Ruff joined the Sabres, there had been 170 coaching changes in the National Hockey League.

Ruff, after being told of the decision, went to the team bus as it prepared to depart for Toronto and Thursday night's game against the Maple Leafs. One last time, Ruff briefly addressed the players.

"There were a lot of hugs," Regier said.

Ron Rolston, the Rochester Americans coach for the past two seasons, will replace Ruff on an interim basis for the remainder of the season.

Besides spending 15 years as Sabres head coach, Ruff played for the Blue-and-Gold for 10 seasons. His firing was the first mid-season coach replacement action by the Sabres since Rick Dudley was fired in December 1991.

Regier said several factors led to his decision, with the most obvious being the lackluster play of the Sabres.

"Unfortunately, there was a lack of progress," Regier said. "For every two steps forward, we took one step back."

Ruff finished his Sabres tenure with a 571-432-162 regular season record plus another 57 playoff victories. His team made the Eastern Conference finals four times but had won a playoff series since 2007. Ruff was named NHL Coach of the Year in 2006.

Coaching shuffle between Amerks, Sabres

By Kevin Oklobzija

Democrat and Chronicle

February 20, 2013

Considering the way the Buffalo Sabres were playing, it was quite obvious they weren't listening to, or even acknowledging the existence of, their coach.

Lindy Ruff's voice was falling on deaf ears. No matter what he said, or how he said it, no one within the Sabres dressing room heard him.

By Tuesday night, Ruff was in panic mode against a team that is pretty much the Sabres' woeful equal, the Winnipeg Jets. Drew Stafford started the game on the fourth line, and as the game wore painfully on, there were never-ending alterations to the line combinations.

Ruff was grasping at anything that might work, even though he surely knew nothing would prevent his team from falling to 6-10-1.

His boss, general manager Darcy Regier, knew it too. That's why, on Wednesday afternoon, he fired Ruff, the guy he hired way back on July 21, 1997. It's the first time Regier fired a coach.

In fielding questions at the news conference, Regier was explaining to Buffalo News reporter Mike Harrington an answer he had given a week or so ago.

"I don't make absolute statements," Regier said. "I never have, I never will."

In itself that statement was pretty funny. "I never have, I never will" might as well come in a vodka bottle, because it's a very absolut(e).

Irony aside, it was actually a very telling statement for the guy he hired to replace Ruff, Amerks coach Ron Rolston.

Regier gave Rolston the job, he just wouldn't commit past the current season. And so, there's nothing absolute about this appointment.

But why is that? Is it because firing Ruff was a change for the sake of change? Is the guy Regier wants not available yet due to contractual obligations elsewhere (Toronto Marlies coach Dallas Eakins, for instance)? Does he want to see how the dust settles after further NHL coaching changes, either in season or afterward?

If Regier really knew that he was making the right choice, if he knew Rolston was ready for the NHL, if he knew his team would respond to the calmer, more cerebral approach of Rolston, then there would be no interim title.

Instead, it's Rolston's job through the end of April. Then they'll re-evaluate.

Now, I understand the apprehension. The need for a get-to-know-each-other period makes some sense.

Rolston was hired in August 2011 to be teach the kids in “Sabres University,” he wasn’t hired as the NHL-head-coach-in-waiting.

Rolston’s Amerk team in 2011-12 was OK, and got better, but lasted all of three games in the playoffs (against Eakins’ powerhouse Marlies team). It took some time for trust to build between the players and coach, and vice-versa.

This season, the Amerks have talent and they have found consistency since December.

But Rolston has never been in the NHL, not as a player or a coach. He coached as an assistant in college for 13 years, was a head coach at USA Hockey’s National Team Development Program for seven years, and then joined the Amerks before last season.

At every stop, he has been a teacher and even a father figure. Will NHL players relate to him? Will they listen to him? More importantly, will they believe in what he asks?

Surely the younger players will, the guys he dealt with in Rochester such as Cody Hodgson and Marcus Foligno and T.J. Brennan. And he’s a Michigan guy, so he’ll get the benefit of the doubt from Ryan Miller.

But the core group of older players? We don’t know. Nor does Regier.

Will Rolston hold players accountable? In Rochester, under-performing players rarely found themselves sitting out, or benched during a game.

Then again, that’s clearly not his style. He relies on accountability within the dressing room. He’s well aware that peer pressure among players can be a coach’s best friend.

Right now the Sabres don’t need a maniacal screamer on the bench. They need a voice of reason, a calming influence, someone who can convince them they’re not that bad.

Still, if it takes the same amount of time for the Sabres to respond to Rolston as it did for the Amerks a year ago, then it will be another non-playoff spring in Buffalo — and Regier will be hiring another head coach over the summer.

Sabres fire longtime coach Lindy Ruff after poor start to 16th season

By Timothy Chipp

Niagara Gazette

February 20, 2013

Niagara Gazette — After more than 15 seasons, Lindy Ruff is no longer the head coach of the Buffalo Sabres.

The community staple, who led the team to four conference finals and one Stanley Cup final appearance, was relieved of his duties in an "extremely difficult" decision Wednesday afternoon before the players left for a game tonight in Toronto.

The situation left General Manager Darcy Regier emotional at the podium. While Ruff was leading practice Wednesday morning, Regier said he was meeting with team owner Terry Pegula, President Ted Black and special advisor Ken Sawyer about the future of the franchise.

"It's a tough day," Regier said. "Ultimately it was my decision. I made the decision. But these things aren't made in a vacuum."

Regier reflected fondly on Ruff's hiring, back in July 1997. He said after the interview with Ruff, who was serving as an assistant coach with the Florida Panthers at the time, he spoke with hockey legend Scotty Bowman. He asked Bowman what he thought of Ruff, to which he received a glowing response.

"He said to me, 'Darcy, he's like (Hall of Fame coach) Al Arbour ... with a sense of humor,'" Regier said. "I think Scotty was right."

Regier thanked his first, and only, coaching hire for his service, not only to the team but also the Western New York community.

"I would like to thank Lindy as a player, a great coach and an outstanding citizen of this community," Regier said. "He understood it, he was extremely professional."

Ron Rolston, who had been serving as head coach of the team's minor league squad in Rochester, will finish out the year as Sabres interim head coach.

The change came quick, following Ruff leading practice and speaking with area high school hockey players earlier in the morning.

Ruff entered this season, shortened to 48 games following the latest work stoppage league-wide, with a different attitude. He was more patient with players, at least vocally. He learned from some of the comments players made last year following locker clean out day after missing the playoffs.

Former center Derek Roy was critical of Ruff and his approach to handling the players in the room. Roy was later traded to the Dallas Stars and Ruff came to work attempting to change the persona he'd created in the past.

Wednesday's change didn't happen because the experiment failed, and Regier said Ruff trying to reinvent himself was a risk he needed to take. Ultimately, it didn't pay off, though, as the team compiled a 6-10-1 record through its first 17 games.

It's eerily similar to what's happened in both of the previous two seasons and Regier said there needed to be a change.

"You have no choice," Regier said. "Either you have to change the people or the people have to change. It doesn't matter what we do, it's about growth. If you don't embrace it, don't try to find ways to become better, and with that, unfortunately in this case, I think it created a risk that didn't pay off.

"He didn't lose the team in any way in respect to communication. There were huge strides in that area. Unfortunately, it didn't translate to the ice. And for whatever reason, we couldn't get any traction, especially defensively. He felt at times ... it was hard to get a grip on."

RUFF FIRED

By Aaron Garland
Tonawanda News
February 21, 2013

Tonawanda News — A 2-1 loss on home ice to Winnipeg Tuesday turned out to be the last straw for Buffalo Sabres head coach Lindy Ruff, who was fired Wednesday.

Ruff was the longest tenured coach in the National Hockey League, in the midst of his 16th season behind Buffalo's bench. On the heels of the firing, there were mixed feelings among local residents about the decision to get rid of Ruff.

But for Niagara Falls resident Chase Giarrizzo, who was at the game Tuesday, the move came as little surprise.

"The team needed a change, the players weren't responding," Giarrizzo said. "I was actually at the game (Tuesday night), and they got booed for two periods and I think they deserved it."

Speculation in Buffalo recently has been that Ruff lost the locker room and the players were no longer responding to his stale message. North Tonawanda resident Chris Sklarski agreed with that account.

"I was happy about it, it's about time," North Tonawanda resident Chris Sklarski said. "I think change needed to be made the past couple years — I think it was overdue. ... He wasn't getting through to the players anymore — his voice got old."

"Glad he's gone. Love the guy, but 16 years? Done. Glad. Get him out of there," Niagara Falls resident Michael Valenti added.

The verdict that came from General Manager Darcy Regier did not win rave reviews with all fans, however. With the team just 6-10-1 this season and sitting in last place in the Northeast Division, some feel the onus should also fall on the players.

"I don't think they should put the whole blame on (Ruff)," Tonawanda resident Steve Wutz said. "It has a lot to do with the players, and I think he's taking the fall for everybody."

"I didn't like it. He's been around for a very long time and he knows what he's doing," Niagara Falls resident Lynn Quiet added. "He just doesn't have the players that he needs to win."

Tonawanda's Kim Dabek also feels the players are just as responsible for the team's shortcomings this year, but noted an even more radical way to send a message.

"I think the team should also have some kind of consequence, like a reduction in pay, because it's not just one person, it's a whole entire team," she said.

Whichever side fans take on the decision to can Ruff, at the end of the day, the NHL is a production-based business. And fans in a city that has yet to see a Stanley Cup champion found that out yesterday.

“He’s been here what, 15 years? He hasn’t won one cup,” Amherst resident Phillip Chmiel said, supporting the firing.

Too bad it had to end like this

By Eric DuVall
Tonawanda News
February 21, 2013

Tonawanda News — Like many, when I learned the news of Lindy Ruff's firing I was stunned but not all that surprised.

Not unlike the death of a someone terminally ill, you know it's coming but when it happens you're still taken aback.

And it does feel a bit like a funeral in Sabreland right now, doesn't it? Part of me wants to hug Sabres fans and say "at least Lindy isn't suffering anymore." Mostly, I'm left to shake my head and try to imagine what a Sabres team will look like without Ruff there.

Fans could be forgiven if they can't picture it. After 16 seasons as coach, after 10 years as a fan-favored player and captain, there is arguably no single person more closely identified with the Buffalo Sabres than Ruff. He was behind the bench for more than half the games in franchise history, after all.

Many will argue Ruff had overstayed his welcome. With only two playoff appearances in the last five seasons and one-and-done turns when they did make the postseason, it's easy to make the case.

But for a franchise that's as insular as any in pro sports, there was a staunch belief that there wasn't a better guy available to turn it around than the one already in the chair. Tuesday's game in Winnipeg was quite obviously the straw that broke the camel's back. The utterly uninspired performance from a team loaded with high-priced players had Ruff's Sabres rightly booed off their home ice.

Fans were angry — and they had a point.

Never one to mince words (except where injuries were involved), Ruff was reminded by Buffalo News beat writer Mike Harrington of the team's standing. "This fan base clearly hates this team. Do you understand their reaction to this point with the way these guys are playing?"

"I totally understand it," Ruff replied with more than a hint of resignation. "I'm embarrassed."

Something of a cottage industry has cropped up among local media searching for the cleverest metaphor for the length of Ruff's tenure. (My contribution: He's outlasted one-and-a-half popes.) But wrapped up in the snark and genuine reflection is this hard truth: For 16 seasons, Ruff and the Sabres have hit various low points. By virtue of their decision to can a coach who's practically a hockey god in Buffalo, the Sabres have acknowledged they're at their lowest point in a generation.

Of course that isn't exactly true. The Rigas affair, the bankruptcy, the months when Gary Bettman stood in lieu of an owner, losing Drury and Briere. Those were all pretty bad.

So what makes this different?

For starters, this latest catastrophe is clearly on Ruff's head. It was his job to get players on the same page. For reasons unknown to anyone outside that fancy new locker room — and probably to a degree unknown to those on the inside, too — he failed.

Ruff was given an unheard of 16-year leash largely because everyone — three owners, all those players, media, the fans — acknowledged there simply wasn't a better guy to coach the Buffalo Sabres. In hindsight, the only way Lindy Ruff was ever going to lose his job was if it became apparent anyone would be better.

Tapping Ron Rolston as Ruff's interim replacement for the remainder of this season makes sense. It's a long enough job interview that they'll know what they've got in him. He'll provide a measure of continuity in a season where hope isn't entirely dead, but is certainly on life support. He also offers a fresh set of eyes on a roster that has far more talent than their combined efforts reflect in the standings.

Rumors had swirled for months that players had tired of Ruff's tough-guy act. Derek Roy said as much after last season and was summarily traded — a sign management was more committed to Ruff than any one player. It seems rather obvious now Roy wasn't the only one who had tuned out the coach.

Credit owner Terry Pegula and general manager Darcy Regier for making a decision many, myself included, thought was beyond them. An owner who's truly committed to winning the Stanley Cup had to level with the obvious: The time for Lindy Ruff to lead them there had passed. He simply had to go.

It's a shame. No one wanted to see Buffalo reach the mountaintop more than Ruff. He's literally given a lifetime to this franchise, this city.

It's time for someone else to give it a shot.

RUFF DESCENT

By Bill Walcott

Lockport Union-Sun & Journal

February 21, 2013

Lockport Union-Sun & Journal — Followers of the Buffalo Sabres didn't mourn the firing of coach Lindy Ruff on Wednesday at Applebees. They felt it was just a matter of time and took the news in a matter-of-fact manner. They were a bit surprised, but not crushed.

Ruff coached 16 years and, for the younger fans, he was the only Sabres coach they knew. For the older fans, Ruff is a good man, but it was time to go. There has been a turnover of 170 NHL coaches since Ruff got the Buffalo job in 1997.

The Sabres are in last place in their division, with only six wins in 17 games. The home team was booed by fans at the First Niagara Arena while losing to the Winnipeg Jets on Tuesday. That was Ruff's 1,165th game as coach in the National Hockey League, all with Buffalo.

Dreams of a Stanley Cup diminished drastically. Hopes of just making the NHL playoffs are dim in a season cut short by the owners' lockout.

Kelly Roeser, who was wearing a Sabres cap Wednesday, said, "It doesn't surprise me at all. It seemed to be a good move. Players weren't responding to him anymore. It's a step in the right direction. They had to do it."

With the shortened season, Roeser feel it's too late to for Buffalo to make a playoff run.

"I think Darcy Regier should go too. I want someone to show a little more emotion on the bench. Talent wise they've got two decent lines, but a few guys aren't pulling their weight. They're too soft," Roeser added.

Eric Fry, who was 5 when Ruff was hired, feels indifferent the shakeup.

"It had to happen," he said. "He's an all right coach, but he's been here 16 years. It was time."

Fry wants a younger coach, somebody new.

"With guys that have been around, it's the same old...same old," he said.

Tony Weiland, the manager of Niagara First Impressions in Lockport got a text message from his wife about a minute after the announcement was made.

"Lindy will go down as the greatest coach in Buffalo history, but it was time to do so (fire him.) Things need be changed," Weiland said. "As a human being I always thought he was a great guy. He was very personable, very funny and he did a great job directing the

team for a lot of years. Over the years, players have changed. His style of coaching was more geared to players of his generation. The younger players need a different motivation.”

”It was his time. I had mixed emotions. I was happy that the Sabres were making a move. At the same time, he’s the only coach I’ve ever know for the Sabres. It’s kind of a culture shock,” Anthony Weiland said.

Nick Roberto of Lockport gets to a few games and was not surprised.

”He needed to be fired,” he said. “It was a matter of time. He was a ticking bomb. We needed a lot of changes.”

”I am surprised,” said Lisa Manning of Clarence. “I thought it would have been awhile ago. Usually there’s a high turnover in coaches and they haven’t won in awhile. He hasn’t won any cups or anything.”

Bob Spencer of Lockport gets to five or six games a season.

”I’m happy about that. It’s about time. They needed a change,” he said. “I think the change will help. The players will get together a little bit and the new coach will come in with a new direction. It’s a good thing.”

Spencer hopes the new coach puts a little excitement and more offense into the Sabres.

”Let the players play,” he said

Not everyone favored the firing. Andrew Janik sure didn’t.

”I don’t think it’s a good idea to get rid of Lindy Ruff. We get rid of all our key players on the ice,” Janik said. “Our chemistry is key. We get all of these players and they don’t have chemistry. That’s why we’re losing.”

Fans react to firing of Lindy Ruff

By Gib Snyder III

Dunkirk Observer

February 21, 2013

The same team that drafted Lindy Ruff in the second round of the 1979 NHL Entry Draft, fired him Wednesday, as the Buffalo Sabres relieved the league's longest-tenured head coach after nearly 16 years of service.

During Ruff's career standing behind the Sabres' bench, his teams went 571-432-84 with 78 ties. Ruff continued the success Ted Nolan had with Buffalo, taking the team to the Eastern Conference finals in his first season, before the Sabres fell to the Dallas Stars in the Stanley Cup finals in 1999. In all, Ruff's teams made eight trips to the playoffs, including two other trips to the Eastern Conference finals in 2006 and '07. The Sabres won 10 playoff series and lost eight, going a combined 57-44.

The team missed the playoffs last season and, after beginning this strike-shortened season 6-10-1, find themselves in 13th place in the Eastern Conference, four points out of a playoff spot. That might not seem bad to some, but the team has been inconsistent to say the least.

After winning their first two games, the Sabres are just 4-10-1. They played well over the weekend, beating the Boston Bruins (9-2-2) on Friday and played well in a 4-3 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins (11-5-0) Sunday. But after Tuesday night's 2-1 loss to the Winnipeg Jets, it was clear, even to their fans, that the Sabres needed to make a change.

"Unfortunately, even great coaches that lead the same team for so long are often tuned out by the players," season ticket holder, and former Dunkirk resident, Scott Ellman said. "They simply lose their flavor. This team is talented and capable, as they've shown versus Boston twice this season. A change will be a good thing."

Like Ellman, many other fans felt the same way.

"It was time for a change," Dunkirk resident Luke Crawford said. "I think Lindy is a good coach and will do well somewhere else."

"I think some new blood as head coach is what the Sabres need right now," Jim Murphy III, a former Fredonia resident now living in Charlotte, N.C., said. "And hopefully (the coaching change) will benefit this struggling excuse for a team."

Other fans, including season ticket holder Nate Dolce had mixed emotions.

"Lindy is a Buffalo guy," Dolce said. "He played here, he coached here, but things get stale. Other teams do this all the time."

For some, however, not seeing Ruff behind the bench tonight against the Toronto Maple Leafs will be a little tougher to take, despite their agreeing that a change was likely needed.

"As a long time and die-hard Buffalo Sabres fan, I am very sad to see a legend - and in my opinion a Hall of Fame coach - be fired," Fredonia resident Josh Tedone said. "As much as I wanted to see the Sabres win with Lindy Ruff, it's simply time for a change. Ruff's message has gotten stale and the current record shows it's time for a change. I feel like the team has hit rock bottom this year."

Dunkirk resident Andy Bohn, a long-time Sabres fan, added his thoughts on Ruff's firing.

"It's hard letting someone go that you have an emotional attachment to," Bohn noted. "But I really think the players stopped playing his system. I hope they don't hire from within the team. They need outside help."

Added Dunkirk resident Tim Korzenieski, "Fifteen years, only one trip to the (Stanley Cup) finals, change was imminent."

Unlike when the Buffalo Bills fired Chan Gailey after yet another disappointing season, the firing of Ruff, who had been on the hot seat - at least in the minds of the fans and media members that cover the team - the firing still came as somewhat of a shock.

"It's tough to part with a coach that has been with the organization since 1997," Murphy added. "I started to love hockey around 1995, so all I know is Ted Nolan and Lindy Ruff behind the bench. I hope the next coach brings back the excitement."

Rochester Americans head coach Ron Rolston was named the interim coach for the remainder of the season. Rolston had led the Amerks to a 27-18-2 mark and 57 points, which, as of Wednesday night, was good enough for seventh place in the American Hockey League's Western Conference.

Firing likely not surprising to Lindy Ruff

By Pierre LeBrun

ESPN

February 20, 2013

Lindy Ruff was fired Wednesday after almost 16 years behind the Buffalo Sabres' bench, but he likely had a clue this was coming.

At least that's how fellow coach Ken Hitchcock felt when it happened to him. The St. Louis Blues coach calls it the pit-in-your-stomach instinct as a coach when you know you're losing your team.

"As a head coach, you know ahead of time," Hitchcock told ESPN.com on Wednesday in the wake of Ruff's firing.

"Everybody thinks it's about winning hockey games. It's the energy your team plays with. As a coach, it's an uncomfortable feeling when the energy in your group is not there and that's your responsibility. When your team walks around in a fog, that's your responsibility. You know well in advance before it happens. When you're a good coach, and Lindy is a hell of a coach, it just doesn't feel right. You know it. It's really an uncomfortable feeling."

Fired in Dallas, Philadelphia and Columbus and yet one of the game's most respected coaches, not to mention last season's Jack Adams Award winner as NHL coach of the year, Hitchcock knows full well it's part of the business.

He also worked alongside Ruff as part of Team Canada's Olympic staff in Vancouver, capturing gold in 2010, so Hitchcock knows the coaching talent that's now on the open market.

"Lindy is going to have lots of choices," Hitchcock said. "He's a great coach. For me, he's a really creative guy. I really saw that at the Olympics."

Team Canada 2010 head coach Mike Babcock also enjoyed getting to know Ruff as part of the Olympic process and, like Hitchcock, felt for his colleague on Wednesday.

"The big thing for Lindy, as a player and then as a coach, he's had an unbelievable run in Buffalo," the Detroit Red Wings coach told ESPN.com on Wednesday. "His family has grown up there. He's always going to be part of Buffalo. In saying that, Lindy Ruff is a very, very, very good coach. They had a hell of a team there at one time. Their team is not as good as it used to be. He still found a way to be competitive. You know it's going to be a tough time for his family, but he's going to move on and be excellent somewhere else. Someone is going to get themselves one hell of a person and a great, great coach."

Team Canada GM Steve Yzerman hasn't yet announced his coaching staff for the 2014 Olympics in Sochi, but my guess is that Babcock will return as head coach and

Hitchcock and Ruff will return as assistants. Just a hunch on my part, but I don't see Team Canada wanting to mess with success.

And if Ruff does indeed get an invite back on the Olympic staff, it will tell you -- as if anyone needed to say it -- what high regard people in the game still have for him despite Wednesday's firing.

I'm not saying the Sabres were wrong to fire Ruff. The message can indeed get stale after more than 15 years, and this Sabres squad looked listless.

But let's not pretend this is a cure-all answer to Buffalo's woes. Some of this has to fall on GM Darcy Regier, as well. His blue-line corps, for my money, is overrated, I might even say soft. The Sabres aren't good enough down the middle, although Cody Hodgson is showing signs he'll be a good one. And overall, there's not enough character and leadership on that team.

If the Sabres miss the playoffs, I'm guessing owner Terry Pegula will also make a change at GM as well despite handing Regier an extension before the season.

Regier and Ruff have always talked about being a package deal. They've done some great work together in Buffalo. I'm not quite sure why they didn't leave together.

Will new voice get Sabres into postseason?

By Scott Burnside and Craig Custance

ESPN

February 20, 2013

Burnside: Craig, big news out of Buffalo, as the longest-tenured coach in the NHL, Lindy Ruff, finally had the clock run out on him. Can't say it was all that surprising given how poorly the Sabres have played this season and, frankly, it's been a long time -- dare I say 2007? -- since this team has been a legitimate contender. Since those back-to-back trips to the Eastern Conference finals in 2006 and 2007, the Sabres have missed the playoffs three times and been bounced twice in the first round. For me, the most disappointing moment was in 2011 when they had a banged-up Flyers team on the ropes in the first round and couldn't close the deal, losing in Game 7. So, is that a coaching issue or a personnel issue? When you've got one of the best goaltenders in the game in Ryan Miller, the results should be better, but it still doesn't address the question: Are the Sabres' repeated failures connected to needing a new voice, or new people in the jersey? Guess we'll start to find out as Ron Rolston, coach of Rochester's AHL team, was named interim head coach.

I have often lamented from afar that this remains a team without a strong leadership core. There's no Daniel Briere, Chris Drury, Brian Campbell or Jay McKee, all of whom were central to those strong Sabres teams. Can a new coach coax more leadership out of guys like Drew Stafford, Tyler Myers, Tyler Ennis, Nathan Gerbe? What's your first reaction to this move?

Custance: My first reaction was surprise, which is strange because we've been debating whether or not the move should happen for a while now. It's kind of like David Poile firing Barry Trotz -- it just didn't seem possible. But there's pressure on general manager Darcy Regier to win and it hasn't been happening in Buffalo. Terry Pegula came in and immediately started talking about winning Stanley Cups. That's where the bar has been set in Buffalo. I'm with you -- I'm not sure the coach is the problem -- but now we find out. When you look at the Sabres right now, they're getting the usual strong goaltending from Miller. They're getting offensive production up front from guys like Thomas Vanek, Jason Pominville and Cody Hodgson. Vanek has been unreal for most of the season. Defensively, there are some issues, and it's hard to identify if it's because of personnel or coaching. Tyler Myers appears to have regressed, which is a major problem since he's making \$12 million (!) in actual salary this season. Jordan Leopold was a healthy scratch. There's a lot of money invested in that defense and it hasn't come with a real payoff. Is there a coach available to fix that?

Burnside: Well I think you noted on Twitter right after the news broke Wednesday afternoon that Dallas Eakins and Jon Cooper, who coach the top farm teams for the Toronto Maple Leafs and the Tampa Bay Lightning, respectively, would be the top candidates for a permanent job if the Sabres are looking to go that route. It will be interesting to see how those teams -- both in the same conference and, in the case of the Leafs, the same division -- would allow an in-season move or whether both would require the Sabres to wait to the end of the season. Last year, the Nashville Predators

allowed Kirk Muller to take the Carolinahead coaching job even though they'd just hired him to coach their AHL team in Milwaukee. That was a different dynamic though.

As for the Sabres themselves, you've touched on some key personnel issues. Would a new coach help Myers get back on track? Or was that the kind of personnel mistake made at the GM level that will cripple the club for years? Same with the Ville Leino signing. I guess if you're Regier you hope a new coach can help turn what appear to be egregious mistakes into positive assets. I have to believe that, unless Regier can catch lightning in a bottle and see his team improve dramatically in the short term and make the playoffs, we'll be talking about another key opening on the Sabres' staff the moment this season ends.

Custance: Which is probably fair. Pegula has opened his checkbook and expects results. If I'm him, I'm not sure I'm letting Regier make a long-term coaching hire at this point. That's why I like the move to promote Rolston on an interim basis from Rochester. According to a couple reports from Toronto, Eakins doesn't have an out until after this season. So by doing that, you're opening up more options. But yeah, I think both Eakins and Cooper will be NHL coaches by this time next season, and it'd be smart for Buffalo to consider getting the jump on one of them. I agree that Regier's track record in free agency has been suspect, but you have to appreciate the trades he made last season, acquiring Hodgson from the Canucks and getting a first-rounder for Paul Gaustad. Maybe that's the next move? Try and shake things up through a trade. There are certainly enough general managers looking to add defense if the Sabres want to make changes there. Buffalo is currently four points outside a playoff spot and has been known to make a run late in the regular season. You think this sparks them back into the playoff conversation?

Burnside: Maybe the Sabres have a surplus of defensemen because they don't have many who play it all that well, or who haven't played it all that well under Ruff. The team ranks 26th in goals allowed per game. Not sure what kind of return you're going to get for players that Regier might be looking at moving, or maybe it's just the act of moving someone. Just as this is about the act of "doing something" on the part of Regier. This isn't to downplay the emotion that must have gone into this. Regier and Ruff have spent the better part of two decades together trying to build a winner in Buffalo. Hard to make that call. But I still don't see anything there to suggest that whoever's behind the bench makes enough of a difference to get this team back to the postseason. The good news is that it's the Eastern Conference and it's filled with mediocre teams, and good teams like Ottawa are crippled by injuries, so maybe this is all the Sabres need. What do you think, do we see them come the last week of April or not?

Custance: My playoff locks in the East are Pittsburgh, New Jersey, Boston, the Rangers and whoever wins the Southeast. That leaves plenty of room for the Sabres to make a run. The problem is that there are four teams in front of them before you get into the top eight, and it's hard to make up ground when all you're playing are teams in the Eastern Conference. I'm not ruling out the playoffs for Buffalo, but the Sabres have their work cut out.

Ruff's long tenure with Sabres ends

By A.J. Perez

Fox Sports

February 20, 2013

The firing of Lindy Ruff was announced on a medium that didn't exist when he took over behind the Buffalo Sabres bench in 1997.

General manager Darcy Regier sent out a message through the Sabres' official Twitter account that Ruff — the longest-tenured coach in the NHL — was let go on Wednesday. The reason for the change Regier gave at a news conference where he announced that Ron Rolston would finish out the season was hardly novel.

“Unfortunately, it's the coaches who too often pay the price,” said Regier, who informed Ruff of the move at his house after practice earlier in the day. “It's something that I made every effort to avoid in the past. I'm a part of it. The players are a part of it. You can go to the scouting staff. Everyone here feels responsible.”

That'd be responsible for losing, something the Sabres have done a lot of this season. The Sabres are 6-10-1, have won only four of their last 15 games and are 13th in the Eastern Conference.

Regier acknowledged in a shortened season, such skids are magnified.

The Sabres' record this season overshadowed Ruff's resume, one that includes 16 seasons as a coach and another 12 as a player. He compiled a 571-432-162 record as coach, best among active coaches. Only San Antonio Spurs coach Gregg Popovich has been employed longer among the four major sports.

There were 170 coaching changes since Ruff was hired in July 21, 1997, according to NHL.com. While other pro sports have caught on, the NHL created the trend of midseason firings like these — and they have paid off on occasion.

The Pittsburgh Penguins replaced Michel Therrien with Dan Bylsma in February 2009. Last season, the Los Angeles Kings fired Terry Murray and tapped Darryl Sutter at midseason. Both teams went on to win the Stanley Cup.

But Ruff was more than a just a coach.

He'd been an institution in Western New York. Much of the region followed intently on the progress of his then-11-year-old daughter, Madeleine, who had brain surgery in 2006 to remove a tumor — The operation was a success, and she had a full recovery.

Fans once rallied to pay a \$10,000 fine Ruff was levied in 2009 for sending out his enforcers, a move that initiated a brawl in a game against the Ottawa Senators.

"The hockey world knows how I and the entire Buffalo Sabres organization feel about Lindy Ruff not only as a coach, but also as a person," Sabres owner Terry Pegula said in a statement. "His long tenure with the Sabres has ended. His qualities have made this decision very difficult. I personally want Lindy to know that he can consider me a friend always."

This wasn't a case where the players stopped listening as the message became stale, Regier said.

"He didn't lose the team in any way in terms of communication," Regier said. "In fact, communication has never been better. There were huge strides in that regard. Unfortunately, it didn't translate to the ice."

That was never more evident than when it came to the Sabres' lifeless defense, which hasn't come close to matching an offense that includes the league's leading scorer entering play Wednesday night (Thomas Vanek).

Too often, goalie Ryan Miller has been left to fend for himself. While he's still one of the game's top goaltenders, Miller can only do so much as his defensemen take bad angles, get out of position and generally play sloppy.

The Sabres have the league's 26th-worst goals-against average (3.29 goals per game). Only three defensemen (Christian Ehrhoff, Alexander Sulzer and TJ Brennan) have a positive plus-minus.

"For whatever reason, we couldn't get traction," Regier said.

So, one of only two coaches to lead the Sabres to the Stanley Cup Final — Ruff took the Sabres there in 1999, when they lost to the Dallas Stars — is now looking for work. He won't be the only one this season, as there will be another GM out there looking to give their team a jolt.

It's hard not to get nostalgic over this dismissal, however.

When Ruff was hired, the NHL consisted of four fewer teams, the wound Mike Tyson carved out of Evander Holyfield's ear was still fresh, Major League Baseball had just started interleague play and a 21-year-old Tiger Woods was just a few months removed from winning his first major.

And if you told somebody you just sent a "tweet," you'd get some strange looks. Strange, just like the NHL minus Lindy Ruff.

Lindy Ruff firing gives Sabres chance for change

By Adam Proteau

The Hockey News

February 20, 2013

You can't say Lindy Ruff never had enough chances to succeed in Buffalo. Indeed, the Sabres' longest-serving coach and the man who had more tenure with his team than any other current NHL coach spent 5,693 days on the job before the franchise fired him Wednesday afternoon. But although Ruff was done in by a stumbling 6-10-1 start to the season, the reality is this move should have been made long ago.

That's not to excuse the moribund performance of the team this season and Ruff's role in it. However, anyone who takes a look at the franchise in recent years could see a team that had some significant issues. Indeed, when you consider the Sabres have made the playoffs just four times in the past 10 years, it's no small wonder a management change of some sort didn't come sooner.

Now, there's certainly something to be said for continuity of message. But 16 years of the same approach stretches far beyond that and deep into cult of personality territory. Even worse, it gave the core of the team a face and persona to protect it year after year, even as ownership changed hands numerous times, even as star players such as Dominik Hasek and Derek Roy came and went.

In many regards, that's a credit to Ruff's abilities, which will remain highly respected and coveted around the league regardless of his employment status. The 53-year-old made more lemonade out of lemons than the Country Time and Mike's Hard empires combined, so for a very long time there was the sense the team didn't have to spend as much to compete as the league's consistent Stanley Cup contenders. That has changed under present-day owner Terry Pegula – and even though the team has some very promising youngsters in the midst (including Cody Hodgson and Tyler Myers), they somehow had put those youngsters in positions of massive importance. Hodgson has responded well so far this year, but Myers has struggled mightily. And honestly, when Hodgson is expected to be your No. 1 center after just one season where he posted decent numbers, I'd argue the organization as a whole is asking too much of the 23-year-old.

If Ruff had been dismissed after three straight years of missing the playoffs from 2002-2004 – or after two straight trips to the draft lottery from 2008-09 – the franchise might well have charted a far different course. Instead, the roster retained much, if not most of its core under equally-long-tenured GM Darcy Regier. Certainly, many of those players still have great value. But what if the mix was just the wrong mix? That happens often across all sports. Usually when the wrong mix happens, a coach gets tossed out as well. But, for better or worse, the mix remained the same in Buffalo because Ruff believed in players. Yet year upon year, they were still failing to get it done for one reason or another.

And this past summer, rather than looking at an aging core and deciding to acquire more youth, what did the Sabres do? They doubled down on the grit Ruff loved to see by dealing Roy and acquiring agitator Steve Ott. Did that make sense considering Buffalo already had a world-class pest in Patrick Kaleta? You could easily argue it did not. But as we know, many NHL teams wind up being built in the image of the man behind their bench. The Sabres became more like Ruff and less like one that could compete with younger, more skilled divisional rival squads in Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal.

Now all the heat gets directed at Regier, who has been in his position as long as Ruff was until today. With cornerstone goalie Ryan Miller scheduled to be an unrestricted free agent after next season, you would imagine the Sabres have to scramble in a big way to show him the future is worth sticking around for. But there's a danger there as well: If Regier makes a push for more veterans, he easily could wind up chasing his tail and putting Buffalo in the no-man's-land of a ninth-or-10th-place finish, far from the elite prospect pool and just as far from the post-season.

In other words, the Sabres' big decisions are far from over simply because Ruff is no longer in town. They may yet be able to pull out of this tailspin and return to being the franchise that made two consecutive Eastern Conference final appearances, but they've been at a crossroads for a very long time. At the very least, the removal of a team legend like Ruff – however painful it might be in the short-term – gives Buffalo a better chance at a more honest appraisal of where they stand in the NHL's pecking order.

After Lindy Ruff's firing, it's time for Buffalo Sabres to take top-to-bottom inventory

By Nicholas J. Costonika

Yahoo! Sports

February 20, 2013

Two years ago, Terry Pegula introduced himself as the new owner of the Buffalo Sabres. He choked up as he called Gilbert Perreault his hero. He declared the team's reason for existence was now to win the Stanley Cup. He also quoted the Pittsburgh Steelers' Art Rooney on stability and success.

"Panic doesn't seem to work," Pegula said at that news conference on Feb. 22, 2011. "Our feeling is that you pick good people and you stick with them. If you have the right people in place, you always have a chance to be successful."

Pegula stuck with coach Lindy Ruff and general manager Darcy Regier, a tandem since 1997. He gave them the financial support they had lacked before. He even gave them contract extensions.

When Ruff was fired Wednesday, it wasn't panic. It was the opposite of panic. The man outlasted popes and presidents – in pro sports. Ruff was the longest-tenured coach in the NHL. One hundred and seventy coaching changes were made in the league while he was in Buffalo.

But now that he's gone, it's time to reevaluate everyone else, starting with Regier. The problem wasn't patience, but the people. Ruff and Regier are good people, but Ruff clearly wasn't the right coach anymore and Regier might not be the right GM anymore, either, based on the roster and the record.

Making the playoffs shouldn't matter as much as making sure the Sabres have the leadership to execute their philosophy, so Pegula can remain patient and watch it pay off next time.

Pegula released a statement in which he praised Ruff: "His qualities have made this decision very difficult. I personally want Lindy to know that he can consider me a friend always." The statement said nothing about Regier, let alone the plan for the future, but maybe silence speaks volumes.

Regier said firing Ruff was ultimately his decision. But he acknowledged that he made that decision in consultation with Pegula, team president Ted Black and senior advisor Ken Sawyer, and Ron Rolston is coming up from the American Hockey League's Rochester Americans as only an interim coach. That means the Sabres have options. Regier could keep Rolston or hire someone else. If the Sabres hire a new GM, the new GM can hire his own coach.

Does Regier worry about his own future?

“Not right now, I don’t,” Regier said. “It’s not my day.”

But when will that day come?

Pegula came in as a billionaire businessman but also as a self-described fan, and he has done a lot to make this a first-class organization off the ice while learning what it takes to win. He has poured money into facilities and people.

It was reasonable to see what Ruff and Regier could do with more resources – a larger scouting staff, the freedom to add high salaries. These two had come close to the Stanley Cup in 1999 and won a Presidents’ Trophy in 2007.

But obviously overpaying for free agents like Ville Leino and Christian Ehrhoff wasn’t enough two summers ago, and obviously adding tough guys like Steve Ott and John Scott wasn’t enough last summer.

Tuesday night’s 2-1 loss to the Winnipeg Jets was brutal. Ruff said he was embarrassed and sounded out of answers, as his players openly admitted their lack of effort. The frustrated fans booed the Sabres out of the building. The Sabres are 6-10-1 and entered Wednesday night with the third-worst record in the NHL in terms of point percentage.

“I think the prevailing factor here was where we are, where we’re going, conversations that I had with Lindy, how he felt about where the team was,” Regier said. “I think last game was quite honestly a tipping point, and it was evident to me that we were searching for answers to too many questions.”

But this was not the first crisis Ruff had endured in recent years, and the only reason his job security didn’t come up more often was because he had been fired in the media so many times before, it seemed like he could survive just about anything. This team has missed the playoffs three times in the past five seasons and hasn’t won a playoff round since going to back-to-back Eastern Conference finals in 2006 and ’07.

And the Sabres are still searching for answers to too many questions. Are they underachieving? Yes. Could they do better under a new coach simply because of a new voice? Yes. Will they do better under Rolston? We’ll see. Are they building toward a Stanley Cup? That’s the big question, and it seems doubtful, despite the parity in the NHL. Asked about the Sabres’ shortcomings before Ruff was fired Wednesday, one NHL executive said simply: “Talent.”

It’s not just Regier. It’s that Regier is essentially alone at the top. Even though the Sabres have added a number of scouts since Pegula bought the team and lifted the financial restraints – going from a staff of about 11 to two dozen – who is his trusted lieutenant?

It’s also that the Sabres lack a strong organizational identity. Who are they? What kind of hockey do they play? How do they beat you? Are they a skilled team? A skilled team trying to add toughness? What?

Pegula knows what he needs to do. He said it at his introductory news conference. He said he wanted the Sabres to be the best in the league at “finding,” “developing” and “keeping” talent.

Is Regier the best man for that job? Should he be the one making moves down the stretch before the Sabres are even in position to decide on the permanent coach? What about up-and-coming executives, like the Nashville Predators’ Paul Fenton, the Los Angeles Kings’ Ron Hextall and the Toronto Maple Leafs’ Claude Loiselle?

Pegula needs a GM with a strong vision. He needs his GM to surround himself with a strong staff and his own coach. And then, yes, he needs to give more resources, more time and more patience before he ratchets up the expectations.

“I’m disappointed in myself,” Regier said. “I’m disappointed for Lindy. I’m disappointed ... When I see the players, I’m disappointed for them, too. We should all be disappointed. As far as anger, we have too much work to do.”

The work is just getting started.

Buffalo Sabres fire Lindy Ruff, hire Ron Rolston as interim coach

By Allan Muir
Sports Illustrated
February 20, 2013

It's not tough to guess the exact moment when Buffalo Sabres GM Darcy Regier knew it was time to fire coach Lindy Ruff.

It came during last night's shambolic 2-1 loss to Winnipeg when Ryan Miller, the face of the franchise, threw his arms into the air in disgust after he'd allowed the Jets' first goal.

It was another selfish display from Miller, a player whose own tenure with the franchise might be drawing to a close. But it also spoke clearly to how out of control the situation had become.

Surely Regier saw that, and then noticed the slump-shouldered resignation that settled into most, but not all, of the Sabres on their bench.

If he hadn't been convinced that Ruff had lost the team, that moment removed all doubt

And so Regier, whose blind loyalty to Ruff kept the struggling coach employed years after his best-by date, finally made the call to let him go on Wednesday afternoon.

Ruff is a good man and an excellent coach, but his message had gone stale. It was absolutely the right decision by Regier...and absolutely the last one he should be allowed to make.

The culture of losing that permeates this franchise won't be any easier to disinfect than the Carnival Triumph. Installing a new man behind the bench might be just the tonic elsewhere, but in Buffalo it's the equivalent of slapping on a new coat of paint. Regier has assembled an ill-fitting mix of parts. There are too many small forwards, the defense is soft and ineffective and there's a serious deficit of character. This organization needs to be stripped down to the frame, and rebuilt from there.

And that's why Regier should have followed Ruff out the door.

It didn't happen today, but it almost surely will if the Sabres don't engineer a remarkable turnaround and make the playoffs. The announcement that Rochester coach Ron Rolston had been hired to coach on an interim basis is telling. By not making him a permanent hire, the organization created freedom for a potential replacement GM to name his own man.

That's a smart move. The second one the team made today. Just one more to go.

Johnston on Sabres: Stunned by Ruff's firing

By Chris Johnston

Sportsnet

February 20, 2013

TORONTO - One by one, they filed off the bus and began walking into an uncertain future.

There was an unmistakable air of disbelief as the Buffalo Sabres stepped into a snowy Toronto night with the news of Lindy Ruff's firing still shaking them to the core. It was clear that most of the players had yet to even make sense of what happened.

"A lot of guys are emotional," captain Jason Pominville said Wednesday night. "It was a tough go."

Everything about the day had been normal -- right down to Ruff's arrival on the bus after his players were already seated and ready to go. Then the Sabres coach of more than 15 years began wishing everyone all the best and telling them they weren't far off and thanking them for the time they spent together.

Something wasn't right...

"I think even at that point we were kind of still in shock," said Pominville. "We weren't really sure what he meant by that."

Eventually, the message became clear. The rock-solid tectonic plates under the Sabres organization had finally shifted and Ruff was out of a job. It resulted in an earthquake that should come with tremors which will be felt for a good long time.

"I'm still trying to process what happened," said alternate captain Drew Stafford.

There has been just one way for the Sabres organization to operate over the last decade and it was always Ruff's way. Now the task falls to Ron Rolston, at least on an interim basis, starting with Thursday's game against the rival Toronto Maple Leafs at Air Canada Centre.

How is that going to feel after all this time? It certainly won't be a matter of simply turning the page and moving on.

Buffalo's struggles have been undeniable during a 6-10-1 start to the season that culminated with Ruff calling Tuesday's loss to Winnipeg "embarrassing." But most close to the team expected it to pull out of the tailspin with the help of a coach who had been at the helm for the last 1,065 regular-season games.

Instead, that coach is now looking for work.

"He's a top free agent out there right now and any organization that's going to get him is going to get a great coach," said Sabres forward Thomas Vanek. "It's a sad day."

On some level, it was also inevitable. Ruff helped the Sabres to an appearance in the 1999 Stanley Cup, not to mention consecutive runs to the Eastern Conference final. But the team had qualified for the playoffs just twice in the last five years and the prospects for this season weren't particularly good either.

A change wasn't expected but it might have been needed.

"I mean you've got to try something, right? We're not in a very good place," said goalie Ryan Miller. "We knew we had to improve regardless of who's going to be coaching us. ... Hopefully it's just a wakeup call for the guys -- to remind you that it's pro sports, it is about your performance and how professional you are. "It came down to performance and we as a team we haven't lived up to it."

Ruff played 10 seasons in Buffalo and then managed to coach even longer in the city. All of that time in one place makes it tough to put his legacy into perspective.

"I never thought this day was going to come," said Pominville.

The 170 coaching changes around the NHL between Ruff's hiring and firing only begin to highlight how unusual his tenure was. It's interesting to place his career alongside that of contemporary Ken Hitchcock. Since Ruff was hired, Hitchcock won a Stanley Cup in Dallas, got hired in Philadelphia, led Columbus to its first ever playoff berth and then landed in St. Louis.

All the while Ruff remained in one place.

Even with his unmatched longevity, there was no denying that he needed to survive some tough times. Asked during a February 2009 interview whether he ever thought his days were numbered in Buffalo, Ruff replied "Oh God yeah."

"You've got to fear losing," he added. "I think that's my greatest fear always."

That didn't change right down to the end.

Perhaps the greatest testament to Ruff's legacy was the 90-minute practice he put the Sabres through at First Niagara Center on Wednesday morning. With the team struggling, he was still looking for answers right down to the final minutes before GM Darcy Regier decided it was time to look in another direction.

His players will always remember that dedication.

"Lindy's always been an influence and somebody who has been there and believed in us," said Miller. "He's been a Sabre for such a long time we feel bad that this is how it

played out for him. We had much higher expectations and much higher goals. ... "I just feel really sorry for that because no one cares more than Lindy."

Vanek felt the same. He acknowledged having an "up and down" with relationship with Ruff since breaking into the NHL in 2005, but seemed genuinely upset that it was over.

"There was no quit in him, there never will be," said Vanek. "He's in my eyes still the face in Buffalo. It's an emotional day and it's a tough day."

Ron Rolston brings technically sound plan to Buffalo

By Elliott Friedman

The Hockey News

February 20, 2013

During a recent quiet moment, Ron Rolston called his younger brother to see how he was doing.

"I told him I'm winning tournaments with my son's peewee team," Brian Rolston laughed Wednesday night. "You better start winning something with your team."

Ron's won enough that he's getting a chance at the highest level. Eighteen years ago, in another lockout season, the Rolstons celebrated Brian's arrival in the NHL. His 1,256-game career ended last summer, but on Thursday, they will celebrate another debut. Ron, almost seven years older, succeeds Lindy Ruff as the Sabres' second coach in 16 years.

"He asked me, 'Do you have any words or suggestions?'" Brian said. "It's difficult, because you're starting with the treadmill at 10. I just told him, 'You've been preparing for this a long time. It's not rocket science. Do what you do, and you'll be great.'"

For many of us -- myself included -- the follow-up is obvious: What does he do? Rolston (the coach) is a bit of an unknown entity, especially to a Canadian audience.

He spent seven years in the USA Development program, including two stints at the world junior championships. When his new team lines up against the Maple Leafs on Thursday night, he'll see a couple players he guided through that system -- Phil Kessel and James van Riemsdyk.

But he felt he needed to go the professional route to get closer to the NHL. The Sabres hired him to coach the AHL's Rochester Americans before last season, where he compiled a 63-44-17 record before getting the call from Darcy Regier.

The most off-beat thing about Rolston is that he doesn't wear hockey gloves while running practices. Apparently, he hates taking them off to write on the greaseboard, so he uses workmen's gloves instead.

'Technically sound' best describes Ron Rolston

Other than that, the descriptions you hear most from those who know him are "detail-oriented" and "technically sound."

"He'll make sure everyone knows their responsibilities," said Chris Taylor, Rochester's development coach. "He demands that everybody is prepared; and he wants a north-south game."

TJ Brennan, Marcus Foligno and Cody Hodgson had 81 points in 88 games (combined) for Rolston this season. Kevin Porter, who leads the Americans in scoring, is going to join the big club as well. But any Sabre fan will tell you team defence has been the real issue.

"His attention to detail starts with having to take care of the defensive end first," Brian said. "I was lucky to play nine seasons for a great coach in Jacques Lemaire, and Ron would ask me, 'What does Jacques do here? What does he think about this?'

"In Boston, we had a rule: the forwards back-checked the puck and the defence took the middle of the ice away. The goalies knew the shot was coming from the outside. Ron will be like that. He'll set up a defensive system and expect the players to stick with it."

Other than that, though, Brian declined to specifically compare him to one of his own NHL coaches. "He's his own man."

It's going to be so strange to look at the Sabres' bench and not see Lindy Ruff. But while his incredible Buffalo run ends, another one continues. For the 19th straight year, the Rolston family is represented in the NHL.

Allen: Lindy Ruff's message might have grown stale

By Kevin Allen

USA Today

February 20, 2013

General manager Darcy Regier's decision to fire coach Lindy Ruff undoubtedly will help both the Buffalo Sabres and a team to be named later.

Sabres players needed a new boss, a fresh voice, a change in routine. There is nothing wrong with Ruff's tactics, work ethic or bench decisions. After 16 years with Buffalo, Ruff was simply beyond his freshness date. His message had grown stale, and players were no longer nourished by it.

That doesn't mean players wanted him fired. There is a major difference between a coach losing the team and players growing weary of listening to what a coach has to say.

Every parent understands there comes a point when your children, even if they love you, will look right through you when you lecture them for the 100th time on the same subject. Your children know all of your points before you make them.

And so it was with Buffalo players and Ruff, who was the longest-tenured NHL coach with the same team before he was fired Wednesday. When Ruff was hired July 21, 1997, current Buffalo rookie Mikhail Grigorenko was 3.

San Antonio Spurs coach Gregg Popovich, hired in 1996, is the only active coach in the four major sports with a longer run than Ruff.

Ruff is a tough-love coach, and players have long thought he could be too hard on them. Ruff acknowledged that and changed his style a bit this season, and Regier said communication with players was never better.

But it didn't change the fact that they had heard all of his stories and knew all of his methods. It was like the team was waiting for something to happen. The team needed another layer of inspiration, and Ruff had used up all of his tricks. The magic between coach and players was gone.

Whose fault is it the Sabres are sitting at 6-10-1 after winning their first two games?

There is no right answer. There is only a long list of contributing factors. Tyler Myers hasn't developed like the Sabres hoped he would. The line of Marcus Foligno, Tyler Ennis and Drew Stafford hasn't played as well as it did last season. The defensive play has been inconsistent. The team's depth of talent doesn't seem strong enough. Certainly, there have been some ill-advised contracts.

It's impossible to know for sure why the team is struggling, but Ruff is being replaced on an interim basis by Rochester (N.Y.) Amerks coach Ron Rolston from Rochester (N.Y.)

of the American Hockey League because that's the generally accepted practice in this situation.

"I think (the team was) making some strides," Regier said. "But in the end, for every two steps forward, it was one step back."

Home fans booed the Sabres when they lost 2-1 to the Winnipeg Jets on Tuesday.

"I think last game was a tipping point," Regier said. "It was evident to me we were searching for answers to too many questions."

Regier said he didn't make the decision to fire Ruff until Wednesday while the team was practicing. He will be second-guessed for not moving sooner, the price he will pay for being loyal to a friend and dedicated Sabres employee of 16 years.

Ruff is probably in a more secure situation now than Regier. With Ruff removed, Regier will face scrutiny alone for what happens to the Sabres. If Rolston can't turn the team around or at least make strides, the impression will be that Regier built a team that wasn't talented enough.

Meanwhile, Ruff, if he chooses, will be the hottest candidate in the coaching marketplace.

Everyone in the NHL understands that just because a coach is fired doesn't mean he's not a good coach.

Hard-edged coach Randy Carlyle's message grew stale on the Anaheim Ducks, but now he's the toast of Toronto. Bruce Boudreau was fired because he couldn't get the Washington Capitals moving, but now he is doing a masterful job with Anaheim. Peter DeBoer was fired by the Florida Panthers and then took the New Jersey Devils to the Stanley Cup Final last June.

It's doubtful Ruff feels good about his situation tonight, because his family's life has been turned inside out. But within a short time, he'll realize it's entirely possible he could end up in a better situation. Even Regier conceded Wednesday there were plenty of unknowns about what kind of team the Sabres had. If Ruff hadn't been fired Wednesday, he was going to stay on the hot seat.

Regier predicted Ruff would land fairly quickly in another NHL job.

"I think back when we interviewed (Ruff) and I called Scotty Bowman about him," Regier said. "I said, 'Scotty, who would you compare him to?' And he said, 'Darcy, he's a lot like Al Arbour with a sense of humor,' and I think Scotty was right."

Buffalo Sabres fire head coach Lindy Ruff

By David Shoalts
Globe and Mail
February 20, 2013

There is one NHL axiom no head coach can escape, not even Lindy Ruff, one who had been around longer than anyone else: The players have to buy what you are selling.

By the time the Buffalo Sabres turned in yet another dispirited effort last Tuesday – losing 2-1 to a mediocre Winnipeg Jets team for their 10th loss in 15 games – it was clear to everyone the players were no longer listening to Ruff, who had been behind the Buffalo bench for 15 years and seven months.

It was clear to the sellout crowd, which booed them off the ice, and maybe it was finally clear to Darcy Regier, whose first major act after being named Sabres general manager in 1997 was to hire Ruff.

On Wednesday, he fired him.

Then again, that is the one question looming over this move: Was it Regier's idea or did it come from Sabres owner Terry Pegula, who has supported Regier and Ruff since he bought the NHL team two years ago? It was just one month ago, Pegula announced he'd given Regier a contract extension, much to the chagrin of local media.

Regier danced around that question at an afternoon press conference Wednesday. That in itself was an answer.

"Ultimately, it was my decision," Regier said finally, adding it was done after talks with Pegula and team president Ted Black.

Ron Rolston was promoted from the AHL farm team to be the Sabres interim head coach. He will be behind the bench Thursday, when the Sabres play the Toronto Maple Leafs at the Air Canada Centre.

Regier said Rolston is the coach for the rest of the 2013 season. It is still not clear if Regier will survive past that as GM. (Pegula no longer gives interviews.)

No matter which suit pulled the trigger, the decision was driven by the players. The other old saying about coaches is it's easier to replace one coach than it is 20 players. Or, more realistically, it is easier to pay one coach \$1-million not to coach than it is to unload \$65-million (U.S.) in player contracts.

Ruff, 53, had a remarkable run in Buffalo. He played for the Sabres from 1979-89, and, in the four major North American professional leagues, the only current head coach to hold his job longer is Gregg Popovich of the NBA's San Antonio Spurs (17 seasons).

Since Ruff was hired on July 21, 1997, there have been 170 coaching changes in the NHL alone.

But by last Tuesday's loss, it was clear Ruff was being tuned out. Even the players admitted they were no longer working hard. So Ruff became the 171st coaching change.

"People, they just want you to work hard," Sabres goaltender Ryan Miller said. "They just want you to give them something to cheer about. We've been letting them down."

Ruff clearly knew his fate shortly before he met with Buffalo reporters after practice Wednesday. He talked about forward Cody McCormick being placed on waivers, hinted more changes were coming, then cut the session short.

A few hours later, the announcement came the way it usually does these days, on the Sabres' Twitter account.

However, Ruff will only be unemployed for as long as he chooses. He is one of the most respected coaches in hockey, one whose acumen kept the Sabres in contention over the years despite steady turnover of the roster.

Ruff leaves the Sabres with a 571-432-78-84 regular-season record and took them to the 1999 Stanley Cup final, losing on the infamous Brett Hull toe-in-the-crease goal.

But even Ruff's smarts could not overcome a series of bad personnel moves by Regier. Pegula opened his wallet and the Sabres payroll ballooned to \$65-million in the last two seasons, but they have missed the playoffs in three of the last five years. High-priced acquisitions such as forward Ville Leino and defenceman Robyn Regehr failed to live up to their salaries. Defenceman Christian Ehrhoff is the best of the team's big-money players, but that is only by comparison to the rest.

It was two years ago, when Pegula appeared at his first media conference as Sabres owner. It was a dewy affair, with Pegula promising a single-minded dedication to winning the Stanley Cup and doing the necessary spending – welcome news to Buffalo ears.

But Pegula's loyalty to Regier and Ruff quickly ended the honeymoon with the fans and media. The watch is now on for the other half of the tandem to fall.

Lindy Ruff's availability might cause some concern among struggling coaches

By Chris Stevenson

Ottawa Sun

February 20, 2013

So, Lindy Ruff is on the market.

That should cause a few neck problems in the coaching fraternity around the NHL.

Ruff had been the longest-serving coach in the NHL when the inevitable tap on the shoulder came from Buffalo Sabres general manager Darcy Regier Wednesday.

Now, with Ruff hitting the bricks, any other NHL coach who has the slightest sensation of the sand shifting beneath his feet -- say in Colorado or Columbus or Minnesota -- has to be looking over this shoulder.

Even a struggling team that might have been classed a contender before this wonky season -- like the Philadelphia Flyers -- would have to consider a guy like Ruff, wouldn't it, if the losses continued to mount?

Any general manager, or owner for that matter, who is contemplating a coaching change should be sure the Plan B is going to be better than the status quo (look up Gauthier, Pierre). With Ruff on the market, there might be somebody out there who decides he's a legitimate option.

It's kind of what happened last year when the Washington Capitals canned Bruce Boudreau and the Anaheim Ducks decided he was what they needed and fired Randy Carlyle a couple of days later. Toronto Maple Leafs Brian Burke then fired Ron Wilson to bring Carlyle to The Big Smoke.

Not saying there will be, but a similar domino effect could unfold in the next few weeks after Wednesday's developments.

Ron Rolston was promoted from the American Hockey League to take over the Sabres on an interim basis for the rest of this season.

Maybe Ruff's reputation, thanks in large part to his remarkable longevity in Buffalo, was slightly embellished.

Like most coaches in the NHL who have success, he rode the remarkable career of a dominant goaltender in Dominik Hasek to some pretty good results. That he had the guy who was the best at the most important position, in his prime, certainly helped Ruff and the Sabres franchise have their success.

Ruff made the most of the opportunity. He also squeezed a lot out of some teams that had no business going as deep in the playoffs as they did.

He and Regier were the stabilizing presence through a bankruptcy and tight budgets.

OK, so Ruff didn't win a Stanley Cup while with the Sabres. But he did win 10 playoff rounds, which is the most of any franchise in the Northeast Division, during his run in Buffalo.

After losing in the conference championship in 2006 and 2007, the Sabres missed the playoffs the next two years, lost in the first round the two years after that and missed the playoffs last year, so the trend hasn't been good.

Regier, who signed a contract extension just before this season, has long -- probably for about 16 years -- talked about how firing the coach is not the answer to a team's problems.

He probably still believes that -- the emotion he showed in discussing the decision to fire Ruff reflected that -- but what's changed in Buffalo is there is now an owner who is putting out money and is involved in the team as a fan. The previous owners had other distractions (John Rigas was trying to stay out of jail and Tom Golisano always seemed to have rescued the team out of bankruptcy as a public service), but Pegula is paying salaries -- and paying attention. He wants to win.

"Starting today, the Buffalo Sabres reason for existence will be to win a Stanley Cup," Pegula said almost two years ago to the day when he bought the franchise.

"Wonder if Pegula didn't buy the team, would Ruff still be behind the bench?" queried one NHL executive. "Funny how having more money to spend was detrimental instead of an advantage."

Pegula shelled out big money for the likes of free agents Ville Leino and Christian Ehrhoff and the Sabres aren't better.

For years, not much changed in Buffalo.

Now they have and Ruff paid the price Wednesday.

Ruff and Leafs a 'sworded' tale

By Lance Hornby

Toronto Sun

February 20, 2013

There have been 170 coaching changes in the NHL since Lindy Ruff was hired by the Buffalo Sabres in 1997, including five in Toronto.

The football Bills made eight such moves playing fewer than 20 games a season. Heck, the city's hockey arena changed its name more frequently than the man behind the bench.

But no matter how badly things looked in Buffalo, Ruff could usually look up the QEW and find some solace in making life harder on the Maple Leafs. In eight of the 13 seasons the teams shared the Northeast Division and nine of Ruff's 14 overall, the Sabres finished with more points. While Pat Quinn's teams briefly reversed that trend at the turn of the century, the Leafs could never seem to win big games on the American side of the Peace Bridge.

And with a ticket to the Stanley Cup final on the line in 1999, minus Dominik Hasek the first two games, it was Ruff's team that found a way to get through. In every year since the 2004-05 lockout, Buffalo resumed its superior place in the division and finished an average of 16 points higher than Toronto.

But like those endless TV commercials for Western New York car dealers saturating the Toronto market, the Sabres are finally trading in the old model after 15 years. On Thursday night, Ron Rolston will be the first man other than Ruff to be calling the Sabres lines against the Leafs since Ted Nolan matched wits with Mike Murphy.

Ruff had walked the gang-plank so many times before and somehow managed to avoid the fate of so many bench brethren. But if boss Darcy Regier was going to pick a time to finally shove him into Lake Erie and change coaches, why not before a game against the Leafs? It's a time-honoured move to make a coaching switch against a rival and Toronto took advantage of the schedule last year, bringing in Randy Carlyle for a Saturday night showdown in Montreal. Presto, a 3-1 win, which is Carlyle's record in the Bell Centre since.

Rolston, however, will need more than a one-game rally. Projections have Buffalo needing to finish this year with at least 20 regulation wins in its final 31 games to get the 50-plus points for playoff security. Two of those dates are against the Leafs.

The Sabres drove into Toronto on Wednesday night and Sportsnet's Chris Johnston reports that those aboard called it an emotional trip. Eight-year veteran Jason Pominville said Ruff addressed the team on the bus before it departed in the early afternoon, once he'd been informed of his firing by Regier. Ruff was the second-longest tenured coach in pro sports, behind Gregg Popovich of the NBA's San Antonio Spurs.

"I thought this day would never come," Pominville said of Ruff's longevity.

Regier, who has been in office as long as Ruff and seen five GMs in Toronto come and go, was very emotional at Wednesday evening's press conference. His own job will be in jeopardy if the Sabres miss the playoffs a second straight year and make it four of the past six. There is already talk that Dallas Eakins, the Leafs' excellent farm coach, will get an interview in the off-season if Rolston doesn't pan out. Last April, it was Eakins' Marlies who swept Rolston's Rochester Americans from the first round of the American Hockey League playoffs.

"This is mine to clean up," Ruff said last week, saying there had been transition problems with young centremen, but that he'd dramatically changed his coaching approach from a big pain to a big brother. He truly believed the team would sort itself out before it was too late.

Truth be told, the Sabres don't need a minor miracle to re-establish themselves against teams such as Toronto. They just need to play in a fashion that allows Ryan Miller to do his thing. The great goalie's mark is 28-14 against the Leafs, whom he beat 2-1 to spoil their home opener on Jan. 21. Matt Frattin's overtime winner at First Niagara set the Leafs on course to win eight of their next 12 overall, but expect the Sabres to rebound after Regier played the last card he had.

Sabres-Maple Leafs Preview

Associated Press

February 20, 2013

Apparently the Buffalo Sabres did just what coach Lindy Ruff recently suggested, looking into why the team has fared so poorly. It seems management felt he was a big part of the problem.

A day after the winningest coach in team history was fired, the struggling Sabres begin a new era looking to avoid a third consecutive loss as they visit the Toronto Maple Leafs on Thursday night.

Buffalo (6-10-1) opened with two straight victories but has since won four times in 15 games and once in the last five. Only three teams in the league have fewer points.

The Sabres were booed several times by the home crowd Tuesday as they endured a series of mental lapses during an overall lackluster performance in a 2-1 loss to Winnipeg. The locker room remained closed longer than normal after the game, though Ruff eventually emerged to share his frustration.

"I'm embarrassed," Ruff said. "We've got to take a hard look at everything."

Buffalo's brass apparently looked deeper into the job Ruff was doing, and opted to let him go following a 90-minute practice Wednesday. General manager Darcy Regier called Tuesday's loss a "tipping point."

Ruff had been the longest-tenured coach in the NHL, having won 571 regular-season games since his hiring in 1997 and leading Buffalo to eight postseason appearances. However, the Sabres missed the playoffs last season and haven't been past the first round since 2007.

"The hockey world knows how I and the entire Buffalo Sabres organization feel about Lindy Ruff not only as a coach but also as a person," owner Terry Pegula said in a statement released by the team. "His qualities have made this decision very difficult. I personally want Lindy to know that he can consider me a friend always."

Ron Rolston was promoted from Rochester of the AHL to take over as coach on an interim basis for the rest of the season. Rolston, who has never played or coached in the NHL, is the older brother of 300-goal scorer Brian Rolston.

Even longtime Sabres goaltender Ryan Miller seemed to imply changes may be coming when he spoke to reporters after Tuesday's loss.

"Something needs to get shaken up with our attitude more than anything," Miller said. "It's definitely mental on our part."

Buffalo has been held to one goal twice and shut out once over the last five contests. The Sabres' 12.9-percent power-play conversion rate, including 2 for 37 this month, ranks among the lowest in the NHL.

Buffalo did snap a five-game losing streak in Toronto with a 2-1 victory Jan. 21 but has since given up an average of 3.9 goals in seven road games.

The Maple Leafs (10-7-0) avenged that defeat with a 4-3 overtime win in Buffalo on Jan. 29.

They enter this matchup coming off their second loss in eight games, 4-2 at Tampa Bay on Tuesday. Toronto, though, has won its only two home games over the past two weeks - by an 8-2 margin - after dropping four of its first five while getting held to nine goals.

"Thursday is a new game, a new team and we have to up and ready to go from the start," said forward James van Riemsdyk, who scored his team-leading ninth goal Tuesday.

With James Reimer still dealing with a knee injury, Ben Scrivens could be back in net despite being pulled against the Lightning after allowing four goals on 13 shots. Scrivens made 71 saves while posting shutouts in his previous two starts.

"It seems like I was getting some fortunate bounces the last couple of games, and (Tuesday) they bounced the other way," said Scrivens, who stopped 18 shots in last month's loss to Buffalo. "That's the nature of the game. Those are the breaks."

Van Riemsdyk has eight points over the past eight games but none in his last three against the Sabres.

Buffalo's Jason Pominville, who scored Tuesday for his first point in seven games, has five goals and seven assists in his last nine versus Toronto.

Teammate Thomas Vanek ranks among the league leaders with 12 goals but has one in the past five games. He has six assists but no goals in his last seven against the Maple Leafs.

Sabres face Maple Leafs in first game without Ruff

By Eric Goodman

NHL.com

February 20, 2013

SABRES (6-10-1) at MAPLE LEAFS (10-7-0)

TV: MSG-Buffalo, SNET-Ohio

Last 10: Buffalo 3-7-0; Toronto 6-4-0

Season series: Toronto and Buffalo split the first two of four games with each club getting a victory on the road.

Big story: The Sabres relieved coach Lindy Ruff of his duties Wednesday afternoon. Ruff was the longest-tenured coach in the NHL with 16 years of service. He led the Sabres to the 1999 Stanley Cup Final and had a career regular-season record of 571-432-162.

Ruff ran practice Wednesday and addressed reporters afterward, but was notified he was being let go by general manager Darcy Regier a few hours later.

Regier announced that Ron Rolston, the organization's coach from the Rochester Americans (American Hockey League), will take on the role of interim coach for the remainder of the season.

"[Ruff] didn't lose the team in any way with respect to communication," Regier told the media at a press conference Wednesday. "For whatever reason, we couldn't get any traction, especially defensively. I wish I can tell you the exact reasons, but he definitely didn't lose the team."

Team scope:

Sabres: With four wins in their past 15 games, the Sabres were at a point where change was inevitable. The players must turn it around quickly or risk missing the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the third time in the past five seasons.

Buffalo's 12.9 percent conversion rate on the power play is worst in the NHL, and it has been held to one goal twice and shut out once over its past five games.

A 2-1 loss at home to the Winnipeg Jets on Tuesday appeared to be the tipping point. Many players were voicing their frustrations in the locker room following the game.

"Something needs to get shaken up with our attitude more than anything," goalie Ryan Miller said. "It's definitely mental on our part."

Maple Leafs: Toronto has hit a brief bump in the road recently, but it could take advantage of the shake up in Buffalo. Backup goalie Ben Scrivens earned his first two

NHL shutouts in back-to-back contests over the U.S. holiday weekend, but was pulled after giving up four goals on 13 shots in a 4-2 loss at the Tampa Bay Lightning on Tuesday.

The Maple Leafs did get good news Wednesday: Starting goalie James Reimer was skating for the first time since a lower-body injury suffered Feb. 11, and forward Joffrey Lupul (forearm) also took part in the optional practice. There is no timetable for a return to game action for either player.

Who's hot: Sabres captain Jason Pominville has three goals and eight assists over his past eight games against the Maple Leafs. ... Maple Leafs forward James van Riemsdyk has a three-game point streak with one goal and two assists.

Injury report: Sabres defenseman Andrej Sekera (lower body) missed his second game Tuesday. Forward Ville Leino (hip) is on injured reserve. ... Maple Leafs defenseman Carl Gunnarsson (hip) and forward Matt Frattin (knee) remain on IR.