



# **Buffalo Sabres**

**Daily Press Clips**

*Saturday, February 23, 2013*

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## **Itching to coach, Ruff has fond memories of Sabres**

By John Wawrow  
Associated Press  
February 22, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) -- Lindy Ruff is finding it difficult being a spectator after his 16-year run as Buffalo Sabres head coach came to an abrupt end this week.

"Ah, god, I miss it already," Ruff said Friday. "Most people wouldn't, but I watched hockey the first night. It's hard. It's a tough feeling. It's been a strange feeling. But I've got to keep going. I love the game."

Speaking publicly for the first time since he was fired on Wednesday, Ruff said it's his intention to pursue another job because he's not lost his passion for coaching. He also made clear that he'll never lose his affection for Buffalo or the Sabres.

"It's a place I always will call home. I don't feel like I have anything to be ashamed of or any regrets," Ruff said. "I've had a lot of great memories."

Those memories came to an end this week, when Ruff was fired after the Sabres struggled in getting off to a 6-10-1 start. The breaking point came after the team was booed off the ice for a lethargic performance in a 2-1 loss to Winnipeg.

Calling the performance "a kick in the gut," Ruff wasn't surprised when general manager Darcy Regier showed up on the coach's doorstep to deliver the bad news a day later.

"When I saw him, I said, 'I know.' I said, 'Don't say you're sorry,'" Ruff said. "I said, 'You've been my biggest backer all these years.'"

Ruff, who turned 53 Sunday, spent 26 years in Buffalo, including 10 as a player. He became the team's winningest coach (571-432-162), and ranks second in the NHL in career wins and games with one team.

Ron Rolston, coach of the Sabres' AHL affiliate in Rochester, was promoted to take over. He'll serve as the Sabres interim coach for the rest of the season, and is a candidate to become Ruff's full-time successor.

Ruff spoke for about 13 minutes at a news conference at the First Niagara Center, while the team practiced at a suburban rink because the ice wasn't available at the team's downtown home.

Ruff was emotional at times. His voice cracked when recalling boarding the team bus to inform his players and staff that he had been fired.

Known for his dry wit, Ruff also cracked a few jokes. He ended by saying he's spent the past few days visiting a chain of doughnut shops trying to win a contest.

Most of all, Ruff was gracious.

"I think I owe a few thanks yours," he said. "I know I do."

Ruff began by thanking each of the four owners he's worked under, and made sure to give particular credit to current owner, Terry Pegula and his wife Kim.

"He's a fabulous guy to be around," Ruff said. "My biggest disappointment is not getting it done for them."

He called himself indebted to Regier, noting that most NHL general managers would have "whacked" him a long time ago. And Ruff paid credit to his players, both current and former.

In no way, Ruff said, did his players let him down this year. He also disputed notions that the locker room was divided.

"They gave me what I asked," Ruff said. "The leadership, from Jason Pominville and Ryan Miller, Thomas Vanek on down, I know how they feel. I feel their pain at the same time. It's hard right now. But I think better days are right around the corner."

Even as Ruff cleaned out his office, he had difficulty separating himself from his former job.

"I grabbed my game notes, I've looked at all the games, I've looked at chances, I've looked at how we lost. It's like I'm driving myself crazy," he said. "That falls on me. We weren't good enough to get through a couple of those games."

Where he'll draw the line, for now, is when it comes to watching the Sabres play. After watching a few games Wednesday night, Ruff found it difficult tuning in Buffalo's 3-1 loss at Toronto on Thursday.

"I watched one period and I found it incredibly strange and I had to turn it off," he said. "I just couldn't get through last night."

Ruff also paid tribute to Sabres fans. He recalled how the entire community rallied to his family's support when Ruff's youngest daughter, Madeleine, had successful surgery to remove a brain tumor in 2006.

He couldn't help notice how someone spelled out "Thank U Lindy" in big white letters on a fence lining a construction site across the street from the Sabres' arena.

"I know there's a thank you outside on the fence. I'd like to put a thank you right next to it," Ruff said. "So thanks to all the fans over the years. I owe you. You made this a special place to coach."

## **Ruff expresses his gratitude to fans, players, owners**

*Ruff expresses gratitude at final press conference*

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 23, 2013

Lindy Ruff has been driving from coffee shop to coffee shop the past few days, collecting his thoughts and empty cups. He knew folks wanted to say goodbye, but he wasn't sure he was ready.

He was certain he wanted to say thanks, however, so the Buffalo Sabres' former coach returned to First Niagara Center on Friday for a farewell appearance. It was filled with emotions and laughs, two of the trademarks Ruff established during his 26-year ride as a coach and player in Buffalo.

"Thanks to all the fans over all these years," Ruff said. "I owe you. You made this a special place to coach.

"I know there's a thank you outside on the fence," he said, referring to handmade letters taped near the doors of the arena that spelled out, "Thank U Lindy." "I'd like to put my thank you right next to it because it's a special group. It's a place that I call home, I always will call home."

Ruff's love affair with Western New York and its hockey team began in 1979 when the Sabres drafted him in the second round.

"I still have the invitation to training camp in a book," he said.

The coupling continued for a decade on the ice and restarted in 1997 when he took over as coach. He spent 16 years behind the bench until getting fired Wednesday with the Sabres near the bottom of the NHL.

"I don't feel like I have anything to be ashamed of or any regrets," Ruff said. "I've gone over every game. I've cleaned out my office. I've grabbed all my notes. I've grabbed game notes. I've looked at all the games. I've looked at chances. I've looked at how we lost.

"It's like I'm driving myself crazy, but when I was done I said, 'You know, we gave three games away. We could have been at 9-7 and in a pretty good place, and instead we're at 6-10.' That falls with me."

It was clear listening to him talk that the memories and friendships he built will hold more significance than this season's disappointment.

He thanked team founders Seymour and Northrup Knox for bringing him to town as a player and coach. He thanked the Sabres' other owners – John Rigas, Tom Golisano, Larry Quinn, Dan DiPofi and Terry Pegula – for keeping him around. In true Ruff style, he wittily said he'd skip the era when the NHL owned the bankrupt team.

He thanked the players who performed for him, the ones in the early years who went to four straight post seasons and the skaters now who are in position for a second straight playoff-free campaign.

“The reason a coach has success is he has players who play for him,” Ruff said. “It’s hard right now, but I think better days are right around the corner.”

Ruff also praised Darcy Regier, who hired Ruff just a month after becoming general manager. Regier delivered the dismissal at Ruff’s home in Clarence.

“I saw him, and I said, ‘I know,’ ” said Ruff, who was emotionally devastated following a lackluster 2-1 loss to Winnipeg on Tuesday. “To take that step back against Winnipeg, it was like a kick in the gut for me. You guys saw it. I saw it. I felt it.”

Aside from the fans, Ruff gave his most gracious gratitude to longtime equipment manager Rip Simonick. The South Buffalo native provided Ruff with the best equipment as a rookie and was a friend during the long plane rides as coach.

“He’s no longer coaching the team, but he’ll root for the team,” Simonick said following the Sabres’ practice in Northtown Center at Amherst. “He’s a Buffalonian.

“He came as a kid from Alberta with a chip on his shoulder. ... Everybody knew what they were going to get. When Lindy coached against you, he coached to win. He didn’t care if you took a punch to the nose or a stick from behind. Whatever you had to do to win the game, that was the bottom line.”

Ruff will take time to clear his head, but he has no doubts he’ll return to coaching.

“God, I miss it already,” he said.

He watched hockey on television the day he was fired, and he tried watching the Sabres play Thursday. He lasted one period.

“I found it incredibly strange, and I had to turn it off,” he said.

He refuses to turn off his admiration for the area and the organization, specifically Pegula and his wife, Kim.

“My biggest disappointment is not getting it done for them,” Ruff said. “We’ll get it right here. You’ve got to trust them because he’s a competitor. He’s a fabulous guy to be around, and it will get done right. I know it’s painful right now, but it will get it done.”

## **As a Fired Coach Reels, So Do Fans in Buffalo**

By Jeff Klein

New York Times

February 23, 2013

BUFFALO — The day after he was fired as coach of the Buffalo Sabres, the team he led for 16 years, Lindy Ruff drove around the suburbs here, going from doughnut shop to doughnut shop, trying to sort out his feelings. At home, he wore shorts that bore the Sabres logo. He tried to watch on television as Buffalo played the Toronto Maple Leafs, but he could not go through with it.

“I watched one period,” Ruff, eyes welling, said Friday at his first public appearance since his firing Wednesday. “I found it incredibly strange, and I had to turn it off. It was something — I wanted to, but I couldn’t.”

Coaches of professional sports teams are fired all the time, but few in this win-now era have stayed long enough in one city to see their children grow up there. Fewer still spent almost their entire playing career in that same city.

Ruff, 53, has spent half his life working for the Buffalo Sabres. He was drafted by Buffalo in 1979, when he was a tough 19-year-old from Alberta who overcame a broken femur to be chosen in the second round. He went on to play 10 years for the Sabres, including three as their captain. In July 1997, four years after Ruff retired as a player, he was named the Sabres coach.

At the time of his dismissal, he was the longest-tenured N.H.L. coach, and the second-longest in a major North American professional league, after Gregg Popovich, who was hired by the San Antonio Spurs in 1996. Ruff coached 1,165 regular-season games; only one coach in N.H.L. history, Al Arbour of the Islanders, has coached more games with one team (1,500).

But Arbour and Popovich each won multiple championships, while Ruff did not win the Stanley Cup once, either as a coach or a player.

“Just going through the last 24 hours, it’s the biggest disappointment I have,” he said.

Ruff did not want to talk Friday, but said he felt he should because he had gotten so many requests. At a news conference, he still often referred to the Sabres as “we.” He thanked the four ownership groups he worked under as coach; his players and assistants over the years; and General Manager Darcy Regier, who has been in that job only slightly longer than Ruff was in his.

“I know through 16 years, probably 99 percent of the G.M.’s in the league would have whacked the coach at a certain time,” Ruff said. “We went through some tough stretches where he stayed with me and said you can get these guys through it. He’s a good friend.”

He described how Regier came to his house Wednesday afternoon to tell him he was fired.

“He said, ‘I’m sorry,’ ” Ruff said. “I said, ‘Don’t say you’re sorry — you’ve been my biggest backer through all these years.’ ”

Ruff also thanked the fans of Western New York, citing their support in 2006, when his daughter Madeleine had successful surgery to remove a mass on her brain.

“It got us through a real tough time in our lives,” he said. “It’s a place that I call home, always will call home.”

Buffalo is like a hive mind when it comes to the Sabres and the Bills, who have had eight coaches since Ruff was hired. This small city concentrates so much attention and intellectual energy on those two teams that consensus forms quickly.

The consensus that Ruff needed to go had formed well over a year ago. The Sabres have missed the playoffs four of the past six seasons and have not advanced past the first round since 2007. Calling for Ruff’s firing has long been a regular feature of local radio shows.

But on Thursday, radio-show callers said that even though they have long expected Ruff to be fired, the reality was “like a punch in the gut,” as one caller put it. A new consensus formed: yes, Ruff had to go, but he was a good man who gave his all for the Sabres.

Someone spelled out “Thank U Lindy” in cardboard pieces on a fence across the street from First Niagara Center, where the Sabres play.

By Friday, scores of people had signed the message with tributes of their own.

“Thanks for everything you’ve done for the team and the city,” read one.

“Thank you for years of joy and pain,” read another.

David Bellissimo, 55, watched at an Elmwood Avenue bar Thursday as the Sabres (6-11-1) lost at Toronto, 3-1, under the interim coach Ron Rolston. They looked just as bad as they had in their past several games under Ruff.

“It’s like a love-hate thing we have with Lindy,” Bellissimo said.

Summing up the city’s tortured feelings over Ruff, Bellissimo added: “It’s his fault; it’s not his fault. He should go, but we hate to see him go.”

Bellissimo is old enough to remember when a young Ruff was butt-ended in the eye by the Islanders’ volatile goalie Billy Smith during the 1980 Stanley Cup semifinals. Ruff lay face down on the ice for a moment, then sprung up, bleeding, and attacked Smith.

Ruff's fiery side was also in evidence when he coached the Sabres to the Stanley Cup finals against the Dallas Stars in 1999, only to lose in the third overtime period of Game 6 on a controversial goal by Brett Hull. Ruff protested that the goal should not have counted because Hull had a skate in the crease and complained in vain about it long into the morning.

Two days later he led 20,000 Buffalonians at a downtown rally in a "No goal!" chant.

Ruff said he wanted to get back to coaching someday — "I miss it already," he said — but for now all he was looking forward to was "getting my head clear."

He described the confused emotions of the last couple of days.

"I cleaned out my office and grabbed all my notes, the game notes," he said. "I've looked at all the games. I looked at chances. I looked at how we lost. It's like I'm driving myself crazy. But when I was done I said, you know, we gave three games away. We could have been at 9-7 and in a pretty good place, and instead we're at 6-10. I've said this, it falls with me."

Ruff's son Brian, who plays for the Buffalo Junior Sabres in the Ontario Junior A Hockey League, sent a message out on Twitter, asking for people to show his father how much the city loved him.

"Wanna cheer him up," Brian wrote.

"I told him to stay away from that," Ruff said. "He's a great kid. It has been hard on him."

Scotty Bowman, who coached the Sabres during the 1980s and still lives in the Buffalo area, said he thought Ruff would take a trip for a week or two, just to get away from it all.

"That's what I did when I got fired here — I just wanted to get away from it all and clear my head," Bowman said.

But Ruff did not say what he would be doing in the coming days.

"So if you're wondering what I've been up to, I've been driving around from Tim Hortons to Tim Hortons," Ruff said.

Before anyone could ask him anything else, he held up his hand and said good night. His eyes welling again, he walked away, leaving behind 26 years with the Buffalo Sabres.

## **Fired Lindy Ruff was master at in-game adjustments**

By Chris Stevenson

Ottawa Sun

February 23, 2013

There are more than a few NHL coaches happy to see Lindy Ruff at home.

Ruff was fired as the coach of the Buffalo Sabres Wednesday after 16 years behind the bench and he is held in high regard by his peers contacted by QMI Agency.

One of Ruff's strengths was his ability to make in-game adjustments.

Now, that might seem like a given at the NHL level, but a couple of coaches said it was always interesting to see how quickly an opposing coach would react to wrinkles in a breakout or forecheck.

"He was one of those coaches who, if you made adjustments during the game, he would quickly make his own. We would try and use the middle of the ice and he'd adjust to take it away. You had to say, 'OK, what's next? It was always a battle," said one coach.

"I don't know how much that is a credit to Lindy or to the guy he had upstairs (not God, his assistant coach in the pressbox). Some guys, you can make adjustments and they don't react until the next time you play them."

Ruff's dismissal makes Nashville Predators coach Barry Trotz, who was hired about a month after Ruff in 1997, the longest-tenured coach in the NHL now.

"It seems weird that I'm the guy that's the longest in the league. I guess I'm next (to be fired), I don't know," Trotz told Nashville reporters with a smile. "I was asked what the secret of my longevity was and I said it's just having good people and a good organization around you. Just surround yourself with good people. That's the only secret I've got."

**HEAR AND THERE:** Speaking of Ruff, he tried to watch the Sabres play the Toronto Maple Leafs Thursday night, but lasted only one period. "I miss it already," he told reporters Friday. "It was incredibly strange," he said ... Ruff said he took responsibility for the Sabres' 6-11-1 record, going out on a classy note. "We gave three games away," he said. "That falls with me." He didn't lose his sense of humour, saying if anybody was wondering what he was doing, he was "driving from Tim Hortons to Tim Hortons, rolling up the rim." ... St. Louis Blues coach Ken Hitchcock said rookie Vladimir Tarasenko has signs of a concussion after taking a hit from Colorado's Mark Olver and will be out indefinitely. There was no suspension because, despite the head being the principal point of contact, NHL disciplinarian Brendan Shanahan decided the head wasn't targeted. Both elements have to be present for supplemental discipline.

**THE BUZZ:** Nicklas Lidstrom visited Detroit recently and the sure-to-be Hall of Famer said there's some parts of NHL life he misses in his retirement. Practice isn't one of

them. "I miss being in the locker room and being with the guys, and I miss the game situations, too," said the 42-year-old. "When you're watching the games and the heat of the moment and the playing, that's what I miss. The day in and day out grind of practicing, and all that, I don't miss a whole lot." Lidstrom said he's not willing to pay the price to be a player again. "Not to the point where I do this, come back. I know how fun playing is, but I also know what it takes to be there (on the ice) and that's something I can't do, be up to that level of play where I want to be and that's the reason I retired and I'm still retired." ... Florida Panthers rookie Jonathan Huberdeau is making a case for the Calder Trophy. He scored on his first shot on in the NHL, scored on his first shootout attempt and has now scored on his first penalty shot. He's within two points of Tampa's Corey Conacher for the rookie scoring lead now. ...

**JUST SAYING:** After Thursday's game against the Detroit Red Wings, the Columbus Blue Jackets were a battered bunch and now don't have Brandon Dubinsky or Artem Anisimov, the two players they got in the Rick Nash deal with the New York Rangers. Anisimov cracked his head on the ice and spent the night in hospital before flying home Friday. Honestly, what did the Columbus Blue Jackets do in a previous life? ... Rumours are going to be ramping up with the trade deadline April 3. Blues GM Doug Armstrong and scouts from 10 organizations were in Pittsburgh Friday for the Penguins-Panthers game.

**JUST WONDERING:** G Rick DiPietro is on waivers and the New York Islanders have moved a step closer to ridding themselves of what might have been the worst contract in NHL history. If it's not, it was the one given by the Islanders to Alexei Yashin. Hmm. Detect a theme here? ... Veteran NHLer Brian Rolston is the brother of new Sabres coach Ron Rolston. Brian celebrated his 40th birthday Thursday and knows he might be at the end of this playing days. Will he follow his brother into coaching? "I played for Jacques (Lemaire) for nine years. I think I have my PhD in how to play defensively," said Rolston, who played for Lemaire in New Jersey and Minnesota.

**THE LAST WORD:** Once again a Stanley Cup champion is struggling. Hangover, right? "I know what a hangover is, and I didn't have one," said Los Angeles Kings coach Darryl Sutter. "What does that mean? A hangover for us was a lot of injured players and guys are still injured. We're playing three defencemen that haven't played in the NHL, so consistency is what all young players strive for and what all coaches strive for them to accomplish. That's what it is. We're a different team and I don't think there's anything that held us back other than the injuries."

## **Ruff reflects on long tenure as Sabres coach**

By Chris Caya

WBFO

February 22, 2013

Former Buffalo Sabres coach Lindy Ruff made his first public comments Friday following his firing earlier this week.

Ruff addressed the media from First Niagara Center. The Sabres relieved Ruff of his duties on Wednesday in the midst of a 6-10-1 start to a lockout-shortened season. The team tapped former Rochester Americans coach Ron Rolston as interim coach for the rest of the season.

Ruff thanked the four owners he worked under, General Manager Darcy Regier, the long list of players he coached over 16 seasons, and team's fans.

"My biggest disappointment is not getting it done for them," Ruff said, referring to a Stanley Cup championship.

Ruff became emotional when speaking of fans' response to his daughter Madeline's illness in 2006.

"The fans of Western New York are number one. They really came to the forefront when I dealt with my daughter's medical condition and got us through a real tough time in our lives. I know there's a 'thank you' [sign] outside from the fans today. I'd like to put my 'thank you' right next to it," said Ruff.

Ruff spoke fondly of his longtime partnership with Regier, saying "99 percent of the GMs in the league would have whacked the coach at a certain time." He talked of the many "tough stretches" the two endured and called Regier "a good friend" and "a great hockey man."

"Darcy came out to my home and when I saw him, I said 'I know.' I said 'Don't say you're sorry. You've been my biggest backer all these years,'" Ruff said, describing the moment he learned the news Wednesday.

Ruff said he "loves" western New York and will always call the region his home. He also said he would like to continue coaching.

"I miss it already. I watched hockey the first night. It's hard. It's a tough feeling. It's been a strange feeling. I've got to keep going. I love the game," Ruff said.

The Sabres lost in Toronto last night by a score of 3-1 in Ron Rolston's first game behind the bench. Ruff said he watched one period of last night's game, found the experience to be "incredibly strange" and had to turn it off.

## **Danny Gare: "Lindy is a total class act"**

By Jim Fink

Business First

February 22, 2013

Known for being a tough, hard-nosed player, former Sabre great Danny Gare both emotional and wistful as he watched former coach Lindy Ruff's farewell press conference.

"At least, he a got a chance to say a proper goodbye," Gare said moments before Ruff's presser began. "I never did."

Gare, along with Jim Schoenfeld and Derek Smith, were traded by then-GM Scotty Bowman in November 1981. The trio had little warning that the trade to the Detroit Red Wings was in place.

Ruff, who was fired on Wednesday following a 16-season run as Sabres' coach, was given a chance to say thanks and goodbye. In true Ruff fashion, it was classy and more than just a tad emotional.

Fighting back tears and with a cracking voice, Ruff thanked former team owners like Seymour and Norty Knox, Tom Golisano, Larry Quinn and even, the Rigas family. Kudos were delivered to past and current players like Michael Peca and Ryan Miller and, of course, the fans.

"To the fans, I owe you," Ruff said.

Ruff took full responsibility for his firing, deflecting criticism away from his team.

"They didn't let me down," he said. "They gave me what I asked for."

The tipping point came with Tuesday's 2-1 loss to the Winnipeg Jets. Fans booed and booed loudly. A growing chorus, in the court of public opinion, was calling for Ruff's head.

"We took a step back against Winnipeg," he acknowledged. "It was like a kick in the gut to me."

Having spent 26 of his adult years in Buffalo as a player and coach, Ruff said he is not leaving the area. He make take another coaching position sometime down the road, but Western New York will remain his home base.

"Western New York is where I am going to live," Ruff said. "I will always call it home."

For now, Ruff will spend some time "clearing his head" and in true, Ruff-like humor, said he will be driving around "from Tim Hortons to Tim Hortons, rolling up the rim."

Gare, for one, was not surprised with the mix of emotion and humor in Ruff's farewell address.

"He handled himself with dignity," Gare said. "This had to be a tough day for everyone. There aren't too many guys who get to have a farewell press conference after they've been fired."

## **Ruff's goodbye is a big 'thank you'**

Business First

February 22, 2013

Lindy Ruff met the media Friday morning at First Niagara Center, publicly saying “thank you” to a long list of people for his 25 years of service as a player and then head coach with the Buffalo Sabres.

Ruff was dismissed on Wednesday as the Sabres continued to struggle with just six wins in the first 17 games of a shortened 48-game schedule.

His thank yous started with the Knox family, which founded the Sabres and owned the club when Ruff was drafted in 1979. He continued to the Rigas family, Thomas Golisano, who took over the team after a bankruptcy, and to the current ownership of Terry Pegula.

He said of Pegula and his wife, Kim, the Sabres have great ownership.

“My biggest disappointment is not getting it done for them,” said Ruff, who left as the franchise’s winningest coach.

He also spoke of General Manager Darcy Regier, to whom he is “indebted as a head coach,” the team’s longtime equipment manager Rip Simonick, the scores of players and fellow coaches.

Lastly he saluted the fans, some of whom erected a thank-you sign for the ex-coach near the downtown arena. Ruff said he'd like to add his own.

Buffalo is the “place I call home, always will call home,” he said.

Regarding his dismissal one day after a 2-1 home ice loss to the Winnipeg Jets, Ruff said he knew it was happening when Regier came to his home shortly before the team was preparing to leave for a game in Toronto.

“Don’t say you’re sorry,” Ruff said he told Regier. “You’ve been my biggest backer.”

He then asked to address the team one last time, which he did before the road trip began without Ruff as Buffalo’s head coach for the first time since 1997.

He finished his briefing by saying he tried to watch Thursday’s 3-1 loss to the Maple Leafs but had to tune out after one period because it felt incredibly strange.

“I’ve been driving myself from Tim Hortons to Tim Hortons,” Ruff concluded, “rolling up the rim.”

## **SABRES: Ruff is not bitter**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 22, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Lindy Ruff had been through a lot of tough times during his tenure as head coach of the Buffalo Sabres, but the night before he was let go by the team, things were different, they weren't right.

Ruff spoke for the first time Friday which you heard live on WGR Sports Radio 550. He felt it too, "I felt and I think you guys sensed that after Winnipeg the frustration and I answered those questions honestly. I was embarrassed, I did see apprehension. I saw us going in the right direction against Boston, against Pittsburgh and to take that step back against Winnipeg was like a kick in the gut for me. You guys saw it, I felt it."

With that in mind, it didn't surprise Ruff when Darcy Regier showed up at his house on Wednesday. As the GM walked in the door Ruff said, "I know. Don't say you're sorry, you've been my biggest backer all these years." Ruff went on to say Regier has always had his back, "I'm indebted as a head coach because I know through 16 years there's probably 99% of the GM's in the league would've whacked the coach at a certain time. We went through some tough stretches where he believed in me and said you can get these guys through it, he's a good friend, he's a great hockey man, we went through a lot together and I'm indebted to him for trusting me in a lot of tough situations."

The former head coach just had one request. He said, "I asked him, I said I'd like to go see the team and thank them, give them the news. He said he was fine with it so I drove to the bus. Nobody knew, no coaches no anybody and I stepped on the bus and thanked them and it was just deadly silent on the bus and I walked off and the players walked off to say good bye."

Even though the team seemed to have tuned their head coach out and didn't perform the way he was teaching them to play, he still thinks they have it in them, "They gave what I asked. We had come to an agreement on how we were going to approach the season and they gave me all they had. The communication and the input from them to the coaches was awesome. I've gone over every game and I cleaned out my office. I grabbed all my notes, I grabbed game notes, I've looked at all the games, I looked at the chances, I looked how we lost, it's like I'm driving myself crazy, but when I was done I thought we gave three games away. We could've been at 9-7 and in a pretty good place and instead we're at 6-10. I've said it, that falls with me. We weren't good enough to get through a few of those games and some of it was system related, some of it was mistake related."

Ruff is still a hockey coach and although he's always going to call Western New York home, he's not done. He'd like to continue coaching, "Oh yes, I miss it already. It's hard, it's a tough feeling but I gotta keep going, I love the game."

Being a coach he's watched some hockey since Wednesday, but he couldn't bear to turn on the Sabres quite yet, "I watched one period and I found it incredibly strange and I had to turn it off. I wanted to, but I couldn't. The night before I watched hockey, I'm going to watch (Sabre games) but I couldn't get through last night, it was incredibly strange."

Ruff opened by thanking the Knox family, the Rigas family, Tom Golisano, Larry Quinn, Darcy Regier, Rip Simonik and the Pegula family calling them the best owners in the league. Ruff wishes he could've done more for them, "Washing through the last 24 hours I think that's the biggest disappointment I have is not getting it done for them. They'll get it right here, you've got to trust them and it'll get done right. I know it's painful right now, but it'll get done."

To wrap up, Ruff really loves the fans of Western New York. He said, "The people that have made this place real special for myself, my family. The fans of Western New York are number one. They really came to the forefront when I dealt with my daughter's medical condition. They got us through a real tough time in our lives. I know there's a thank you outside in the fence and I'd like to put my thank you right next to it because it's a special group. It's a place I call home, always will call home. I don't feel like I have anything to be ashamed of or any regrets and I love Western New York."

I think right there is the proper place to close the Buffalo Sabres coaching book on Lindy Ruff.

## **Ruff grateful to Sabres, plans to coach again**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 23, 2013

BUFFALO – Lindy Ruff tried watching the Sabres' 3-1 loss Thursday in Toronto. He lasted one period. The team's former coach found the experience "incredibly strange."

"I turned it off," Ruff said Friday inside the First Niagara Center, his first comments since the Sabres' 6-10-1 start led to his dismissal Wednesday after 15 seasons as coach. "It was something I wanted to but I couldn't."

Ruff was emotional, thoughtful and even funny while speaking 13 minutes inside the Lexus Club, thanking ownership groups, his players, the Sabres' rabid fan base, equipment manager Rip Simonick and team staff.

He recalled getting his 1979 training camp invitation from the Knox family, the start of his long Sabres life. He said the Sabres might've won the Stanley Cup in 2006 if they hadn't run out of defensemen.

Ruff wasn't sure he wanted to talk but felt he owed some people thanks.

Standing behind a black backdrop, a stark reminder of his unemployment, the 53-year-old only answered several question before departing.

The next time Ruff's in the building, it will likely be as an opposing coach. He already misses coaching and plans to do it again. He will, however, keep living in Buffalo.

"It's hard. It's a tough game," Ruff said. "It's been a strange feeling, but I got to keep going. I love the game."

But the game didn't love him back this season. The Sabres imploded following their 2-0 start. Tuesday's 2-1 loss to Winnipeg, a game in which the home fans booed the Sabres' wretched effort throughout, was Ruff's 1,165th and final game as coach.

He had seen the Sabres improving prior to the game.

"To take that step back against Winnipeg, it was like a kick in the gut for me," Ruff said.

He led practice Wednesday. But when general manager Darcy Regier came to Ruff's home that afternoon, his close friend didn't have to say a word.

"I saw him, I said, 'I know,'" Ruff said. "I said, 'Don't say you're sorry.' I said, 'You've been my biggest backer all these years.'"

Ruff then drove to the Northtown Center, boarded the team's bus before it left for Toronto and said he had been fired.

“It was just deadly silent,” Ruff said.

Ruff became the most emotional talking to his family.

“It has been hard on them,” he said.

It’s also been tough on Ruff. But he hasn’t lost his sense of humor.

“If you want to know what I’ve been up to, I’ve been driving from Tim Hortons to Tim Hortons rolling up the rim right now,” he cracked.

Since the firing, Ruff has tried piecing together what went wrong, reviewing old notes and other materials.

“It’s like I’m driving myself crazy,” Ruff said.

Ultimately, Ruff thinks the Sabres gave away three games and could’ve been 9-7.

Despite the Sabres’ poor record, he believes the players “gave me all they had.”

“The communication, the input from them to the coaches was awesome,” Ruff said.

Those players, Ruff believes, are still united and supporting each other.

“It’s been hard. It’s been painful,” Ruff said. “They’re working hard at it. The leadership from Jason Pominville to Ryan Miller to Thomas Vanek on down, I know how they feel. I feel their pain at the same time. It’s hard right now.

“But I think better days are right around the corner. I owe a great big thanks to all those players.”

Ruff also owes a lot to Regier. Coaches just don’t last long these days, especially without a championship.

“I know through 16 years there’s probably 99 percent of the GMs in the league would’ve whacked the coach at a certain time,” Ruff said. “We went through some tough stretches where he believed in me and said, ‘You can get these guys through it.’ He’s a good friend. He’s a great hockey man. We went through a lot together, and I’m indebted to him for trusting me in a lot of tough situations.”

Ruff’s also indebted to Western New York, calling the fans “No. 1.” Ruff said their compassion seven years ago as his daughter, Madeleine, battled a brain tumor helped his family get through the ordeal.

Outside the FNC on Friday, fans had attached a large “Thank U Lindy” to a fence.

“I’d like to put my ‘Thank You’ right next to it because it’s a special group,” Ruff said. “It’s a place I call home, always will call home. I don’t feel like I have anything to be ashamed of or any regrets. Western New York is where I’m going to live. I love Western New York.”

Not surprisingly, Ruff ranks not winning a Cup for Sabres owner Terry Pegula and his wife, Kim, as his biggest disappointment.

“They’ll get it right here,” he said. “You got to trust them.”

## **Ruff Continues To Be A Class Act**

By Matt Spielman

Jamestown Post-Journal

February 23, 2013

Two days after being fired by the Buffalo Sabres, Lindy Ruff came back to the First Niagara Center to thank them.

He thanked Terry Pegula, the owner who signed his checks, but who also placed the hard-to-realize expectations of a Stanley Cup in his first three years of his ownership.

"I think we have the best ownership in the league," said Ruff. "A great big thanks to Terry and Kim. What they've done for our team and our city. My biggest disappointment is not getting it done for them. We'll get it right here. You've got to trust them because he is a competitor. He's a fabulous guy to be around and it'll get done right."

He thanked Darcy Regier, the man with whom he shared the front office for 16 years, but less than 24 hours earlier had delivered the news that he was fired.

"I know through 16 years, probably 99 percent of the GMs in the league would've whacked the coach at a certain time," said Ruff. "He's a great hockey man and we went through a lot together."

He thanked his players, from Richard Smehlik and Alexei Zhitnik who helped him reach the pinnacle of his coaching career at the 1999 Stanley Cup Finals, to Daniel Briere and Chris Drury who carried the 2006 and 2007 teams to the Eastern Conference Finals during some of the most entertaining hockey the city has ever seen, to Jason Pominville, Ryan Miller and Thomas Vanek who are the leaders on the current team, of which he was in charge until Wednesday.

"The reason a coach has success is because he has players who play for him," said Ruff. "From Day 1, wondering if a young coach could get through it, if the group could believe in how we wanted to play. We came very close to capturing what we wanted to capture."

Ruff didn't feel like the team let him down and he said they gave him all they had. He was pleased with the communication early on this season and looking back thinks the team gave away three games — for which he blamed himself — that had they won would have put them in a good position at 9-7 instead of the 6-10 record it had when he was fired.

"That falls with me," said Ruff. "We weren't good enough to get through a couple of those games. Some of that was system related, some of that was mistake related."

Following the Winnipeg loss Tuesday, a dejected Ruff saw the writing on the wall.

"After Winnipeg, I answered those questions honestly," said Ruff. "I was embarrassed. To take that step back against Winnipeg was like a kick in the gut for me."

Listening to Ruff on Friday, it is hard to picture him coaching anywhere else, but it still sounded like he will jump at the chance. The 30-year Buffalo Sabre still referred to the team and its players as "we" and "us" and didn't sound like a guy who had an axe to grind with any of the people in charge of the organization, but he is definitely a man that wants to continue coaching hockey.

"I miss it already," said Ruff.

He thanked the fans of Western New York and says he owes the fans for making Buffalo a special place to coach.

"Most important is our fans," said Ruff. "The people who have made this place real special for myself and my family."

Living in Western New York for nearly all of his adult life, Ruff and his family have also made it through some emotional times in the area including in 2006 when Ruff's daughter was diagnosed with a mass on her brain.

"The fans are No. 1 and they really came to the forefront with my daughter's medical condition," Ruff said Friday. "They got us through a really tough time in our lives."

A hockey guy through and through, Ruff said he watched hockey Wednesday night and tried to watch the Sabres game Thursday night but only made it through one period.

"I found it incredibly strange and had to turn it off," said Ruff. "I wanted to watch, but I couldn't."

For now, Ruff finds himself with a lot of time on his hands, but that probably won't be the case when the next head coaching gig opens up in the NHL.

"I've been driving around from Tim Hortons to Tim Hortons rolling up the rim right now," said Ruff.

It will be hard for the Sabres' next head coach to hang around 16 years like Ruff, who did not second guess anything during that happened during his tenure.

"I don't feel like I have anything to be ashamed of or any regrets."

## **Right time to say goodbye to Ruff**

By Dan DiSciullo  
Sports Network  
February 22, 2013

Philadelphia, PA (Sports Network) - As somebody who gets annoyed at how disposable head coaches are to NHL teams, I respect the Buffalo Sabres for giving Lindy Ruff over a decade and a half to run their team.

That being said, Ruff's firing this week was actually a few years overdue.

In his 16th season with the club, Ruff was given his walking papers on Wednesday, ending a successful partnership that produced a Stanley Cup Finals appearance and four trips to the Eastern Conference finals. However, the club's most recent sojourn to the conference championship was in the spring of 2007 and Buffalo has missed the postseason in three of the last five seasons.

So, it was obvious Ruff had something to prove this season to the front office, including owner Terry Pegula, who upon taking over the franchise in 2011 said, "Starting today, the Buffalo Sabres' reason for existence will be to win a Stanley Cup."

Buffalo's recent history since making back-to-back conference finals in 2006 and '07, makes Pegula's dream of leading the Sabres to their first Cup seem far-fetched at the moment. The Sabres have bowed out in the first round in both of its postseason appearances over the last five seasons and the club is currently sitting 14th out of 15 teams in the East standings.

It's not fair to blame Ruff for all of the Sabres' struggles over the last several years, but at a certain point somebody has to absorb the blame or else it'll look like the team tolerates losing. Even in a hockey-crazed town like Buffalo, it's important for an owner -- especially a new one -- to prove to his fan base that winning is at the top of his to-do list. Firing a popular coach like Ruff sends that message, even if it was a tough call to let go of him in the middle of a season.

"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 upon announcing Ruff's dismissal. "His qualities have made this decision very difficult. I personally want Lindy to know that he can consider me a friend always."

Of course, Ruff isn't going to be out of work for too long. On Friday, while addressing the Buffalo media, Ruff responded to a question about whether he plans to return to coaching by saying, "I miss it already." The only question is whether his next chance to lead a team comes this season or sometime before the 2013-14 campaign, but the only way Ruff will stay out of work longer than that is if he personally chooses to take time off.

Ruff also made a plea to Sabres fans to not turn on Pegula for firing him, which is the kind of classy thing Buffalonians come to expect from the longtime coach.

"We'll get it right here," Ruff said. "You've got to trust him (Pegula) because he's a competitor.

Whether or not they actually take him up on that advice is another matter altogether.

With Ruff out, general manager Darcy Regier has to be feeling the heat. Regier, who ascended to his post along with Ruff back in 1997, is the longest-tenured GM in club history and was given an unspecified contract extension before the start of this season, but it's hard to believe he'll be around to see the end of it.

Regier's contract extension likely hastened Ruff's demise. After all, it wouldn't reflect well on Pegula if he handed his GM an extension in January only to hand him a pink slip a month later.

In the end, it was Ruff who had to pay for Buffalo's slow start, but it would be unwise for Regier to breathe a sigh of relief. As a billionaire natural gas tycoon, Pegula can afford to lose money on Regier and it's unlikely he'll think twice about giving him the axe should the Sabres' downward spiral continue much longer. In fact, if things get much worse this season, Regier might not be around long enough to pick a permanent head coach to follow interim bench boss Ron Rolston.

Pegula has said in the past that he doesn't consider the Sabres to be a business venture, once remarking, "If I want to make some money, I'll go drill a gas well."

Of all people, Pegula should know when a well has run dry. He realized it was time to say goodbye to Ruff and you better believe he's already sizing up Regier's prospects.

## **Ruff thanks players, Sabres organization in farewell**

By Adam Kimelman

NHL.com

February 22, 2013

In his first public comments since being fired as coach of the Buffalo Sabres on Wednesday, Lindy Ruff talked about how much the organization meant to him.

Ruff's firing ended a relationship that started when the Sabres selected him in the second round of the 1979 NHL Draft.

"I still have the invitation to training camp in a book," Ruff said.

Through 10 seasons as a Sabres player and 15 seasons as coach Ruff became a constant in Buffalo. But with the team struggling, the franchise dismissed the longest-tenured coach in the NHL on Wednesday.

However, Ruff said there were no hard feelings toward anyone, taking time at a press conference at First Niagara Center to thank all three ownership groups he worked under, general manager Darcy Regier, all the players he coached and Buffalo-area hockey fans.

"The fans of western New York are number one," Ruff said. "They really came to the forefront when I dealt with my daughter's medical condition. Got us through a real tough time in our lives. And I know there's a thank you outside, a fan sign, and I'd like to put my thank you right next to it because it's a special group. It's a place that I call home [and] always will call home."

Ruff said he wasn't sure if he would remain part of the Sabres' organization, but said he did want to return to coaching.

"I miss it already," he said. "Most people wouldn't, but I watched hockey the first night. It's hard. It's a tough feeling. It's been a strange feeling. I have to keep going. I love the game."

He also loved his players, past and present, and spent time thanking them, as well.

"The reason a coach has success is because he has players that play for him," he said. "... I owe a great big thanks to all those players, from day 1 to now, from the [Richard] Smehliks and [Alexei] Zhitniks of the world to the [Michael] Pecas, to all our current players, the [Danny] Briere, the [Chris] Drury, the players that have come and gone through the doors. You don't last this long without good players and good players playing good for you, scoring special goals."

Ruff was equally fond of the current group, and said when Regier informed him that he was being let go, he made one request -- to tell the players in person.

"I drove to the bus [and] nobody knew, no coaches knew, no anybody," Ruff said. "I stepped on the bus and thanked them. Thanked them for all the work. We had a hard day [Wednesday]. It was a great day of practice, we had a great meeting as a team, I met with some of the leaders that morning. It was just dead silent on the bus. I walked off and the players walked off and said goodbye."

Ruff viewed being allowed to say a final goodbye to his team as one final classy move by Regier.

"To Darcy, to whom I'm indebted as a head coach because I know through 16 years, there's probably 99 percent of the GMs in the League who would have whacked the coach at a certain time. We went through some tough stretches where you believed in me and said you can get these guys through it," Ruff said. "He's a good friend, he's a great hockey man. We went through a lot together. I'm indebted to him for entrusting me in a lot of tough situations."

But the final tough situation was one Ruff couldn't work his way out of.

"I've gone over every game," he said. "I cleaned out my office, I grabbed all my notes, I grabbed all the game notes, I looked at all the games, I looked at the chances, looked at how we lost. I'm driving myself crazy. When I was done, I said we gave three games away. We could have been at 9-7 and in a good place and instead we're at 6-10. And that falls with me. We weren't good enough to get through a couple of those games."

However, Ruff said he sees a bright future for the current players -- even though he could only bring himself to watch one period of Thursday's loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs, saying he "found it incredibly strange and I had to turn it off."

"It's a united group," Ruff said of his now-former players. "Sometimes you [the media] think it's been divided, but they're a very united group. They're in a place where they're trying to support each other, push each other. It's been hard. It's been painful. They're working hard at it. The leadership from Jason Pominville, Ryan Miller, Thomas Vanek down, I know how they feel. I feel their pain at the same time. It's hard. It's hard right now. But I think better days are right around the corner."

## **Islanders-Sabres Preview**

Associated Press

February 22, 2013

For the moment, the Buffalo Sabres are not playing any better under their new coach than they did for the old one.

Hoping to avoid a season-high fourth straight loss, the Sabres look to give interim coach Ron Rolston his first victory when they try to continue their recent success against the visiting New York Islanders on Saturday night.

Still feeling the aftershock from the firing of longtime coach Lindy Ruff a day earlier, Buffalo (6-11-1) lost 3-1 at Toronto in Rolston's debut Thursday. The Sabres have lost five of six and their 13 points are tied for the third-fewest in the league.

Rolston coached Buffalo's AHL affiliate in Rochester and Ruff, who played 10 seasons for the Sabres, was the NHL's longest tenured coach.

"It's a change that if we're playing better doesn't happen, but we're moving forward," said forward Tyler Ennis, who scored his first goal in five games. "I think (Rolston's) a great coach. We just have to get some wins."

In order to do that, Buffalo must improve offensively.

The Sabres have been held to one goal three times and shut out another over the last six games. They're converting only 12.3 percent of their power-play chances this season, and 2 of 40 this month.

"Most importantly, we need to generate more shots, more scoring chances," Rolston said. "We've got to shoot and get more traffic in front. We've got the guys back there (on defense) who can really shoot it. If we can establish that, it should really open things up for us."

Cutting down on the number of shots they allow would also help, as the Sabres are giving a league-worst 33.6 per game.

Opponents are also 4 of 12 on the power play in Buffalo's last four games. One of the Maple Leafs' two came during their two-goal second period. The 28 second-period goals Buffalo has yielded are the most in the NHL.

"We just need to go back at it and get better," said Rolston, who inherits a team that allows 3.3 goals per contest.

Rolston hopes to see some improvement at home where the Sabres were often booed during a 2-1 loss to Winnipeg on Tuesday in Ruff's finale. However, they'll be looking for a fourth consecutive victory against the Islanders (7-9-1).

Thomas Vanek had a goal with an assist and Ryan Miller made a season-high 41 saves Feb. 9 when the Sabres won 3-2 at New York despite recording 15 shots on goal.

Vanek ranks among the league leaders with 12 goals but has one in six games. He has two with an assist in his last two against the Islanders.

Miller has a 1.95 goals-against average in the last three versus New York.

The Islanders decided to put oft-injured goalie Rick DiPietro on waivers on Friday, and he'll likely be headed to the minors once he clears, as expected.

The 31-year-old DiPietro, who signed a 15-year contract with New York in 2006, has gone 0-3-0 with a 4.09 GAA in only three games this season while serving as the backup to Evgeni Nabokov.

The Islanders overcame a pair of two-goal deficits to win 4-3 in overtime at Montreal on Thursday. Matt Moulson scored twice on the power play and Thomas Hickey notched the winner for his first NHL goal.

"It's really been a struggle for us this year, starting off on the wrong foot," said star forward John Tavares, who added two assists. "But it's a good way to battle back and know that we can do that."

Though New York allows 3.5 goals per contest, it's converting a league-high 33.3 percent (9 of 27) of its power-play opportunities on the road.

Tavares had a goal against the Sabres this month but has gone without a point in his last two at Buffalo. Moulson has no points in the last three overall in the series.

## **Olympics-Vanek eager to show world Austria is more than Mozart**

By Frank Pingue

Reuters

February 22, 2013

Feb 22 (Reuters) - Austria is known more as the birthplace of notable classical music composers than ice hockey players, but Thomas Vanek hopes to change that tune at next year's Sochi Olympics.

The Vienna-born forward, who has led the NHL scoring race for much of the season, is eager to parlay his performance onto the international stage when Austria's men's hockey team returns to the Olympics for the first time since 2002.

"It's going to be great," the soft-spoken sniper told Reuters before his Buffalo Sabres fell 3-1 to the Toronto Maple Leafs in a National Hockey League (NHL) game on Thursday.

"As a kid you obviously have goals and dreams and one of them is to play in the Olympics and represent your country and hopefully I can stay healthy and perform and be a part of that."

Vanek, one of three Austrian-born players currently in the NHL, is easily the most decorated ice hockey player in the small country's history and will be counted on to lead his homeland in Russia next year.

Austria qualified for the Olympics two weeks ago and Vanek is keen to help his country build on the 12th place finish at the Salt Lake City Games, when he was 18 years old and playing junior hockey in the United States Hockey League.

Austria secured its spot in the Sochi Olympics by avoiding a regulation loss to Germany after already posting wins over Italy and Netherlands in a qualifying tournament.

"I followed the games online and it was nerve-wracking to watch and not being able to help. But the guys that played in the tournament competed hard and deserved it," said Vanek, who played hockey in Austria during the recent NHL lockout.

"For the country of Austria it's big. Hockey is growing, I realized that when I was back there playing for five weeks and this is just going to help."

### **MAKING HEADLINES**

But first, the NHL needs a new deal with the International Olympic Committee, the International Ice Hockey Federation and the NHL Players' Association that would allow its players to compete in Sochi next February.

In seven NHL seasons since the Sabres selected Vanek with the fifth overall draft pick in 2003, he has never scored fewer than 25 goals.

The 29-year-old forward, however, is making headlines this year with a stellar campaign that has seen him in control of the NHL scoring race for nearly the entire season, making him the envy of many young Austrian hockey players.

To grow the game further in his home country, however, Vanek feels greater efforts must be made to help promote hockey among up and coming players in Austria's professional leagues.

"More and more kids are starting to play and seeing that there is a chance of moving on so the game has grown, but there are still some changes that need to be made," said Vanek.

"If you look at the pro leagues in Austria there are 10 or 11 imports (per team) and that doesn't give Austrian kids a chance to play. So if they can limit that number to six or seven it still makes it competitive and lets their own product play."

Vanek makes a living by parking himself in front of opposing team's goalies and tipping shots into nets and that approach is paying off like never before for the 29-year-old forward.

Through Thursday's NHL games, Vanek has 25 points in 17 NHL contests, tied with Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby for the league lead even though he failed to register a point in five of Buffalo's last six games.

While Vanek is focused on getting his NHL team back into the playoffs for the first time since 2011, he is also eager to let the world know Austria is about more than Mozart and Schubert.

But with Austria in a group featuring 2010 Olympic gold medal winner Canada, bronze medal winner Finland and Norway, Vanek is realistic about his country's chances of advancing to the medal rounds.

"For us it's just to keep it tight every game and compete," Vanek. "The expectations are zero." (Editing by Steve Keating)

## **New coach, new challenge for Sabres**

*Sabres must adjust to different voice*

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 23, 2013

The longtime season-ticket holders behind the Buffalo bench will undoubtedly do double- and triple-takes tonight in First Niagara Center. After 16 years of looking at Lindy Ruff and his designer ties, they'll see Ron Rolston and his Burberry glasses. It'll take some getting used to for everyone involved.

The Sabres learned that quickly during Rolston's coaching debut.

The forwards heard a new voice handing out assignments and sending them over the boards Thursday in Toronto. Though the transition from Ruff to Rolston went seamlessly — the Sabres weren't penalized for too many men and never missed a shift change — it was different.

"It's just awkward when you hear a different voice," Sabres captain Jason Pominville said. "Lindy's been a leader of this organization for 16 years, so he's been the guy that everyone's been used to hearing, whether it's on TV, in the media or in the locker room.

"It's nothing against Ron. It's just different. It's going to take a little time for everyone."

The problem for the Sabres is there's not much time left to salvage this season. They welcome the New York Islanders to town tonight as one of the NHL's worst teams, one that has lost three straight and eight of 11.

"Certainly coming into the situation that we're in now is a challenge," Rolston said Friday after practice in Northtown Center at Amherst. "It's something I'm looking forward to, and the team has been very responsive to date. That's our mind-set right now is making sure we're always keeping faith in what we're doing and we're staying positive in what we're doing."

Rolston has decided against any immediate, jarring changes on the bench. The interim boss has taken over the forward lines, a duty Ruff handled, while assistant coach James Patrick is still in command of the defense pairings.

"I thought we were pretty dialed in on the bench," Rolston said. "We were plugged in to what needed to be done. I liked our bench Thursday night. I liked what we were talking about all the time and what guys were focusing on, and it was the whole night that way."

Rolston's biggest decisions usually center around faceoffs. He needs to quickly analyze where the puck will be dropped, which center is better on that side and which line is appropriate for that zone, whether it's offensive or defensive.

“I’m still getting a feel, first game, for the team,” Rolston said, “so there’s a lot of things still that we can continue to iron out until you learn the players and what they can do and get more comfortable with that.”

Rolston let the holdover assistants handle the video scouting of the Maple Leafs prior to the 3-1 loss because he wanted to focus on his new team. But with three days on the job, he planned to change that for today’s game. He should have a feel for opponents based on his preparation.

“I’ve been watching video on the Sabres and NHL teams the whole year,” said the former Amerks coach. “We have a server in Rochester that has all Buffalo’s games in four different angles, so I continually watched all the other teams that come into town along with the Sabres. I try to stay up with that as much as possible with the trends and how teams are playing.”

Folks who keep an eye on Rolston during the game will frequently observe him taking notes, which he writes on a card that’s kept in the inside pocket of his suit coat. Occasionally, he’ll choose to look down and briefly stop watching the action. When intermissions came in Toronto, he waited on the bench until all his players had departed before heading to the dressing room. Ruff was usually among the first down the hallway.

Another change came after the game. Ruff almost always addressed the team at the conclusion, and his theme would be repeated by players in postgame chats. Rolston does not make a summary speech, which will leave the players to sort out the win or loss in the immediate aftermath.

“I don’t talk to them after a game,” Rolston said. “I like to go and watch things and really get focused on what the message needs to be instead of just emotionally throwing something out there that’s not really what you want to get across to the guys.”

Rolston’s message during his first full practice day was the team needs to be quicker in its decisions and stop making crucial mistakes.

“We have to play at a different pace right now,” he said. “We don’t put enough pressure on teams right now, just playing a little bit too slow.

“If you lined all the players up on the goal line across the league, it’d be a pretty close race from end to end, but a lot of teams play faster than other teams with puck movement and guys knowing what other guys are doing on the ice. We’ve got to make a concerted effort at doing that, just putting teams in pressure situations more than we do.”

Rolston essentially lost his debut during the second period. The Sabres played a bad middle frame but nearly escaped with a 1-1 tie, then they made multiple mistakes to allow the Leafs to go end-to-end with only 1:56 remaining.

“When you’re on the road like that, you want to be able to go into, for example, the third period 1-1,” Rolston said. “What happens right now with our hockey team is we’re the team that blinks first when you have a staredown. In other words, if the faceoff’s in the zone and we make a mistake in execution, the next thing you know it’s a 2-1 game going into the third.

“That’s part of the reason why things aren’t going the way we want them to go is because there’s times in the game we execute for a long period of time, and then in this league if you have even a short span of a couple of shifts where you don’t execute, that can be the difference in the game. A lot of times it’s been the case here.”

Andrej Sekera may return to the Sabres’ lineup after missing three games with a charley horse, while fellow defenseman Jordan Leopold missed practice again with an upper-body injury. Goaltender Ryan Miller took the day off after a 33-save performance.

“Everyone here knows the value he has to the organization and our team,” Rolston said. “Just more of a maintenance day for him to make sure he’s in the right place.”

## **Sabres' Rolston: 'We're the team that blinks first'**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
February 23, 2013

AMHERST – Through his first two days as the Buffalo Sabres' interim coach, Ron Rolston has been polite and quick to smile. It's hard to imagine the 46-year-old ever raising his voice.

Still, Rolston, who coached the Sabres to a 3-1 loss Thursday in Toronto, assesses his team bluntly.

"We're the team that blinks first when you have a stare down," Rolston said this afternoon inside the Northtown Center following his first full practice as coach.

The Sabres, who host the New York Islanders on Saturday, have wilted all season. They did it again in Rolston's debut, allowing the go-ahead goal late in the second period.

"The faceoffs in the (Toronto) zone and we make a mistake in execution, and the next thing you know it's a 2-1 game going into the third," Rolston said. "And that's part of the reason things aren't going the way we want them to go."

He added: "In this league, if you have even a short span of a couple of shifts where you don't execute, that can be the difference in a game. A lot of times that's been the case here."

When Rolston watched the game again, "I saw some good things, some positive signs, obviously. There's some of the same issues in terms of why we're not being successful and why we're losing games. Right now, those things have to be fixed."

Rolston, you might've noticed, wears regular work gloves from Home Depot on the ice instead of hockey gloves.

Why? It's just convenience. He believes he started sporting them while working with Team USA in Michigan.

"I don't even know when I started, to tell you the truth," Rolston said. "I think it was in Ann Arbor. It just got to the point I didn't need the hockey gloves anymore. You take them off to get to your whistle. You're putting them down to write on the board."

"At some point, I said, 'What do I need to wear gloves for out here?' So I just got a pair of work gloves. ... It's easy to work with the pen and the whistle."

He added: "I didn't want to come up here and change. That's who I am right now."

In other news, goalie Ryan Miller was given a maintenance day today.

Rolston said defenseman Jordan Leopold (hand) is progressing and won't be sidelined long. Meanwhile, defenseman Andrej Sekera (charley horse) could return Saturday.

Winger Steve Ott left practice early but is fine.

## **Rolston makes home coaching debut vs. Isles**

By Brian Hunter

NHL.com

February 22, 2013

ISLANDERS (7-9-1) at SABRES (6-11-1)

TV: MSG PLUS, MSG-Buffalo

Last 10: New York 3-7-0; Buffalo 3-7-0

Season series: Second of three meetings. The Islanders badly outshot the Sabres 43-15 at Nassau Coliseum on Feb. 9, but the visitors still came away with a 3-2 victory thanks to the brilliance of Ryan Miller in goal.

Big story: Ron Rolston makes his home debut as Buffalo coach and takes a second crack at his first NHL win. Rolston was named to the position Wednesday after Lindy Ruff was fired, and he made his debut behind the bench in Thursday's 3-1 loss in Toronto.

Team Scope:

Islanders: Despite residing at the bottom of the Atlantic Division, where the team has finished each of the past five seasons, New York ranks in the top 10 of the League in offense and has shown some pluck in coming back to win several recent games. That was the case on Thursday, as the Islanders dug themselves holes of 2-0 and 3-1 before rallying on Matt Moulson's second power-play goal of the night and a score by Frans Nielsen that forced overtime. That's where Thomas Hickey scored his first NHL goal at the 3:12 mark for a thrilling 4-3 victory.

"I don't think I've ever had a better feeling in hockey," said Hickey, a 2007 first-round pick by the Kings who was picked up on waivers on Jan. 15. "That's special and the setting was unique playing here and being in overtime. I've waited a long time to get that opportunity. It's just a very good feeling and I'm thankful."

Sabres: Rolston got a first-hand look Thursday at some of the problems that have plagued Buffalo, dropping the team into the Northeast basement and getting Ruff dismissed after more than 14 seasons as coach. The Sabres entered Friday having allowed the most shots per game in the League (33.6) and with the fifth-worst team goals-against average (3.28). Miller faced 36 shots against the Maple Leafs and stopped 33, but with the Sabres' only offense coming courtesy of a Tyler Ennis goal in the first period, they lost their third in a row.

"I think we got better in some areas, I really did," Rolston said. "We did a little bit of work this morning before the pregame skate -- as much as we could without overwhelming them with all kinds of different things. I saw some positive things."

Who's hot: Moulson has six power-play goals already, second in the League only to Pittsburgh's James Neal, who has eight.

Injury report: New York defenseman Matt Carkner (lower body) and forward Jesse Joensuu (sports hernia) are on injured reserve. ... Buffalo defensemen Jordan Leopold (upper body) and Andrej Sekera (charley horse) are day-to-day, while forward Ville Leino (hip) is on injured reserve.

