



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Any Sabres' moves won't include Ruff

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

February 6, 2013

The Buffalo Sabres are just 3-6-1 and there's a chance by the time tonight's game against Montreal in First Niagara Center is over they could be last overall in the NHL.

Just 1-6-1 in their last eight games, it seems there's no way the Sabres can keep the status quo going unless their fortunes change quickly. So does that mean possible player moves or perhaps even the firing of longtime coach Lindy Ruff?

"It won't be the coach," General Manager Darcy Regier told The Buffalo News early Wednesday evening.

Ruff was hired on July 21, 1997, and is the second-longest tenured coach in the four major professional sports leagues, behind only Gregg Popovich of the NBA's San Antonio Spurs (who was hired in 1996).

But discontent with Ruff is clearly growing among a fan base quick to point out his team hasn't won a playoff series since 2007 and hasn't even qualified for the postseason in three of the last five seasons.

Ruff addressed the topic of his job security head-on Wednesday when asked about it by The News after practice in First Niagara Center.

"I think you're always concerned," he said. "My job is to keep the morale up. The hope for the team has been real good. The guys have been positive. They've been upbeat. They dug in, tried to come back" in Tuesday's 4-3 loss in Ottawa, "tried to fight through the adversity.

"So you've got to give them credit for digging in but I understand the other side of it too. We need to win games. We need to win them now."

Ruff, whose contract is believed to have another two years to run after this season, said he talked to Sabres owner Terry Pegula on Wednesday morning but that's not unusual as Pegula talks regularly with his coach and GM. What was Wednesday's message? Ruff wouldn't give any specifics.

"We talked hockey," the coach said.

Since Ruff's hiring, there have been 170 coaching changes in the NHL and two of them (Dan Bylsma in Pittsburgh in 2009 and Darryl Sutter in Los Angeles last year) resulted in a team winning the Stanley Cup the same season.

Ruff has 568 wins, second only to New York Islanders legend Al Arbour in wins with a single franchise. Arbour won 740 games and four Stanley Cups for the Islanders from

1973-1994 (and won his retirement game in 2007). Ruff, who has taken the Sabres to four Eastern Conference finals and a trip to the 1999 Stanley Cup final, has the most wins in NHL history for a coach with his first team.

The Sabres were supposed to be off Wednesday but Ruff got the players to agree to come downtown for a video session and an on-ice practice that lasted nearly an hour. Afterward, players scoffed at the notion a coaching change might be in the offing.

“That’s not something we’re going to have to worry about. We’re trying to get ourselves to play some hockey,” goaltender Ryan Miller said. “This is the team we have, these are the coaches we have. We’re not going to look at it like it might happen or a what-if kind of situation right now.

“It’s definitely not lost on us that we need to play better hockey. But I don’t think now is the time to start panicking. It’s time to keep building. We have to climb out of a hole. We can’t dig ourselves deeper by talking about Lindy or us as players and how effective we’re being. We all can be effective.”

“We just have to focus on what we have to do to get back on track,” added captain Jason Pominville. “We’re not that far off. We’ve cut down on” odd-man rush chances, “which was a big issue early on.”

As for a change in coaches, Pominville said, “That’s up to management. We have to worry about what we have to do and that’s win a game. Hopefully it snowballs from then on.”

After winning the first two games of the shortened NHL season, the Sabres’ problems have mushroomed. Chief among them is the fact they have given up an NHL-worst 37 goals in 10 games.

“That’s not a good place to be,” Regier said. “The confidence I do have is in this team to turn this around, in Lindy’s ability and in our ability to rectify that and that’s because I think one of the areas Lindy as a coach is extremely strong in is defensive play. Offensively, we’re fine.” (The Sabres are third in the East, sixth overall with 30 goals.)

“But defensively we have work to do. And when you think of where we are defensively, if I had a coach to pick to shore that up, Lindy is the guy. And it’s not just all on Lindy by any means. We have to work together to get this turned around.”

The Sabres entered Wednesday’s games last in the Northeast Division, 14th in the Eastern Conference and 27th in the NHL. If they lose tonight to Montreal in regulation, Washington beats Pittsburgh and Calgary beats Columbus in overtime (giving the Blue Jackets a loser point), Buffalo would drop to 30th in the league.

Over what’s nearly the first quarter of the 48-game season, the Sabres have been one of the biggest and priciest busts in the NHL.

As a team, they have a payroll that exceeds \$65 million. Eleven players are making at least \$3 million this season and eight make at least \$4 million.

“We’re not a collection of first-year players,” Miller said. “We’ve got to lead the way. For the guys who might not have that firm grasp, the young guys and the first-year guys, it’s up to us to make sure they’re up to speed. We need to play some hockey. That’s been kind of missing the last 5-6 games. Get into some hockey. It’s not about thinking, not about ‘Here we go again.’ You just go out, do your job every shift and come out in the end like you want it.”

Sabres notebook: Faceoffs get extra attention in practice

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

February 6, 2013

The Buffalo Sabres continue to be the NHL's worst faceoff team by a considerable margin so they spent a good deal of time on that area at practice Wednesday in First Niagara Center. But coach Lindy Ruff added a twist to the drill: He let the offensive team win the draw and forced the defensive team into quick coverage mode.

If they didn't cover the shooters in time, they did push-ups on the ice. And that included the goalies. Jason Pominville quickly fired shots off the first two draws and a team that included Ryan Miller dropped and hit the ice.

"If you lose the draw clean, my point today was it's almost impossible to get in the shot lane," Ruff said. "Pommer proved it on the first one. Then he proved it again on the second one. ... The center man can't lose it clean at all costs because it doesn't give me that one second to get in the lane."

The Sabres got destroyed in the circle in Tuesday night's loss at Ottawa, 37-15, and are winning just 41.3 percent of their draws for the season, a stat compounded by their troubles on assignments. No other team entered Wednesday at less than 45.3 and 20 teams had won at least 49 percent.

"We chased the puck 70 percent of the time because we didn't win a draw," Ruff said. "That's a big deficit to come back from. We get it 30 percent of the time, they get it 70 percent. That's hard hockey. Our faceoffs have to get better."

Cody Hodgson went 8-10 on draws against the Senators – while the rest of the team was just 7-27. Steve Ott leads the team at 48.8 percent.

"You're always putting yourself in a hard position when you're chasing the puck after you lose a draw," said Ott, who shifts from wing to take many faceoffs. "... It can save you 15-20 seconds at the start of a shift. When you're constantly chasing, by the third period you're going to be a lot more tired."

...

The Sabres were scheduled to have Wednesday off but Ruff asked the team's leadership to change the schedule and practice lasted nearly an hour.

Under the new collective bargaining agreement between the league and NHL Players Association, teams are to get two days off a month at home and two on the road and they must be planned in advance. They cannot be changed "absent compelling circumstances," and it's assumed that a mere slump does not qualify.

“We don’t need a day off right now,” Ott said. “We need to focus on things that will improve our club. Collectively we all wanted to come in and skate and get something out of today.”

“For us, it’s education. I don’t think it’s a punishment day,” said Miller.

In an email to The News Wednesday evening, NHLPA director of communications Jonathan Weatherdon said the group is reviewing the matter.

...

General Manager Darcy Regier said the team could conceivably send struggling backup goaltender Jhonas Enroth on a conditioning assignment to Rochester to get some work but is not currently planning that move. Enroth is 0-2 this season and his loss Tuesday in Ottawa kept him winless since Nov. 26, 2011.

“We will keep him here to work with goaltending coach Jim Corsi,” Regier said. “We know Jhonas can play and we saw how he has played in the past. His save percentage last season was very respectable [.917] and we still think he’s a good young goalie.”

...

The Sabres had just five defensemen in practice Wednesday as Mike Weber sat out for a maintenance day while Christian Ehrhoff (undetermined muscle), Andrej Sekera (ankle) and Robyn Regehr (ankle) also sat. Ruff said Ehrhoff is doubtful for tonight’s game against Montreal. Regehr and Sekera are not ready to play either.

Patrick Kaleta returned to practice after suffering his latest neck injury last week against Toronto and being hospitalized overnight. He could play this weekend.

Asked if he was ready to go, Kaleta said, “That’s a bad question because I’m available whenever the coaches need me, no matter what the case may be. ... If they need me and think I benefit the lineup, I’ll do whatever it takes.”

Ruff: 'We need to win now'

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News (blog)

February 6, 2013

The Sabres practiced for nearly an hour this afternoon in First Niagara Center on what was supposed to be a day off. Coach Lindy Ruff approached team leadership and they agreed (at 3-6-1, what could they really say?).

"For us, it's education," said goalie Ryan Miller. "I don't think it's a punishment day. It's not a you-guys-need-to-wake-up day. We need to learn, spend some time in the classroom so to speak."

(6:30 p.m. update -- As I mentioned earlier today, the new CBA seems to say teams can't do this sort of thing. A PA spokesman just e-mailed me to say the association is reviewing the matter).

The Montreal Canadiens are here Thursday, the Sabres travel to Long Island Saturday and host Boston Sunday. They're 14th in the East and could be last overall in the NHL based on other results as soon as tomorrow night.

Ruff said he chatted with owner Terry Pegula Wednesday morning -- saying only "we talked hockey" -- and admitted he knows what the fanbase is saying. And what might be said if these next three games go poorly for his team?

"We need to win games," the coach said. "We need to win them now."

"It's definitely not lost on us that we need to play better hockey. But I don't think now is the time to start panicking," said Miller. "It's time to keep building."

---The Sabres spent much of practice working on coverage on faceoffs after they're lost, which the team is doing 59 percent of the time. At one point, if the defending team gave up a shot, all of its players had to do pushups -- including the goalies.

"We chased the puck 70 percent of the time last night because we didn't win a draw," Ruff said of the 4-3 loss in Ottawa. "That's a big deficit to come back from because we've got to try to defend and get it away. We get it 30 percent of the time, they get it 70 percent. That's hard hockey. Our faceoffs have to get better."

---Ruff said the team will try to find backup goalie Jhonas Enroth -- who hasn't won in nearly 15 months -- extra work in practice and before games. "He's got to work his way out of it. It's like a goal scorer. They need that one game to feed off."

Recapping the injuries:

Mike Weber (undisclosed): Ruff said it was a "maintenance" day, which usually means the player is available the next game.

Christian Ehrhoff (undisclosed muscle): Did not skate Wednesday, doubtful for Thursday.

Andrej Sekera (bone bruise in ankle): Still not skating but able to exercise and improving.

Robyn Regher (ankle): Skated hard on his own for about 20 minutes before practice.

Patrick Kaleta (neck): Skated as an extra forward but said he was ready to play tomorrow if needed. Ruff said Kaleta may not yet even be cleared for contact. "He always wants to play. That's a good thing. Give him credit," Ruff said.

Regier Gives Ruff Vote Of Confidence

By Howard Simon

WGR 550

February 6, 2013

For those wondering whether or not Lindy Ruff is on the hot seat as the Sabres slide towards the bottom of the Eastern Conference, the answer is no.

When asked if there would be big changes, whether its players or the coach, should things go poorly this weekend, Sabres General Manager Darcy Regier said “It won’t be the coach.”

Regier made the comments to Mike Harrington of The Buffalo News.

He added the team needs to be better defensively and Ruff is the right man for the job. “Offensively we’re fine,” Regier said. “But defensively we have work to do. And when you think of where we are defensively, If I had a coach to pick to shore that up, Lindy is the guy.”

CBC’s Elliott Friedman reports the Sabres are open to trading one of their defensemen for the right return. According to Friedman, Regier has told teams “Give me a reason to trade one.” To this point he has not received a good enough answer.

Sabres skip day off; Ehrhoff doubtful for Thursday

By Joe Buscaglia

WGR 550

February 6, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Originally penciling in Wednesday as a day off amidst the rigorous regular season schedule, the Buffalo Sabres elected to practice instead. The Sabres have lost seven of their last eight contests, including their most recent 4-3 failure to Ottawa on Tuesday.

"I went to the leadership on the team and said 'We need to work on some things. I think it would be a good idea if we could flip a day here or there,'" head coach Lindy Ruff said. "It is a situation where we know we're digging out of a hole. We've got a lot of guys out, we've got new guys in different positions. There was lots of stuff to go over. We did some video, we did some on ice. They were in agreement. Everybody was on the same page."

Corroborating with Ruff's sentiments, goaltender Ryan Miller knows the team had some work to do.

"For us, it's education. I don't think it's a punishment day," Miller said. "I don't think it's a 'Hey, you guys need to wake up,' kind of day. We need to learn. We need to spend some time in the classroom so to speak. It's a day to go over some stuff and walk through it on the ice. Honestly, I think that's been the main difference between our team and the other teams right now."

During the session, the Sabres were shorthanded on defense. Mike Weber was nowhere to be seen during the skate, leaving Buffalo with only five defensemen on Wednesday. After practice, Ruff said it was only a maintenance day for Weber.

The Sabres are still without three defensemen that started the season on the active roster. That group includes Robyn Regehr, Andrej Sekera and Christian Ehrhoff. Ehrhoff's muscle ailment kept him off the ice on Wednesday, and Ruff declared him doubtful for the team's next contest on Thursday night against Montreal. Sekera is improving, but his bone bruise is keeping him from putting a skate on at this point.

On the positive side, the Sabres had 14 forwards on the ice. Patrick Kaleta skated during practice for the first time in front of the media since suffering a neck injury against Toronto on January 29. Kaleta said it felt good to get back out on the ice, and said he wanted to get back to game action as soon as possible. Matt Ellis also participated in the session.

There were no changes to the lines from the previous game against Ottawa. They read as follows:

Pominville - Hodgson - Vanek

Foligno - Ennis - Stafford

Ott - Grigorenko - Hecht

Gerbe - McCormick - Scott
(Extras: Kaleta, Ellis)

Myers - Pardy
Sulzer - Brennan
Leopold

The Sabres and Canadiens square off at First Niagara Center Thursday night at 7 pm.

Sabres Get in Extra Practice Time as Team Struggles

WGRZ

February 6, 2013

BUFFALO, NY-- It's no secret that the Buffalo Sabres have been struggling on the ice recently.

So on Wednesday, the team took a different approach to try and improve performance: More practice.

The new collective bargaining agreement calls for the players to have four days off per month, two at home and two on the road. Thursday was supposed to be one of those days off for the Sabres, but given the team's struggles, Head coach Lindy Ruff thought it was best the team should practice.

And the players agreed.

"I went to the leadership on the team and said we need to work on some things," said Ruff. "I think it would be a good idea if we could flip a day here or there. We need to win games and we need to win them now."

The Sabres have lost seven of eight games, including Tuesday night's 4-3 loss at Ottawa, and they are in second to last place in the conference standings.

The next few days won't be easy for the team either. They play three games four days starting with Thursday night's home game against the Montreal Canadiens.

Can Sabres win without great centers? Apparently not

By Kevin Oklobzija

Democrat and Chronicle (blog)

February 6, 2013

After 10 games, or just over 20 percent of this abbreviated, condensed NHL season, the Buffalo Sabres have one team beat in the Eastern Conference.

If this was the Kentucky Derby, the outlook wouldn't be all that bleak. Horses often rally from far back in a race that goes 1 1/4 miles.

Of course, for a colt to rally far back and hit the finish line first, he still must be very talented.

And so, if that's the case, then it's pretty difficult for anyone to be all that optimistic about the Sabres. The NHL season isn't a horse race, and with every passing day we're learning that the Sabres are not all that talented.

They are 3-6-1 and have two points more than the Washington Capitals, a team to which they have already lost.

For a century, "strength up the middle" has been a pretty good way to build a winner on the baseball diamond. Catcher, pitcher, shortstop, second base and center field.

It works in hockey, too. Even if, when saying up the middle, you mean just the center-ice position.

The Boston Bruins, for instance, understand. Their top three centers: David Krejci, Patrice Bergeron, Tyler Seguin.

So do the Pittsburgh Penguins: Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin, Brandon Sutter.

And the Tampa Bay Lightning: Steven Stamkos, Vinny Lecavalier, Cory Conacher and even Tom Pyatt.

And that's just the division leaders in the East. West teams like San Jose, Edmonton, Chicago, Vancouver, Los Angeles and St. Louis aren't worried about who they have at center.

The Sabres, meanwhile, have 22-year-old Cody Hodgson (potential but still learning about life in the faceoff circle and his own end), Tyler Ennis (who at 5-9, 157 is all too easily eliminated by guys 50 and 60 pounds heavier), Mikhail Grigorenko (just 18 and with a world of upside, but far from being a difference-maker), and a role player to center the fourth line, like Matt Ellis or Cody McCormick.

Injured Ville Leino can play center, but he believes he's better on the wing. He has yet to play this season and wasn't really very good last year, not when considering just two other forwards on the team (Thomas Vanek and Jason Pominville) make more than his \$4.5 million.

It's virtually impossible to consistently win without good centers. The Sabres had a far-below-average group of centermen last season and missed the playoffs.

They know it, obviously. That's why they drafted Grigorenko and also Zemgus Girgensons (who is playing left wing with the Amerks but can play center) in the first round, and took Justin Kea (6-3, 217) on the third round.

But, oh, if only they had one or two of those big-name superstars in their lineup now, the guys that can dominate a game, or can change moment with one critical goal.

One reason the Sabres haven't landed a Jonathan Toews, Taylor Hall, Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, Stamkos, Bergeron, Crosby or Malkin: They haven't been bad enough to deserve a first- or second-overall draft pick. Being bad is never good, until the summer when you get to draft really high.

Another reason the Sabres aren't strong up middle: Poor drafts in 2005, 2006 and 2007.

This is precisely the time that the Sabres should be reaping the benefits of those '05, '06 and '07 drafts. Instead, they selected too many guys that weren't good (Marek Zagraban, Philip Gogulla, Dennis Persson).

When you draft poorly, you do two-fold damage:

- 1) You deny yourself a chance to build from within, and
- 2) you can't make significant, standings-altering trades to obtain high first-round draft picks, because no one else wants your garbage.

The Bruins didn't get to draft Seguin second overall in 2010 because they were bad; they found a bad team (the Maple Leafs) that was desperate for immediate help. The Leafs got Phil Kessel and the Bruins got what ended up being the No. 2 draft pick.

While you can fill secondary roster spots with third-round picks or later, you need impact at rounds 1 and 2.

The following list is part of the reason why the Sabres are where they are at today.

2005

Round 1: Marek Zagraban (13th overall). Wasn't even good in Rochester.

Round 2: Philip Gogulla (48th). They know him in Portland but you've never seen him in Buffalo and never will.

Bypassed: Martin Hanzal (17th by Phoenix), T.J. Oshie (24th by the Blues), James Neal (33rd by Dallas) and Paul Stastny (44th by Colorado).

2006

Round 1: Dennis Persson (24th). Showed moderate promise with Portland, suffered an ankle injury early last season with the Amerks, did nothing when he returned, and decided to stay in Europe this year.

Round 2: Jhonas Enroth (46th). Goaltending was a need so the pick made sense. Goaltending might still be a need, however, because Enroth has been pretty darn bad this season.

Bypassed: Patrick Berglund (24th by the Blues), Milan Lucic (50th by the Bruins). Yeah, the whole league missed on Lucic. The fact remains, so did the Sabres, and they're paying now for every one of those misses.

2007

Round 1: No pick. En route to the President's Trophy, the pick was traded to the Capitals for Dainius Zubrus in an attempt to make a run at the Stanley Cup. Not the worst idea in the world. They tried, the Ottawa Senators just steamrolled them in the conference finals.

Round 2: T.J. Brennan (31st). His ceiling would appear to be as a fifth or sixth D-man.

Round 2: Drew Schiestel (59th). A knee injury in February 2011 derailed his career. He really has never recovered.

Bypassed: P.K. Subban (43rd by the Canadiens), Wayne Simmonds (61st by the Kings).

Hindsight is always 20/20, I get that..

Foresight, however, is a necessary quality that any management team with Stanley Cup aspirations must have.

Last-place Sabres trying to dig out of early-season hole

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 7, 2013

BUFFALO – Everything's becoming ugly very quickly for the reeling Sabres, whose season is already on the brink of collapsing after losing three straight contests and seven of the last eight.

Three wins and seven points through 10 games have them mired in last place in the Northeast Division and 14th in the Eastern Conference following Tuesday's 4-3 defeat in Ottawa, a game they nearly roared back and tied.

Incredibly, depending how some other dregs fair, a regulation loss tonight at home to the Montreal Canadiens could kick the Sabres to dead last in the league.

Don't forget, the Sabres won their first two contests. Two weeks later, they're a mess, unable to defend or even win draws consistently.

After missing the playoffs last season and starting this campaign so wretchedly, should the Sabres be concerned changes are coming among the player ranks or even the coaches?

"I think you're always concerned," coach Lindy Ruff said Wednesday inside the First Niagara Center after the Sabres practiced nearly an hour on a day they were originally scheduled to have off. "My job is to keep the morale up. I think the hope for the team has been real good. The guys have been positive, they've been upbeat.

"I thought they dug in, tried to come back in the game, tried to fight through the adversity. We were a toecap away from tying it (Tuesday) on (Jordan) Leopold's shot with the goaltender pulled. So you got to give them credit for really digging in.

"But I understand the other side of it, too. We need to win games. We need to win them now. We've lost two or three that I feel faceoffs have cost us."

More on the faceoffs later.

What about Ruff, who's been around since 1997? Could this awful 10-game stretch start the clock ticking on the NHL's longest-tenured coach?

Sabres goalie Ryan Miller said players won't sit and worry about the pressure mounting on their coach.

"We're trying to get ourselves in a good place to play hockey," Miller said. "This is the team we have. This is the coaches we have. We're not going to look at them like, 'Uh, it might happen.' ... It's not lost on us that we need to play better hockey. But I don't think now's the time to start panicking. It's time to keep building."

Ruff said he spoke with owner Terry Pegula Wednesday morning.

“We talked hockey,” Ruff said.

Despite the Sabres’ terrible start, it still seems unlikely Ruff would be fired, at least in the near future.

He’s extremely close to general manager Darcy Regier, who’s been beside him from the start. In a published report Wednesday, Regier said Ruff won’t be replaced.

Pegula’s an unabashed Ruff fan.

“Pardon my French: Lindy ain’t going nowhere,” Pegula said on the day he purchased the Sabres two years ago this month.

But even Ruff’s most ardent supporters probably can’t defend some downright terrible numbers. The Sabres are 30th in goals allowed (3.70) and faceoff percentage (41.3, a full four percentage points behind Edmonton).

Ruff spent much of Wednesday’s session drilling the Sabres on playing faceoff losses properly. He estimated the Sabres chased the puck 70 percent of the time after losing 37 of 52 draws Tuesday. The Senators scored once off a clean win.

“That’s hard hockey, and our faceoffs have to get better,” said Ruff, who had players doing pushups if they defended a draw poorly. “That’s going to start with every guy in the dot at least trying to saw it off where we can get help to come in.”

Still, the Sabres have done some things well. Their 30 goals (10th overall) should’ve been parlayed into more wins. Thomas Vanek already has eight goals and 19 points, the NHL’s hottest offensive start. Linemate Jason Pominville has six scores and 14 points.

In goal, Miller looks locked in. Forget that his statistics – a 3.11 goals-against average and a .906 save percentage – are weak.

Other than a forgettable effort in last Tuesday’s 4-3 overtime loss to Toronto, he’s played well enough to win every game. Backup Jhonas Enroth, meanwhile, has a 4.75 goals-against average in three appearances.

“I think it’s fine,” Miller said about his own play. “I don’t think it’s been horrible. I think I had one pretty sour outing against the Leafs. I think I’ve been pretty sharp.”

The Sabres practiced Wednesday because they must improve quickly, especially with Montreal, a team that throttled them 6-1 on Saturday, coming in tonight.

Ruff told the team's leadership group skating would be a good idea. The new collective bargaining agreement mandates a certain number of days off each month, but the Sabres plan to make Wednesday's scheduled one up later.

"It is a situation where we know we're digging out of a hole," Ruff said. "We got a lot of guys out. We got a lot of guys in new positions. There was lots of stuff to go over."

Pominville added: "I think it was something we decided as a group that we had some things to do, to work on. I think everybody hopped on board."

Sabres' Kaleta nearing return following scary neck injury

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 7, 2013

BUFFALO – If Sabres agitator Patrick Kaleta has his way, he'll return to the lineup tonight against the Montreal Canadiens

Forget that the winger left the First Niagara Center on a stretcher last Tuesday after injuring his neck and spent the night in the hospital. Forget that he's only been through one non-contact practice. Forget that coach Lindy Ruff wasn't sure if the 26-year-old has even been cleared to play yet.

"I'm available whenever the coaches may need me, no matter what the case may be," a smiling Kaleta said Wednesday. "I have a high pain tolerance. I can battle through whatever."

Ruff said that's Kaleta's "enthusiasm pushing through."

"I think in all fairness that'll be a coach's decision and I'll make a wise one on that," Ruff said about Kaleta returning so soon.

Read: Kaleta will likely miss his fifth straight game tonight.

Kaleta, who has a long history of neck injuries, feared for the worst after Toronto's Mike Brown hit him into the boards as he turned early in a 4-3 overtime loss.

"You realize why you play the game when you have to get taken to the hospital on a stretcher," Kaleta said. "You think about certain things (like), 'Hopefully, everything's OK, or, 'Is this going to be the last time I'm ever going to suit up?'"

Ruff wants the ultra-aggressive Kaleta to calm down a bit on the ice to preserve his career.

"I think there's an obligation that Patty has to be ... a little bit more careful in some situations (like) not getting his back turned at all costs, trying to protect the puck and take a blow that maybe he doesn't have to take," Ruff said. "He's going to have to be better at (it). That's just for his own well-being and his career. That's a fragile area."

In other injury news, defensemen Christian Ehrhoff (muscle strain), Robyn Regehr (lower body) Andrej Sekera (bruised foot) and Mike Weber (maintenance) all missed practice Wednesday. Regehr, who's on injured reserve, skated alone before his teammates.

Ehrhoff will likely miss his second game tonight.

Sekera, Ruff said, is progressing and can exercise off the ice.

AROUND THE NHL

By Brian Duff

Sabres.com

February 6, 2013

I've got some quick thoughts on the Sabres before we jump around the NHL.

Faceoffs matter

If they didn't, the coach would go out of his way to explain how a winning percentage of 40 percent (or less) is just a number and that it's merely a media fixation that in no way is representative of the team's record. On Wednesday, Lindy Ruff said faceoffs have cost them at least two or three games. That's 20-30 percent of their games so far! And that's why it was an obvious area of emphasis at practice.

The Mood

No one is happy about losing seven of the last eight. But there was a very businesslike approach to the previously unscheduled practice at First Niagara Center on Wednesday. Everyone we heard from was in agreement that this session was needed – for educational purposes, not as a punishment. The fact that it was followed by the music being a little louder in the room than usual is at least a small sign that no one is moping around here.

The Interview – Part Two

Tyler Ennis and I have had a couple of interesting (if not awkward) moments in front of the camera this season. During our broadcast in D.C., Ennis joined us during the first intermission and came across as a bit of a low talker, with his hat pulled down, and not projecting to his fullest. He proceeded to tell me the next day how much heat he took from family and friends for that 90 seconds of camera time. We laughed about it, and I told him not to worry about it.

Well, our second interview of the season came during the first intermission in Ottawa on Tuesday night, and what a role reversal. Despite being down 3-1, Ennis was clear and concise, and willing to answer anything - even if no one at home could have possibly understood the question!

Honestly folks, I'm not sure I've ever conducted a worse interview than that one during 21 years in this business. I was midway through a question about defensive zone coverage when I was thinking to myself "What the heck are you trying to ask here?" Believe me, the question never did make sense even after I rambled for about 15 more seconds. Still, Ennis came up with an answer and I greatly appreciated the bailout. I apologized to him after the game for a failed attempt at journalism. Of course he said "No worries." He could have said – "Now we're even!" I'm looking forward to our third installment in the coming weeks!

Five individuals worth watching

For as long as I can remember, I've always enjoyed picking up the sports section (or nowadays reading online) and scanning over the top scorers list in the NHL. In the early weeks of a season it's usually filled with a ton of names that eventually fade back to a more familiar statistical position.

At the start of this week, the NHL's top 30 had fewer surprises than I can usually recall. Could it be that the onus is on the big guns to be in mid-season form already? Regardless, there are still a few notable - if not surprising - names to keep an eye on moving forward.

* Cory Conacher (Tampa Bay) - In a tie for 11th place with 12 points in 9 games, Conacher leads all rookies in points and has very quickly asserted himself to being a top six forward for the Lightning. Given his supporting cast, Conacher could hold a top 30 position for quite some time.

* Chris Kunitz (Pittsburgh) - Tied with Conacher in scoring after a four-goal game on Sunday, we all know who Kunitz gets to play with on a regular basis in Pittsburgh. The question is - with 12 points in 10 games, can he be a point-a-game player or better for the first time in his career?

* John Tavares (NY Islanders) - 17th in scoring marks a nice start for Tavares after finishing eighth a year ago when he posted 81 points in 82 games. Now in his fourth season, get used to this Islander being part of this group of elite players for the next dozen or so years.

* Vladimir Tarasenko (St. Louis) - The new poster boy for organizational patience (whether the Blues wanted to wait or not), Tarasenko is showing that four years in the KHL have prepared him well for this moment. A first round pick in 2010, this 21-year-old has dazzled on a highly-regarded team with 5-5-10 in his first nine NHL games.

* Sam Gagner (Edmonton) - After a year (if not more) of trade rumors, and of course his epic eight-point game last season, Gagner figured to get lost in the hype surrounding all of his high-flying teammates. But there he is - 27th in scoring thanks to 10 points during a nine-game point streak. Maybe some teams will regret not making a bigger push for a player who has - in the past - only averaged about 44 points per season.

Honorable mentions

Tobias Enstrom (Winnipeg) - leading all defensemen with 12 points in nine games...
David Clarkson (New Jersey) - seven goals in nine games, seeking back-to-back 30-goal seasons...
Teemu Selanne (Anaheim) - 42-years-old and still averaging a point per game with nine points in eight games. Just imagine where Selanne would be on the all-time goals, assists, and points lists had he not lost almost two full seasons due to work stoppages.

Pat Hickey: Sabres GM Regier has seen it all

By Pat Hickey

The Gazette

February 7, 2013

MONTREAL — When Darcy Regier looks back at his career, he feels fortunate to be in his 16th season as general manager of the Buffalo Sabres.

“It’s a long time and I don’t feel it’s something you can ever take for granted because of the nature of this business,” Regier said. “I view myself as being fortunate, grateful. I’ll keep working at it.”

There are other National Hockey League GMs with longer tenures. Lou Lamoriello has been in New Jersey since 1987 and Jim Rutherford had a three-year head start on Regier when was hired to run the Hartford Whalers before their move to Carolina. Detroit’s Ken Holland and Washington’s George McPhee are also in their 16th seasons with the same club.

What sets Regier apart is that he has worked with the same head coach for 16 years and there are few GMs who have had to deal with as much turmoil.

Regier is a firm believer in the theory that if you hire the right person, there’s no need to make a change. That’s not to say he is opposed to change. He believes it’s important for individuals to change.

“The emphasis is on you have to change,” Regier said. “He has to change, I have to change. Communication between the GM and coach is important and you have to have the hard conversations and you have to be willing to change.”

Regier said one major change in his position is the willingness to rely on others.

“I think the days of trying to do things by yourself, whether as a general manager or as a coach, I don’t know whether they ever existed, but they don’t exist now,” Regier said. “For someone in my position, it has to do with your working relationship with your coach and your owner. That’s the most important part.”

Regier has had lots of practise developing a relationship with owners because he has dealt with four different ones.

Northrop Knox hired Regier in 1997 when the team was in disarray. Regier replaced John Muckler, who had a running battle with head coach Ted Nolan, who in turn had issues with star goaltender Dominik Hasek. Nolan, who won coach-of-the-year honours in 1997, had a year remaining on his contract, but Regier balked at offering him a long-term deal. That opened the door for Ruff, who had been a popular captain of the team.

The Sabres were losing money and the Knox family sold the team to cable TV entrepreneur John Rigas in 1998. A year later, the Sabres went to the Stanley Cup final,

but lost to the Dallas Stars in six games. Folks in Buffalo are still bitter over the final game, which was decided in double overtime when Brett Hull's goal was allowed despite replays that showed his skate was in the crease.

The Sabres fortunes on the ice have — as is the case with most teams — been cyclical. There was the Stanley Cup final and three other appearances in the conference final, but the team has also missed the playoffs six times.

The Sabres went through a major crisis in 2002 when Rigas was indicted and later convicted of fraud. The NHL took over operation of the franchise until it was bought in 2003 by billionaire B. Thomas Golisano.

“I thought that if Tom Golisano hadn't bought the team, there was a possibility it would go under,” Regier said.

Golisano, who is known for his philanthropic work in western New York, saw the purchase of the Sabres as a civic duty rather than a business opportunity. He brought stability to the franchise, but Regier had to deal with a tight budget. The team lost players like Danny Brière and Chris Drury to free agency because they couldn't match offers from other teams and were forced to trade Brian Campbell.

Golisano put the Sabres on the block two years after he moved to Florida to escape high taxes in New York and to spend more time working on his relationship with former women's tennis star Monica Seles. He sold the team to Terry Pegula, a rabid hockey fan who made billions in the energy sector.

Pegula, who is also bankrolling a new Division I hockey program at Penn State, has loosened the purse strings, but that has brought its own challenges.

“The challenge for me now is to have the resources and spend them wisely vs. not having the resources and having decisions made for you,” Regier said. “You can get caught on long-term contracts and the value you place on a player becomes a big deal.”

Regier said the landscape has changed in his tenure.

“I think you have to deal with players differently than when I started,” he said. “You don't have clout. It's more about relationships. You have to talk more to your players. You have to use education more than the hammer. You have to know the value of players. You have to become better at measuring that because of the salary cap.”

The uncertainty over where the cap will be in coming seasons is a concern

“The teams that are in real tough positions have the two buyouts that will give them a fair amount of relief and then it's going to be the good management going forward,” Regier said. “The contracts being done now can't be done in light of what the cap is now, it has to be based on what the cap will be next year and the years after.”

One of the questions coming out of the lockout was what teams would do with their top junior prospects and whether they would burn a year of an entry-level deal on a shortened season. The Canadiens decided to keep No. 3 overall draft pick Alex Galchenyuk, while the Sabres held on to Mikhail Grigorenko, who was the 12th overall pick from the Quebec Remparts.

“If we had been making this decision in September, he would have been back in juniors,” Regier said. “The strides he made in Quebec — and this is a credit to Patrick Roy — between the beginning of the season and before the world junior championship and then the confidence from the world juniors made the difference. You don’t keep an 18-year-old, but you have the benefit of another half season and the experience of the world juniors. The hardest point is the contract, but we have to pay him down the line.”

At first glance, Buffalo’s decaying downtown makes it one of the least attractive venues in the NHL, but Regier noted the city’s suburbs are a magnet for current and former players.

“We traded for a defenceman a while back and I couldn’t get him to return my calls all summer and he wouldn’t return Lindy Ruff’s calls all summer long,” Regier recalled. “It’s perception more than anything else, but now he’s retired and he’s living in Buffalo. And there are a lot of those stories.

“The hard part is to get them here; the hard part isn’t to keep them here. I can think of only one player, a Russian player, who didn’t want to play here.”

Canadiens-Sabres Preview

Associated Press

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The Montreal Canadiens were victimized by a hot goaltender in their last game.

Another meeting with the struggling Buffalo Sabres may get the offense going again.

The Canadiens look to rebound from a recent defeat as they attempt to beat the Sabres for the second time in less than a week Thursday night.

Montreal (6-3-0) is scoring 3.0 goals per game, but the team has totaled that while splitting the last two. The Canadiens' latest effort resulted in a 2-1 loss to Boston as 20 of their shots were saved by Tuukka Rask, who has a 1.96 goals-against average.

"For me, the important thing is that we're getting quality chances," coach Michel Therrien told the team's official website. "It's going to happen in the NHL where you're facing a goalie that's playing really well. It's not a matter of will. I think we worked hard to create those chances.

"There are just nights the puck goes in and there are nights the goalie's going to make the save."

That certainly wasn't the case against the Sabres (3-6-1) on Saturday, when Montreal pounded them 6-1.

Despite the loss, Buffalo is 8-1-1 in the past 10 meetings with its Northeast Division rival, but much of that success is aided by stellar performances from Ryan Miller.

The 2009-10 Vezina Trophy winner surrendered four goals on 21 shots through two periods against the Canadiens last week before being pulled for Jhonas Enroth, who allowed two scores on 11 attempts.

Miller had been 6-0-1 with a 1.12 GAA and two shutouts over his previous seven starts against them.

The Sabres give up a league-high 3.7 goals per game - 4.3 during a 1-6-1 stretch.

Enroth didn't help Tuesday, making 20 saves in a 4-3 loss at Ottawa as Buffalo's slide reached three games.

He's lost both of his starts with a 4.75 goals-against average, while Miller is 1-4-1 with a 3.67 GAA in his last six.

"We need better goaltending. There's no secret to that," coach Lindy Ruff said. "I think (Enroth) will admit that he has to have a couple of those. Now you have to look to

bounce back. I tried to let him bounce back in the game and I thought the team answered the bell.

"Right now we've got to worry about winning a game, whatever that takes."

It'll likely take improvement from Miller, who should be back in net. He's 3-0-1 with a 1.45 GAA and a shutout in the last four home meetings with Montreal.

Thomas Vanek leads the NHL with 19 points, but he's looking to get back on the scoresheet after his season-opening eight-game scoring streak came to an end Tuesday.

The left wing found the net against Montreal last week, getting just his second goal over the past 22 games versus the Habs.

P.K. Subban is giving the Canadiens some added scoring punch in three games since returning to the team after signing a two-year, \$5.75 million contract Jan. 28.

So far, the layoff doesn't seem to be an issue since the defenseman has managed a point in each of his first three games.

Subban got his first goal Wednesday, and had an assist against Buffalo on Saturday in his season debut. However, that was just his third point - all assists - in 13 career meetings with the Sabres, and he has one in six road matchups.