



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres try for third straight

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo Sabres

March 2, 2013

With their top offensive line in a funk, the Buffalo Sabres still managed to squeeze enough juice from their offense to get two wins in Florida.

They go for their first three-game winning streak of the season today in First Niagara Center against the New Jersey Devils and secondary scoring will continue to be a point of emphasis. They will need more breakout performances like the one winger Nathan Gerbe put together in Thursday's 4-3 shootout win at Florida.

Gerbe scored his first two goals of the season, putting together his first multi-goal game since April 8, 2011. Still working into game shape after summer back surgery, Gerbe had been skating better in recent games and creating scoring chances. The goals almost seemed like a matter of time.

"I tried not to focus on a breakout game," Gerbe said Friday after the Sabres' brief practice in the Northtown Center at Amherst. "My focus is on the initial process of working hard, skating hard and doing my best to create chances and using my work ethic to help get this team going."

The 5-foot-5 Gerbe has been much more like his usual pest self in recent games. He has nine shots on goal in the last four games and garnered a season-high 17:07 of ice time Thursday.

"His energy level has been really good," said interim coach Ron Rolston. "He was making a lot happen with his feet and getting to pucks first and that's the start. That's the start for our team, trying to get first touches and having that kind of energy. He's had it lately."

Gerbe had 16 goals in the 2010-11 season, his first full one in the NHL. But he slumped to just six goals in 62 games last year – including only one in his last 21 games. So chalk up 16 scoreless games to open this season and Gerbe had just one goal in 37 games until Thursday.

Gerbe opened the scoring at 6:30 of the first period after streaking down the right wing into the Florida zone past Peter Mueller, stopping and then firing a quick wrist shot that deflected off Mueller into the net. He scored again at 16:46 of the first beating goalie Scott Clemmensen with a quick snapshot to the top corner just before he crashed into the end boards.

"He's got a little life, a little energy," said captain Jason Pominville. "He's actually been moving his feet well, skating well and making plays. He got a bounce on the first one, made a great play on the second one. It's nice to see a guy get rewarded with all the work he put in."

Gerbe actually turned away a good chance at a hat trick opportunity, making an ill-advised pass to Tyler Ennis on a 2-on-1 late in the third period with Buffalo protecting its one-goal lead. The Panthers eventually tied the game but the Sabres survived in the shootout.

“I should have shot,” Gerbe said. “I drifted away from the net and tried to make a pass to Tyler. If the pass connects, Tyler has a good chance with an open net. But a tight game like that, I have to shoot the puck and try to score and ease the pressure on our team.”

“Where he was at, he had a great opportunity to shoot the puck and made a lower percentage play,” Rolston said. “But that’s part of the process.”

Gerbe missed the first two games of the season after his July back surgery, with the lockout essentially saving him a 30-plus-game absence. He wasn’t very noticeable when he returned in long stretches. That changed when he engaged Toronto captain Dion Phaneuf in a brief tussle last week in Air Canada Centre and Gerbe has been better offensively as well.

“I’m a player that plays with fire,” Gerbe said. “I try to walk that fine line of being aggressive and not being undisciplined out there. That’s my game, it’s to agitate, create energy and create scoring chances.”

Sabres notebook: Flynn callup could mean roster moves

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

March 2, 2013

The Sabres called up speedy winger Brian Flynn from Rochester on Friday night and the move opens up some interesting questions on their roster.

Thomas Vanek sat out Friday's practice in Amherst due to what interim coach Ron Rolston called maintenance and his status could be up in the air for today's game against New Jersey. However, the Sabres don't have an open roster spot and Marcus Foligno sat out Thursday in Florida as a healthy scratch so he could fill that role.

One option would be to put defenseman Jordan Leopold on injured reserve for the weekend, perhaps backdated, to make room for Flynn. Leopold (upper body) is back at practice.

A more unlikely scenario would be to return Mikhail Grigorenko to junior hockey, although the Sabres are already paying the first year of his entry-level contract. And they are known to want the 18-year-old working with their skating and strength/conditioning coaches as well as taking part in NHL practices.

Flynn, 24, is a 6-foot-1, 180-pounder who has 16 goals and 16 assists this year for the Amerks, ranking 10th among AHL rookies in goals and points. He's tied with Mark Mancari for the Rochester lead in goals. He signed with the Sabres last March and played five games at the end of the 2011-12 season in Rochester on a pro tryout from the University of Maine.

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Rolston said Friday that backup goaltender Jhonas Enroth is going to get some work soon. Ryan Miller, the NHL's runaway leader in shots against and saves, will make his 12th straight start today but the Sabres have three sets of back-to-back games in March (they play Sunday night in New York against the Rangers), and three sets of three games in four nights.

If Enroth doesn't play Sunday, he certainly could get the call either Tuesday in Carolina or for Thursday's rematch with the Devils in Newark. Rolston said Miller will have some input on his schedule but the team will continue to massage his practice and game time and monitor his energy level.

"We certainly communicate with him a lot in terms of where he's at," Rolston said. "But we also have to make sure we're helping him manage the situation too because I'm sure he wants to play as much as he can."

Enroth, who is 0-10-3 since last winning on Nov. 26, 2011, has been mostly terrible in his three appearances this year. He has a goals-against average of 4.75 and a save

percentage of .847 – last in the league in both categories among goalies who have played more than once.

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Injured winger Ville Leino (hip) worked hard on his own for 40 minutes Friday and then joined his teammates in practice, albeit in a limited role, for the first time since Jan. 18.

“Rehab has been good lately, I’ve been skating the last five days pretty hard and I was going pretty hard today,” Leino said. “I felt pretty good. If it’s not too sore the next two days, I’ll be pretty close to being able to play.”

Leino didn’t rule out a return for next Thursday’s game in New Jersey or the March 10 game in his old home, Philadelphia.

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The Devils hit town in a 2-5-1 slump and on a three-game losing streak. They are seventh in the East and sliding after being 8-1-3 and atop the pack through 12 games.

The Devils, of course, lost the Stanley Cup final last year to Los Angeles but were expected to drop quickly this season in the wake of the free agent defection of Zach Parise to Minnesota. Longtime goaltender Martin Brodeur is not with the team as he remains on injured reserve with a bad back. Johan Hedberg will start today. Former Buffalo defenseman Henrik Tallinder, who has been a healthy scratch at times this year, played his 600th NHL game Thursday.

Shamrock Run, Sabres game could create traffic problems

By Charlie Specht

March 1, 2013

Two popular downtown events will overlap this afternoon, possibly creating traffic and parking issues around First Niagara Center.

But Buffalo Sabres and police officials predict fans will have a relatively smooth ride in for the 3 p.m. hockey game despite encountering the end of the largest Shamrock Run in history.

“We don’t see this being an inconvenience to the fans at all,” said Sabres spokesman Michael Gilbert.

Multiple roads will be closed to traffic starting at 11 a.m. as more than 5,000 runners make their way through the industrial areas of the Old First Ward.

Major arterials such as Seneca Street, South Park Avenue, Michigan Avenue and surrounding side streets will be closed to vehicles and teeming with runners for the nearly five-mile run, which begins at noon.

“I think it’s going to be crazy,” said Maryann Schuta, who has helped organize more than 30 of the road races. “Early, it’s going to be worse.”

Race officials have received permits to close the roads to traffic until 4 p.m., but they plan to open them earlier because of the hockey game.

Michigan Avenue should be opened to traffic by 1 p.m. after the initial pack of runners clears that stretch, officials said.

That would make commutes to the game much easier – depending on when people leave their homes to come downtown.

“As long as people don’t come too early, it shouldn’t be a problem,” said Laura Kelly, director of the Old First Ward Community Center. “As the runners go by, we don’t let the roads sit idle. We should be in pretty good shape.”

Motorists coming into downtown from the Niagara Thruway should avoid the Louisiana Street, Hamburg Street and Seneca Street exits, race organizers say.

The Elm Street exit should be passable, and Washington Street or Pearl Street could serve as alternative routes to the arena.

Buffalo police will have additional traffic officers on detail because of the concerns, said police spokesman Michael J. DeGeorge.

DeGeorge said motorists coming to the game from South Buffalo should leave some extra time for traveling, and those coming from the north could use parking ramps near the Main Place Mall or take Metro Rail.

Runners also are expected to linger in the bars and restaurants surrounding the Shamrock Run for hours after the race ends, taking some of the parking spaces on city streets typically used by Sabres fans.

The former parking lot on the Webster Block development site also will be closed, DeGeorge noted.

But Gilbert said that “parking is not an issue down here,” noting that the Sabres’ parking ramp for season-ticket holders will be open, as well as multiple surface lots.

Sabres Enroth has a clean slate

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 1, 2013

Amherst, NY (WGR 550) -- Jhonas Enroth has not played a game for Ron Rolston. As a matter of fact, his last game was a loss on February 5th in Ottawa. Ryan Miller's backup gave up four goals on 24 shots.

Enroth has not won a game since November of 2011, that covers 12 starts. This season he's 0-2-0 with a 4.73 goals against and .847 save percentage.

Buffalo is in the middle of three games in three cities in four nights going from Sunrise to Buffalo to New York. Saturday and Sunday are back to back and Ryan Miller has now played 11 straight games and 16 out of 18. Ron Rolston has been known to ride one goaltender and this year in Rochester it was David Leggio. Rolston said, "We're just going game to game now and really trying to monitor Ryan's energy levels knowing that Jhonas will be going into a game here. It's just picking the right spot at this point." Enroth has played two career games vs New Jersey and has a 4.70 goals against. Against the Rangers he's 1-1-1 with a 2.31 goals against.

Rolston said in his first press conference that all the players will start from square one and he will judge them moving forward. Rolston said, "Since I've gotten here I've watched him practice and he's been good in practice as of late, he stays out extra, especially in practice situations he's been good so those are the things I'm really tuned in to more than anything and not past performance. He's got to continue to develop and the next opportunity he gets he's got to take advantage of it."

When Rolston monitors Miller it involves a lot of talking, "We certainly communicate with him a lot in terms of where he's at, but we also have to make sure we're helping him manage the situation too because he wants to play as much as he can because he's a player that wants to help us be successful."

Sabres Foligno is ready to play his game

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 1, 2013

Amherst, NY (WGR 550) -- Marcus Foligno was cruising right along last season. In his first career game at Ottawa, he didn't get a point, but in his next 12 NHL games, he accounted for 13 points.

This season, he had just eight points in 20 games before being benched at Florida. Foligno said, "I was pretty surprised, you don't really want to hear that, it was tough. The biggest thing for me was Ron didn't just say you're not playing, he showed me a lot of what I can bring, the good things on the ice and things I've got to start doing so it was a big learning tool and I'm looking forward to getting back into the lineup." The winger went on to say that maybe he was confused on what kind of player he is, "I'm learning, being scratched has taught me a lot. I think in the beginning of the year I might have been getting caught in the middle, trying to be physical, trying to be offensive so I just gotta play my game and start winning one on one battles. I know what I can bring and my team knows what I can bring."

As far as what went wrong Foligno said, "I think I was trying to do too much, just simplifying my game I think is the biggest thing. I've got to be a simple player and when I'm a simple player, I'm most effective. I think that's using my speed on the walls and battling pucks. For myself I was losing a lot of battles and that's not how I play so I was disappointed with my effort and I have to be ready to go come Saturday."

As far as what Ron Rolston is thinking he said, "Marcus is a player that can be a dominant hockey player in this league and he was when he came to Buffalo last year, but in order to do that he has to play a certain way and he hasn't been able to do that thus far, but we have full confidence that he'll be able to get that game back." Rolston added, "He's got to work consistently in doing the things that makes him a good hockey player and that's being a player that can be north and south and get to the net and attack the net, be good on walls in our zone and just be a presence for us. If he's playing with guys who are water bugs like Ennis or Gerbe, he's got to be a guy that makes space and plays his game and not their game."

Thomas Vanek was given the day off from practice. He should be ready for Saturday afternoon against New Jersey.

Breaking down Sabres March schedule

By Howard Simon

WGR 550

March 1, 2013

And just like that, we are in the second to last month of this NHL regular season. It will be a busy month for the Buffalo Sabres who will play 15 games in 30 days. Although this month does feature the longest break between games the club will have with the truncated schedule.

After a March 12th contest with the New York Rangers, Buffalo won't play again until four days later when Ottawa comes to town.

The Sabres will play just six of their 15 games this month on the First Niagara Center Ice. The nine road games include a stretch of four straight this week with games against the Rangers, Carolina, New Jersey and Philadelphia.

Speaking of the Devils and Rangers, they are the last two conference opponents Buffalo has yet to play this season.

The Sabres had a little break from back to back sets of games but they return this month with the first coming this weekend. The next is the 16th and 17th when they host Ottawa, and then travel to Washington. The third back to back will take place on the 30th and 31st but there isn't any travel involved since the Sabres will entertain Washington and Boston those two days.

The Sabres also requested some afternoon games with the back to back sets so the team could get a few extra hours in between. In addition to today's game, which will be followed by a seven o'clock start at Madison Square Garden tomorrow night, the Sabres will have a three o'clock faceoff with Ottawa on the 16th and play at seven the next night.

Buffalo had four back to backs in January and February. They went 2-2 in the first game and 1-3 in the second.

Sabres: Myers Growing Pains

By Chris Parker

WGR 550

March 1, 2013

Whiner Line caller..."Stop comparing Tyler Myers to Zdeno Chara. He's not Chara." This isn't exactly a cheap shot at the Whiner Line. The point gets made plenty often enough to me via E mail. It's just that I hear the Whiner Line every day after I drop my boys off at school and well that's really it.

Right, of course he's not Chara. Chara is great and dominant and mean and has won trophies individually and, you know, that big team one they give out every spring/summer. He's a captain and climbs mountains for fun in the off season. So no, Myers is not Chara.

Chara is also on his 3rd team. It took him some time to prove that he could be the game dominating wrecking machine he is. And maybe he only did the mountain climbing thing one off season. Whatever.

Here's the thing about the Myers Chara comparison. The Sabres are paying Myers to be Chara right now. Myers got \$10 million in July. No lockout changed that. There is no arguing that he's nowhere near Chara-ville in his play. Anyone can see it.

Myers has miles to go and watching him play this season could certainly give you reason to doubt whether or not he'll ever get there. That, more than any other single thing, is what has left the Sabres with 6 teams to climb over just to get to 8th place in this shortened season.

You know what really can screw up your team chemistry? Pay a 23 year old \$10 million and then watch him not only struggle, but on most nights, be your worst player. You think you feel let down as a fan, how do you think his teammates feel? How would it go over where you work if your success was dependent on a guy who just got paid that bonus and he showed up at work and not only didn't help you do your job better, he sucked and dragged you down with him? I'll bet you'd go home complaining about him to your spouse.

The idea of Myers getting it together this season is starting to feel more and more far fetched to me. The warning signs were there in the week long training camp when the now fired coach talked about his conditioning being an issue. I know he scored the winning goal on Tuesday in Tampa but don't even waste your breath trying to tell me had any kind of good night. Florida last night was more of the same. Uneven at best. At this point making it out of shifts without a gaffe feels like progress. Myers is still nowhere near where they need him to be. Dominating games and being their best player.

All that said, I'm still not moving him. Should this season continue to track the way it's been going, there will be plenty of conversation about what the Sabres should do with

their roster. A last place team should not have a long list of untouchable players, but the giant defenseman still tops mine.

Is this year a good sign? Of course not. Myers got the big check, a lockout happened, and he showed up in bad shape. He let the team down and more than anyone else dragged them down to the bad record they still have. Myers has been largely uneven since a great rookie year and there could be a danger in just expecting him to regain his form. At some point, you have to just accept that he's more the guy who has been largely inconsistent than the player who won the Calder.

I'm just not there yet. He just turned 23. He's 6'8" and when he's not tripping over himself, can really skate. Maybe this year will really embarrass him. Maybe he'll find a way to put on weight and improve his conditioning. Maybe he'll grow up some more this off season.

Maybe he'll still be great. I'm not done thinking about that possibility and am quite sure the Sabres aren't either. I hope so. I know Myers has been here a while now, but he's still a kid. Let him grow.

Sabres chase third straight win, face Devils

By Brian Hunter

NHL.com

March 1, 2013

DEVILS (10-6-4) at SABRES (8-12-1)

TV: MSG PLUS, MSG-B

Last 10: New Jersey 4-5-1; Buffalo 4-6-0

Season series: First of three meetings. New Jersey went 3-0-1 against Buffalo last season. Patrik Elias led all scorers with six points (two goals).

Big story: Have the Sabres turned a corner after sweeping their two-game road trip through the state of Florida? They're now 2-2 under new coach Ron Rolston, who will take a second shot at his first home win at First Niagara Center, where Buffalo is a woeful 3-6-1 this season.

Team Scope:

Devils: Since Martin Brodeur's back started acting up on him, New Jersey hasn't tasted victory. Johan Hedberg allowed 14 goals over a three-start span, but he couldn't be faulted in the Devils' 3-1 loss in Winnipeg on Thursday night. After Jets captain Andrew Ladd scored eight seconds into the game, Hedberg held the fort and allowed the Devils to eventually draw even. But Ladd's second of the night with 8:01 remaining and an empty-netter sealed a 3-1 defeat, New Jersey's sixth in eight games.

"It's frustrating," forward David Clarkson said. "We've got to find a way to get out of this and start playing in the other team's zone a little more."

Sabres: Allowing too many shots continues to be an issue in Buffalo, but on some nights it won't matter simply because Ryan Miller is in net. Miller may have allowed three goals Thursday night, but he also stopped 40 shots by Florida through three periods and a five-minute overtime. Then he turned aside both shootout attempts by the Panthers, while Thomas Vanek and Jason Pominville converted on theirs to give the Sabres a 4-3 victory. Nathan Gerbe scored twice in regulation, his first goals of the season.

"That was a good game," Gerbe said. "We settled back maybe a little too much in the second, they took it to us. But a resilient win for us. Obviously we don't want to give up that late goal (Brian Campbell scored with 1:26 left to force overtime), but Ryan did a great job getting us in a shootout."

Who's hot: Andrei Loktionov has two goals and two assists during a four-game points streak for the Devils, while Alexei Ponikarovsky has an assist in three straight games. ... Miller has stopped 70 of 74 shots over his last two starts, a .946 save percentage.

Injury report: Brodeur can't be activated from injured reserve until Monday at the earliest. Forward Ryan Carter was activated off injured reserve Friday after missing four games with

a concussion. Forward Dainius Zubrus (wrist) is expected to miss another month. ... Buffalo is without forward Ville Leino (hip) and defensemen Jordan Leopold (upper body) and Alexander Sulzer (lower body).

Sabres' Gerbe regaining old form following offseason back surgery

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 2, 2013

BUFFALO – As Nathan Gerbe approaches 100 percent following offseason back surgery, the 5-foot-5 Sabres winger has regained his confidence, ramping up his tenacity and performing like the fearless, speedy pest from the past.

Gerbe nearly fought 6-foot-3 Toronto captain Dion Phaneuf last week, a sure sign he's bumping full-tilt again. Prior to Thursday's slick two-goal performance, Gerbe had been zooming around the ice.

It appeared his long offensive slump – he hadn't scored since March 10, a 20-game drought – would soon be history.

Sure enough, the 25-year-old dazzled in the Sabres' 4-3 shootout triumph in Florida, scoring two nifty first-period goals before he held the puck on a late two-on-one break beside Tyler Ennis with the Sabres up a goal.

But Ennis couldn't coral Gerbe's pass, and a golden opportunity was botched.

Hindsight being 20-20, Gerbe acknowledged the obvious Friday after the 14th-place Sabres, winners of two straight, prepared for this afternoon's contest against the New Jersey Devils at the First Niagara Center.

"I should've shot," Gerbe said following practice at the Northtown Center in Amherst. "Now, looking back on it, I drifted away from the net and tried to make a pass to Tyler. Obviously, if the pass connects, Tyler's got a good chance at an open net.

"But a tight game like that, I got to shoot the puck and hopefully score and ease the tension."

Still, one mistake shouldn't mar a breakout performance. It's been a long, grueling road back for Gerbe.

The Michigan native underwent a procedure called a Discectomy L5-SI for an L4 herniated disc in July. He was first injured when Philadelphia's Marc-Andre Bourdon rammed him head-first into the boards on Dec. 7, 2011. He kept playing, but the injury worsened over time.

Gerbe couldn't rush back. As his locked-out teammates bided their time elsewhere during the fall and early winter, he was rehabbing at the team's facilities.

"I didn't want to end up back in the hospital, back in surgery," Gerbe said. "I don't want to mess anything up. So I took the process slow. I started to feel better the last 10 games

or so skating. Just feeling more comfortable, using my speed, using my strength and trusting my back, and I think that's the biggest thing."

Gerbe finally returned Jan. 24. If the season had been played fully from the start, he would've missed about half of it.

Challenging hulking opponents, something he must do to survive in the NHL, proves he's comfortable again.

"Well, I'm a player that plays with fire," Gerbe said. "I try to walk that fine line of being aggressive and obviously not being undisciplined out there. That's my game. I use it to agitate and create energy and create scoring chances."

His minutes have increased with his effectiveness. He played a season-high 17:27 on Thursday, his first-two goal game since April 8, 2011.

Interim Sabres coach Ron Rolston sensed Gerbe was about to bust loose.

"His energy level has been really good, so he was making a lot happen with his feet and getting to pucks first," Rolston said.

Gerbe opened the scoring Thursday, stopping in the right circle and cutting sharply before roofing a shot in.

He scored again later in the period, putting a nice move on Erik Gudbranson in the right circle and beating Panthers goalie Scott Clemmensen again as he fell to the ice.

"I know it's a process," Gerbe said recovering. "I prepared myself for that mentally. I wasn't kicking the can too much. I knew that if I stick with it, good things will come if I keep working hard, keep working on my strength."

Mentors not surprised Sabres' Rolston evolved into NHL coach

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 1, 2013

BUFFALO – Twenty-seven years ago, shortly after the junior St. Claire Shores Falcons had lost the national championship in triple overtime in Sioux City, Iowa, Jeff Jackson made a promise to Ron Rolston, his 19-year-old captain.

The coach was moving up from the North American Hockey League to take an assistant gig with Lake Superior State. Meanwhile, Rolston was about to start a three-year NCAA career at Michigan Tech.

“I remember telling him, ‘Someday I’m going to be a head coach in college hockey,’” Jackson, now the coach at Notre Dame, told the Times Herald by phone Thursday, “and I’m going to hire you as my assistant coach.”

Four years later, the Lakers promoted Jackson. Rolston had just spent a year playing professionally overseas.

“Within a week of me becoming a head coach in college hockey I got a phone call,” Jackson recalled.

Jackson hired Rolston, who he called “a little raw” as a coach. But Jackson respected Rolston greatly. He believed he possessed a great hockey mind, a terrific temperament and an eye for talent.

Today, Rolston’s the Sabres’ interim coach, the man in charge of fixing a \$65 million mess. Those who worked with Rolston on his journey to the big leagues recall a smart and passionate assistant coach who evolved and matured over the years.

None are surprised he cracked the NHL.

“He became everything I expected him to become when he played hockey for me a long time ago,” Jackson said.

“I would say without question, 100 percent that he is ready for the job,” said Brian Rolston, Ron’s brother and a veteran of 1,256 NHL games.

The maturation

With graying hair and glasses, Rolston plays the part of a studious NHL coach well, always acting calm and measured. But he’s evolved over time.

As a young assistant, Rolston “was a lot more comical, let’s put it that way,” Jackson said.

“He had a real effervescent personality to him,” Jackson said. “He was a funny guy. He had a good wit about him.”

Over the years, Jackson said Rolston “became a little bit more like a professor.”

“He’s even got the look,” he said.

Rolston still has the same personality, at least privately.

“He’s actually a funny guy,” said Mark Morris, Rolston’s coach during his three years as an assistant at Clarkson. “Most people won’t see that until you’ve earned his trust. But he can bust on you. He’s pretty witty and can be sarcastic at times.

“So until you get to know him or he lets you in that inner circle, you might get the wrong impression of him.”

Back in the 1990s, that personality helped Rolston relate well to his players. He was young, knew their music and had a brother who would reach the NHL. Rolston quickly developed confidence communicating and earned respect.

“He was really instrumental in helping our program reach the national championship game three straight years,” said Jackson, whose Lakers won twice.

In 1996, Morris hired a “jack-of-all-trades” in Rolston, who handled every facet of the game – offense, defense and recruiting – in addition to doing video work and using his fitness expertise, an additional skill that impressed Jackson and Morris long before teams carried strength coaches.

“He really was very detailed and extremely knowledgeable about the game,” said Morris, now the coach of the Manchester Monarchs, the Los Angeles Kings’ AHL affiliate.

Those associated with Rolston always mention the details. Few prepare as well as him. He then relays everything through teaching, a skill vital in today’s NHL with players getting younger and younger, Brian Rolston said.

“It’s paramount to have a good teacher around because these kids that come in, they’re super skilled ... but most of them I don’t think know exactly the little things of the game that need to be taught on a daily basis, and that’s something that is a strength of Ron’s,” Brian Rolston said.

Morris said he marveled at the time Ron Rolston spent preparing players for the game.

“If it wasn’t breaking out video, it was showing them the finer points of the game or in the weight room counting out every rep and telling him why they were doing it,” Morris said.

-Make no mistake, Rolston, whether he shows it or not, is an intense coach.

“He’s gotten more mature over the years and has learned the right way of handling himself,” said Brian Rolston, who played under his brother his freshman year at Lake Superior State. “There’s a lot of passion there, for sure.”

Some of that passion, what Morris called seeing Ron Rolston “a little bit ruffled,” came out when they played shinny in track suits with extra players prior to games.

“He wanted to win every game,” Morris said. “He was not holding back one bit when he was on the ice. I know that he carries that same type of focus when he coaches. It’s more of a calculated type of thing.”

Going to the next level

Rolston worked as an assistant at Harvard and Boston College before taking head coaching jobs with Team USA’s national development program.

Jackson said he had spoken to Rolston two or three times about taking a shot at professional hockey.

“I had an idea what pro hockey was all about,” said Jackson, a New York Islanders assistant coach in 2003-04. “I thought that he had the right personality, temperament to coach at least in the American League and then possibly move on the National Hockey League.”

Morris had told Rolston he “saw him being an excellent guy to teach pros because he was more current with the guys.”

In the summer of 2011, the Sabres recruited Rolston to lead the Rochester Americans, their AHL affiliate. He barely lasted a season and half there before the Sabres promoted him to replace Lindy Ruff on Feb. 20.

“I know how exciting it must’ve been for him to get behind the bench,” Morris said. “But it certainly didn’t happen the way he hoped it would’ve happened. It kind of came a little quicker than I’m sure anybody expected. I’m sure he’s respectful of Lindy.”

Morris called Rolston’s current situation “precarious.”

“He’s in to try to fix everything overnight,” he said. “I know it’s a huge undertaking to try to settle things down and get things moving in the right direction.”

Rolston’s already on the clock. Sabres general manager Darcy Regier has said the 46-year-old could keep the job if he does well.

“Given time, as they find their way whatever changes need to be made, I’m sure that he’ll be fine,” Morris said. “I just think ... to throw anybody into a situation like that has to be a huge challenge.

“Unfortunately, anybody that’s a skeptic is probably going to think, ‘Who is this guy?’ But I can assure you that he’s top shelf. I have met a lot of people in the business, but I hold him right up there with some of the most well-rounded people that I’ve ever had the pleasure of working with.”

Devils-Sabres Preview

By Jeff Mezydlo
Associated Press
March 1, 2013

While the New Jersey Devils search for ways to end their recent struggles, the Buffalo Sabres hope they're in the midst of finally turning their dismal season around.

The visiting Devils look to avoid a fourth straight defeat and keep the Sabres from a season-high third consecutive victory Saturday.

New Jersey (10-6-4) averaged 2.9 goals during its 9-2-3 start, but has totaled nine while going 1-4-1 since. The Devils, who allowed a goal 8 seconds into Thursday's 3-1 loss at Winnipeg, have been held to one goal four times in their last six games while going 2 for 22 on the power play.

"It's frustrating," said forward David Clarkson, who has a team-leading 10 goals but none in the last six contests. "We've got to find a way to get out of this and start playing in the other team's zone a little more."

It has not helped that the Devils have allowed opponents to go 8 of 20 on the power play during the rough stretch.

New Jersey's three-game slide in regulation has coincided with future Hall of Famer Martin Brodeur's absence due to a sore back. Brodeur, who had a 1.84 goals-against average in a 5-1-1 stretch before the injury, isn't eligible to come off injured reserve until Monday.

Johan Hedberg, expected to make his fourth consecutive start, has a 4.06 GAA while losing four straight outings. He's allowed eight goals while dropping his last two starts against the Sabres, but has not faced them since November 2010.

After playing their last four against Washington and Winnipeg, the Devils may be excited to face a different opponent while trying to avoid their second four-game skid of the season. New Jersey went 3-0-1 against the Sabres in 2011-12, scoring nine times to win its two trips to Buffalo.

The Sabres (8-12-1) have won two in a row behind six goals after totaling one while losing their first two games under interim coach Ron Rolston. Nathan Gerbe scored his first two goals of the season and Ryan Miller made 40 saves in Buffalo's 4-3 shootout win at Florida on Thursday.

"We'll take it. It's a step in the direction we need to keep going in," said Rolston, who was coaching Buffalo's AHL affiliate in Rochester when he was tabbed to replace the fired Lindy Ruff last week.

"We still have a big ceiling in terms of room for improvement for our team. Our mindset has to be to get back and be better again come Saturday."

The Sabres went 0 for 13 on the power play in the previous four games but converted their only chance Thursday. Buffalo also has killed 9 of 10 penalties in its last two contests after its previous five opponents went 5 for 16 with the man advantage.

"Ron has made some adjustments, made some changes," forward Jason Pominville told the NHL's official website. "He said from the get-go it might take some time, but we're slowly starting to get results."

The Sabres are looking to get Rolston his first victory at home, where they'll try to avoid their first four-game skid since Feb. 13-20, 2011.

Fur flies as animal rights group attacks Sabres over faux coat

By Allan Muir
Sports Illustrated
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It's become a popular bit around the NHL. Somebody finds a hideous piece of clothing—an old jacket in Boston, a battered fedora in New York—and it becomes a badge of honor in the dressing room, awarded by the players to a teammate who puts in an honest night's work at the rink.

They do it in Buffalo, too. There, the game's star is honored with a particularly gamey fur coat emblazoned with the team's logo. It's a good gag that promotes team unity.

Except PETA didn't quite see it that way.

The animal-rights organization, infamous for its attention-grabbing stunts, got wind of the bit and fired off a letter to Sabres' owner Terry Pegula asking him to end the practice immediately.

“On the heels of the Buffalo Sabres' decision to fire head coach Lindy Ruff, PETA is calling on the team to earn back the trust of its fan base by doing away with something else: the logo-embroidered fur coat that the team recently started awarding to its “player of the game,” PETA Executive Vice President Tracy Reiman wrote in a press release. “There's nothing less sporting and more grotesque than wearing someone else's skin. PETA is telling the Sabres that if they want to move forward and leave the past behind, they need to stop draping their top-scoring players in cruel caveman couture.”

Cruel caveman couture. That's some olde world wordsmithery there.

The letter didn't generate much buzz until Buffalo center Steve Ott fired off a couple of tweets earlier today:

[Steve Ott ✓ @otterN9NE](#)

You would think for a creditable organization [@Peta](#) that the VP would have done its due diligence and not have accused an animal loving....

[Steve Ott ✓ @otterN9NE](#)

Team with such inappropriate accusations and realize the coat is Faux from [@HM #Sabres #BeatIt](#)

That's right. The fur is fake.

The Sabres Observer did a nice job following up with PETA and got this response:

“We would be thrilled if the fur coat was in fact faux, and if the Sabres would like to continue the player of the game tradition, PETA would be happy to supply the team with a faux-fur coat.”

Sounds like the Sabres already have that covered. But mission accomplished on the publicity front, right?