



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Sabres-Lightning Preview

By Jordan Garretson

Associated Press

March 26, 2013

The Tampa Bay Lightning appear to be on the verge of missing the playoffs for a second year in a row. But with a coaching change, they hope they can follow the cue of the Buffalo Sabres, who continue to turn things around after their own mid-season ousting.

Before Jon Cooper makes his coaching debut, the Lightning face a Sabres team that enters Tuesday night's matchup having won 12 of 15 meetings at the Tampa Bay Times Forum.

The 27 points by the Lightning (13-18-1) are the league's third-fewest as they've lost 11 of their last 15 contests - including each of the last three. They fired Gary Boucher on Sunday morning prior to a 3-2 loss at Winnipeg, and named Cooper as his replacement on Monday.

Cooper has led Syracuse, Tampa Bay's top minor-league affiliate, to the AHL's best record, and was also named the league's coach of the year last season after leading Norfolk to the Calder Cup.

Assistants Dan Lacroix and Steve Thomas will assume coaching duties for Tuesday's game, as Cooper's first game behind the bench will not be until Friday against New Jersey.

"He has had success at every level he has coached and is extremely familiar with our organization, as well as our players," general manager Steve Yzerman said. "He has a tremendous record at all levels and we feel he is ready to make the move to the NHL."

The Sabres' season also seemed in dire straits with a 6-10-1 start, but they've revived their playoff push with better play under interim coach Ron Rolston since firing Lindy Ruff on Feb. 20. Buffalo (13-15-4), which defeated Montreal 2-1 on Saturday for its third straight win, has gone 7-5-3 under Rolston and sits three points out of a playoff spot.

"We know we have a long way to go," said Thomas Vanek, who has 12 points in his last seven contests against the Lightning. "Any time you can pick up two points and consecutively three games in a row, it feels good. But there's a lot of work left. We've just got to pick up points and see what happens at the end. But we need help as well."

Buffalo's power play still ranks last in the league, scoring on 12.9 percent of its chances, but appears to be on the rise. The Sabres have scored power-play goals in four straight games.

Tampa Bay's power play started hot out of the gates - tallying 13 goals on 36 chances in the first eight games - but the unit has since slowed. The Lightning are 1 for 20 over

their last six. They've also struggled to score with the advantage in the last six meetings with Buffalo, going scoreless on 17 chances.

They failed on all six opportunities with the extra skater in the lone meeting this season, a 2-1 home loss on Feb. 26.

Tyler Ennis is on a four-game point streak for Buffalo with two goals and four assists. Cody Hodgson, who recorded a goal and an assist in the teams' first meeting, has four assists in his last two games.

Defenseman Andrej Sekera, the Sabres' second-leading points scorer among its blueliners with eight, has missed the last four games with an upper-body injury.

Ryan Miller, who stopped 38 shots on Saturday, has started each of Buffalo's 15 games at Tampa Bay since 2005-06, going 12-3-0 with a 2.38 goals-against average.

Sabres power play showing signs of life *NHL's worst unit makes some progress*

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

March 26, 2013

TAMPA, Fla. — The Buffalo Sabres still have the NHL's worst power play, but numbers that were just about historically bad early in the season won't easily be overcome. So they have to focus on small progress.

And the Sabres definitely have some of that going.

Heading into tonight's game against the Tampa Bay Lightning, the Sabres have scored with the man-advantage in four straight games. Another power-play goal tonight will make it five straight for the first time since Nov. 13-21, 2009.

"It's definitely better. That's what we need going forward," defenseman Christian Ehrhoff said Monday after practice in the Tampa Bay Times Forum. "We needed the 'PP' to step up and get us some goals and we've had a pretty good run. We just have to stick with it.

"We felt like we were going in the right direction. We got the puck more to the net and a key thing is we got it back for some second opportunities. It seemed like it was a matter of time for a few pucks to fall for us and that's what's happened."

The power play is at a 12.9 percent clip for the season but has gone 4 for 15 in the last four games. In the previous 21 games, Buffalo was 5 for 76, and First Niagara Center fans were in near revolt during some situations as the Sabres failed to establish any presence in the offensive zone.

"We weren't creating enough momentum for us and instead coming out of it with no momentum and boobirds and all that kind of stuff," said Steve Ott, whose power-play goal in overtime provided a win last Tuesday in Montreal. "It takes a big toll on your overall game. If we're generating chances and momentum, goals will come."

That momentum has been happening in recent games, thanks to better entries into the zone and better work to keep control of the puck down low.

"It's been huge, night and day," said Jason Pominville. "You're not going to score on all your power plays but if you generate good things, zone time and shots, it does carry over. The same for a big penalty kill. It's a game of momentum and when you get it on your side, a lot of good things can happen."

The Sabres are 7-4-2 this season in games in which they score a power-play goal. That leaves them 6-11-2 in games they're blanked. They have 11 one-goal losses and are just 4 for 32 in those games.

“You have a good power play, it can win you games or at least keep you in there,” said Thomas Vanek. “Look at how many games we lost by one goal and how many power-play chances we’ve had in that span. We could have won I bet half of them with just a decent power play. It’s a key. It reflects your game as a whole.”

Ehrhoff’s booming slap shot from the point of the power play has been a key element this season, pro and con. He’s often fired wide – or drilled a teammate – but now he’s getting more of his shots on the net. He’s even taking some velocity off at times to give himself a higher percentage chance.

Ehrhoff fired a boomer past Toronto’s James Reimer for a goal in Thursday’s shootout victory and snapped a quick wrister that Vanek tipped home in Saturday’s 2-1 win in Montreal.

“There’s different opportunities that call for different types of shots,” Ehrhoff said. “Sometimes you see Thomas in front and he’s not covered you try to get a quick wrister in there. Other times like on the Toronto goal when I had a lot of time and a chance to tee it up, that’s when you really shoot the puck.”

“There’s a right time to use a heavy shot and a right time for him to take some off like he did with ‘Van’ because we’ve got one of the best net-front guys in the NHL there,” Ott said. “There’s times for everything. He’s been solid for us of late on the power play and it’s made a huge difference.”

Vanek continues to lead the Sabres with seven power-play goals and many have come on tips from Ehrhoff. Vanek, of course, is still nursing a sore hip after getting drilled by Ehrhoff last Tuesday.

“Sometimes it’s not about the heavy shot,” Vanek said. “His goal is the time and place. You get the green light in the middle of the ice. He’s getting better at taking some off or shooting even a little wide for a tip.”

No reunion with Ruff, as Tampa picks Cooper

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

March 26, 2013

TAMPA, Fla. — It's going to be Jon Cooper taking over the Tampa Bay Lightning. Not Lindy Ruff.

The speculation about a matchup tonight with their old boss was pretty hot after the Sabres' practice here Monday afternoon but the official word came in the evening that the Bolts had promoted Cooper from their American Hockey League affiliate in Syracuse to replace the fired Guy Boucher.

Media outlets across North America spent most of the last two days speculating on a Ruff-to-Tampa scenario less than five weeks after he was fired following a 16-year run in Buffalo. But it's not going to happen.

The Lightning flew back from Winnipeg after Sunday's loss to the Jets and did not practice Monday. They will take the ice at the Tampa Bay Times Forum this morning at 10:30 but Cooper will not coach the team tonight. General Manager Steve Yzerman will simply let assistants Dan Lacroix and Steve Thomas run the bench tonight against the Sabres as they did Sunday.

Tampa Bay's next game isn't until New Jersey visits Friday, and that would give Cooper a couple of practice days before making his debut. Sabres players admitted after Monday's workout here they had heard the Ruff speculation and his presence on the opposing bench would have made for an awfully interesting Tuesday.

"It would make for a great story," said a laughing Thomas Vanek. "Obviously we heard it too. It would be strange for sure. ... If it happens next year, it's still going to be a weird feeling."

"I hope he gets a job and get back in coaching soon," said captain Jason Pominville. "We know he wants to be behind the bench. Hopefully he makes the best decision for him and his family when he does get asked. We know he'll be back soon. I'm not even worried about that part."

Interim coach Ron Rolston said he hasn't been paying too much attention to the Lightning's coaching search but acknowledged the Sabres should be facing a fired-up team in its first game at home since the change and an 0-3 road trip through Canada.

"They'll have some added jump and emotionally they'll be coming out hard, especially off their road trip wanting to play well," Rolston said. "So we have to be ready for that and ready for a team with that excitement and emotion coming off the start."

Ruff, who has done no interviews locally or with any out-of-town media since his farewell press conference Feb. 22 in First Niagara Center, could be simply waiting out

the season and gauging all of his options after it's over. Virtually any team that makes a coaching change is likely to have him on their wishlist.

"We know that the first opportunity that a coach gets fired Lindy is going to be in the mix and we'll just wait and see what happens here," said defenseman Christian Ehrhoff. "He had been around this organization forever and it's going to be something awkward but special too to see him. For us as players we just have to go out there and do our jobs."

"You see trades and sometimes you have to play against one of your teammates a week later or the next day," said Steve Ott. "Likewise if a coach gets moved. I think it's just the professionalism of being a hockey player and going out and playing hard against whomever it is."

...

Rolston said he's a friend of Cooper, who won the Calder Cup last year at Norfolk and has led Syracuse to an AHL-best 39-18-8 mark this season as of Monday.

"He's won everywhere he's been and had a lot of success. He does a great job," Rolston said. "He'd be a great fit. They have a lot of their players here. It would be a transition where he could come in and know probably half the team. "

...

Rolston said there's a chance that defenseman Andrej Sekera, who has missed the last four games with an upper body injury, could play tonight. The coach added that former No. 1 draft choice Mark Pysyk will stay for now rather than return to Rochester, leaving the Sabres with seven defensemen for this trip.

There's no real change in the status of struggling winger Drew Stafford, who was scratched for Saturday's 2-1 win in Montreal. Stafford has four goals and a minus-12 rating in 31 games.

"He's just got to work hard and he's got to get himself in a situation as a leader to be working hard every day," Rolston said. "So we'll see, but we've been having success lately and we'll see what shakes tomorrow."

Sabres are much improved at blocking shots

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 25, 2013

Tampa, FL (WGR 550) -- The Sabres blocked 31 shots in Montreal on Saturday. That means 69 shots were stopped by Ryan Miller and the team.

It seems like ever since Ron Rolston arrived, the players are willing to sell out more to block shots.

The team has blocked 513 shots which is fourth in the NHL behind Colorado, Toronto and Anaheim. The thing that's weird is no Sabre is in the top 25 in the league. Christian Ehrhoff is 26th with 61 blocked shots. Mike Weber has 56 while Andrej Sekera has 51.

If you go to the forwards, Jason Pominville has 25 while Jochen Hecht is next with 22. Pat Kaleta has 19, but has missed games.

The disappointment is Thomas Vanek. He is willing to sacrifice his body at all costs in front of the net and will wind up injured because of it, but he's not at all willing to sellout to block a shot as he only has two.

Weber had eight blocked shots in Montreal. He said there's some that goes into it, "Just making sure you're in the shooting lane, where his stick is, where the puck is and just being there. The best part of shot blocking is when they actually don't shoot, they have to move it around you." Weber added, I think as a team we've gotten a lot better and it's something that has to get better, especially on our penalty kill, being in lanes, detouring guys from making passes through us or shots to the net."

If the Sabres want to be a good team, Weber thinks blocking shots is key, "It's a big part of the game, every elite team in this league is doing it. Teams are bulking up padding to do it, its desperation and it's one of those things that if you're sitting on the bench and you see a guy make a big block shot at a key point of the game, it gets you a little jacked up and the next guy over the boards goes and does the same." Robyn Regehr added, "I think we are doing a little bit better job of it, especially on the penalty kill, but it's an important part of the game and if there's a breakdown in the defensive zone and you're in a support position, usually you're in that lane to the net, so as a defender you always want to be between the puck and the net because that opponent either has to come through you or the puck has to come through you."

Blocking shots is something Robyn Regehr's been willing to do since he played in Calgary. He said, "There's a little bit of an art to it, The most important thing is you want to be in the shooters lane and preferably allow the goaltender to still see the short side of the net so if the puck does get by you, you're blocking the far side and he can still see the shot."

One of the things I wondered is how does a goalie look at it? On Saturday that was 31 pucks that Ryan Miller didn't have to handle, but there are cases, like the Alexander Ovechkin goal in Washington where he gets screened and doesn't see it. Miller said, "I view it as essential to today's game. It's part of a winning system where you want to get the puck back as soon as you can and not allow the team to cause havoc and confusion in front of your net, so I always appreciate it when the guys get in front of pucks. I know it hurts, they aren't protected quite the way we are. They have taken provisions the last few years with shot blockers around the ankles and the side of the foot. Some of the pucks are coming up and hard, especially on 5-on-3's and guys are getting them inside the hip and arm and sometimes in the ribs, so it's definitely a sacrifice, but it's just the way the game's evolved." Miller added, "There's such good shooters in the NHL, you need to take away time and space and frustrate them and make the game hard on them and that's part of it." Mike Weber also agrees blocking shots is painful, "It's just kind of a second nature for a lot of guys and it's not fun, but it's part of your job, especially mine to go down and get in front of those and they don't tickle so it's anything to help the team win."

I was always told by coaches if you're going to screen the goalie either block the shot or get out of the way. What does Miller do if he's screened, "If it's where we don't have good gap on that shot, I'm going to be a little more patient and just play off of it and try to find a puck through an opposing player, but if the guys have a good gap and it looks like there's a chance to block it, it gives me a chance to sit back a little bit in case the guy changes his mind or a rebound happens or it deflects around there, I can get the backside plays. It's definitely not something where you're going to give up on the play, assuming he's going to block it, you're trying to stay vigilant in the front, but there are situations where you can relax a little bit and read your options. Maybe that guy in the lane changes his mind and they move the puck and our hope is if we're blocking the middle, they'll move to the outside."

The Sabres ability to block shots is certainly something to watch as they try to improve under Ron Rolston.

Sabres improvement is why the gap is closing

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 25, 2013

Tampa, FL (WGR 550) -- The Buffalo Sabres went from 10th to 12th in the East without even playing. They are three points behind the 8th place New York Rangers and six in back of the 7th ranked New Jersey Devils.

Part of the reason Buffalo has closed the gap on points is its gone 7-3-3 picking up 17 of 26 points. That works out to .654.

There are little parts of the team's game that has improved under Ron Rolston. He said, "I think our power play as of late has been better (goals in four straight games, 4-for-15 or 26.7%) and that certainly helps the offensive production, but I think defensively we've done a better job about protecting our goaltenders and trying to limit the real quality chances. You're going to have those in a game, but we want to make sure we're limiting as many second opportunities as we can." The head coach added, "I think our team has become more patient in our zone, and we're trying to build, to be a little more patient in the offensive zone."

In those 13 games Jason Pominville has three goals and five assists for eight points. He said, "I think by far our defensive play. We were running around and all over the place in our defensive zone and it led to us not having the puck a lot and wasting a lot of time in our zone, but I think guys have taken more pride in it and we've worked on it and we've made some adjustments in our zone and we have been better. We're coming out of the zone cleaner and we're having the puck more than we did which you're going to win more games if you have the puck more."

With four teams still to leap in the standings it can be a daunting task. Pominville said, "The biggest thing is doing what we have to do, but knowing at the same time we're probably going to need some help along the way. Teams are playing each other and you don't want to see those three point games, but I think if we take care of our side of business and focus on what we have to do to get better and keep climbing, I think that's the main issue we should focus on."

Andrej Sekera practiced and Rolston said he has a chance, "I think so yes, we didn't do a whole lot of battling today, but we tried to put them in some situations that were game like so I think he'll be healthy."

Buffalo does not need the roster spot so they don't have to send down Mark Pysyk. It sounds like Rolston likes having seven D here, "Mark's played really well for us so that doesn't mean that he'll be out so we'll do that for sure. We want competition here and we want guys playing a certain way and competing and that just adds to the competition because we feel up front and on defense that we have the depth that guys can go into the

lineup and come out of the lineup depending on their level of compete and playing the way we want them to play.”

Drew Stafford is one of those guys as he was benched in Montreal. Rolston says there’s no guarantee he’ll be back against Tampa Bay, “He’s just got to work hard, and now he’s got to get himself, as a leader, to work hard every day so we’ll see, but we’ve been having success lately and we’ll see what shakes out tomorrow.”

The Lightning arrived home from Winnipeg at about 2:00 with still no word on whom the new head coach would be.

Sabres rookie Pysyk quickly earning keep on blue line

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 26, 2013

MONTREAL – Earlier this season, rookie Mark Pysyk, the same defense prospect now playing almost 16 minutes a game for the Buffalo Sabres, sat as a healthy scratch in the AHL three times.

“I just needed a little wake-up call,” Pysyk said Saturday inside the Bell Centre prior to the Sabres’ 2-1 win, his fourth NHL game.

When interim Sabres coach Ron Rolston benched Pysyk with the Rochester Americans in December, the odds of the Sabres’ 2010 first-round pick cracking the NHL this season appeared slim.

The Sabres possessed nine NHL defensemen then. A youngster sitting in the minors didn’t appear to be on their radar.

Pysyk “was getting too casual,” he said. He wasn’t winning battles or “playing with a good stick.”

“You can’t really be mad,” Pysyk said. “It’s basically on your play. The only thing you can get mad at is yourself if that’s the case. I didn’t get mad. I just knew what I needed to work on and started working on it.”

Today, 10 days into his first NHL stint, Pysyk’s experiencing what he calls a “whirlwind” acclimation.

“Every day it goes by, I don’t know what the plan is, whether I’m playing or going down or anything like that,” Pysyk said.

He has already won twice in the Bell Centre, arguably the NHL’s toughest building. The Sabres are aiming for their first four-game winning streak this season tonight in Tampa Bay against the Lightning.

“I didn’t see myself coming up this year,” Pysyk said. “But when I got the call, it definitely caught me by surprise. ... It’s unbelievable so far.”

Defenseman Andrej Sekera should return from his injury tonight, Rolston told reporters Monday in Tampa Bay. He said that doesn’t mean Pysyk will be yanked from the lineup, though. The Sabres will likely keep seven defensemen, Rolston noted.

If the 21-year-old Pysyk goes back down, he could be the first defenseman recalled.

With T.J. Brennan traded, Adam Pardy bypassed for a call-up recently and Alexander Sulzer out for the season, Pysyk has quickly jumped to seventh on the team’s defense depth chart.

“He’s been real solid. He’s really played confident,” said Jordan Leopold, Pysyk’s defense partner. “He’s played simple hockey. That’s what we need right now. Being a young guy, walking in a dressing room you don’t know everybody, it’s a little bit intimidating at times.

“He’s been able to keep quiet and go out and do his job. It’s not flashy, but very effective.”

Rolston, the Amerks’ coach until his Feb. 20 promotion, believes Pysyk is a “really mature player for his age.”

“(He’s) patient, positionally sound, good puck mover – just really a smart hockey player,” Rolston said.

The smooth-skating Pysyk thinks he’s a mix of offense and defense. He can turn the puck up the ice and make plays through the neutral zone, Rolston said, although he likely won’t lead the rush often.

“I like to get up on the offense on occasion,” Pysyk said. “Obviously, not too, too much. First and foremost is defending in my own zone, making a good first pass, a breakout. I think that’s what I do well.”

When Pysyk joined the Sabres after their morning skate last Sunday in Washington, Leopold, who didn’t know the Alberta native well, immediately tried to make him feel comfortable.

“I said, ‘Hey, we’re going to make this thing easy, and we’re going to go out and have a good game. You get questions, ask me. Don’t be intimidated. I’m going to be as good as you tonight, and you’re going to be as good as me,’” Leopold said. “To be able have that relationship and make sure he’s comfortable is one thing because he can go out there and play with confidence, not worry about what’s going on off the ice.”

A lot has changed in a short time.

Just a few months ago, Pysyk said he became “a little bit too comfortable” as his first professional season wore on. Not surprisingly, scratches followed.

All players, Rolston said, need a reminder.

“Their reward is their ice time and playing, basically,” he said. “For Mark, he’s got a lot of maturity to him. One of the best things a player can have is just maturity, knowing where he’s at and where he has to go. If you blame everything on something outside of you, then nothing is ever going to change.”

Pysyk added: “You need to realize every day you need to come, bring your best.”

Sabres go for four in a row vs. Lightning

By Brian Hunter

NHL.com

March 25, 2013

SABRES (13-15-4) at LIGHTNING (13-18-1)

TV: MSG-B, SUN

Last 10: Buffalo 4-3-3; Tampa Bay 4-6-0

Season series: Second of three meetings. Ryan Miller made 30 saves and Thomas Vanek set up goals by Cody Hodgson and Tyler Myers to lead the Sabres to a 2-1 win over the Lightning in Tampa Bay on Feb. 26.

Big story: The only NHL teams to have changed coaches since the start of the 2012-13 season face off at the Tampa Bay Times Forum. Buffalo has won three in a row to climb back into the Eastern Conference playoff picture. Tampa Bay is home for the first time since relieving Guy Boucher of his duties over the weekend.

Team Scope:

Sabres: If there was ever a stretch to make fans believe Buffalo might be able to overcome its lackluster first half to make the Stanley Cup Playoffs, the Sabres winning twice in Montreal in a span of five days might have been it. On Saturday they bent, getting outshot 39-18, but didn't break -- thanks to Miller, who finished with 38 saves, and Vanek, who returned from a one-game injury absence to score twice in the second period. His power-play goal at 10:25 opened the scoring, and he netted what proved to be the game-winner with 39 seconds left.

"Maybe it helps some of the guys in the room, but for me, we're going to need to win hockey games right to the end," Miller said. "There's no easy way to get to the playoffs, even teams that are at the top can't coast in. You want to be playing good hockey for the next month here, so we just want to get our game together and see where we land."

Lightning: A season that has disappointed to this point for Tampa Bay was highlighted by a tumultuous 24-hour stretch this weekend in which the Lightning fell in Ottawa on Saturday night, Boucher lost his job after two seasons and 32 games, and then the Lightning lost again in Winnipeg on Sunday by a 3-2 final. A trio of assistant coaches ran the bench, with Daniel Lacroix, Martin Raymond and Steve Thomas handling the duties. Steven Stamkos scored his League-leading 22nd goal in the defeat.

"We played a solid game," Stamkos said. "We haven't had a lot of those this year. When things aren't going well, they aren't going well. You have to find a way to push through them."

Who's hot: Tyler Ennis has two goals and four assists during a four-game points streak for the Sabres. Hodgson has four assists in the past two games.

Injury report: Buffalo defenseman Andrej Sekera (upper body) is day-to-day. Defenseman Alexander Sulzer (knee) is on injured reserve. ... Tampa Bay goalie Anders Lindback (ankle) and forwards Benoit Pouliot (shoulder), Vincent Lecavalier (lower body) and Ryan Malone (shoulder) are on injured reserve.

Lightning vs. Sabres Preview

By Pete Pupello

TampaBayLightning.com

March 26, 2013

Lightning (13-18-1, 27 Points) vs. Sabres (13-15-4, 30 Points)

TV/Radio: Sun Sports HD; AM 970 WFLA

Season Series:

This is the second of three meetings between the teams. The clubs faced off exactly one month ago to the day of Tuesday's game, back on February 26 in Tampa Bay where the Lightning fell to the Sabres 2-1. Following Tuesday's tilt, the two teams will conclude the season set on April 14 in Buffalo.

The Big Story:

The teams have put together a pair of streaks, but with each one headed in opposite directions. Tampa Bay has lost three straight, and following Guy Boucher's dismissal on Sunday morning, is not only looking to rebound from the skid, but is also still in need of a head coach to serve as Boucher's replacement. Buffalo, meanwhile, has earned a victory in each of its past three consecutive games to remain just three points behind the New York Rangers for the eighth and final playoff spot.

Team Scope:

LIGHTNING – Following a three-game road trip through Canada, the Bolts return home to begin a three-game homestand Tuesday night, that also sees the club host games in front of the hometown fans on Friday night and next Tuesday night, respectively. Tampa Bay looks to turn around its recent troubles, which continued Sunday night in Winnipeg, even with the Bolts putting forth one of their better efforts of the season. Steven Stamkos and Cory Conacher each had goals, with the latter tally bringing Tampa Bay to within one goal with 15 minutes still to play in regulation. Overall on the night, the Lightning overcame a pair of two-goal deficits to come within one twice. Jets netminder Ondrej Pavelec, though, made 23 saves and was strong down the stretch to earn Winnipeg the victory.

SABRES – Buffalo skates in the middle game of a three-game road trip that began in Montreal on Saturday with a 2-1 victory over the Canadiens. Following Tuesday's game, the Sabres will then head down to Sunrise to complete the trip with the finale coming at the BB&T Center against the Panthers. Once dead last in the Eastern Conference, Buffalo has revived itself, in large part thanks to interim coach Ron Rolston. Since Rolston's arrival, the team has vaulted itself back into the playoff picture, as it enters Tuesday just three points out of a qualifying spot. The Sabres continued their winning trend on Saturday at the Bell Centre, where Thomas Vanek scored twice and Ryan Miller turned back 38 of 39 shots to earn Buffalo its third straight win. The Sabres were outshot 39-18, but didn't break, as they kept any hope of a postseason berth alive.

Who's Hot:

Tampa Bay's Martin St. Louis has four assists in his past five games for the Bolts, while Sami Salo and Eric Brewer are currently each enjoying a pair of two-game assist streaks. Buffalo's Tyler Ennis has collected two goals and six points over his past four games and Cody Hodgson has racked up four assists in his past two contests.

Injury Report:

LIGHTNING – Vincent Lecavalier (Lower Body, Placed On Injured Reserve), Ryan Malone (Upper Body, Placed On Injured Reserve), Benoit Pouliot (Upper Body, Placed On Injured Reserve), Anders Lindback (Lower Body, Placed On Injured Reserve), Pierre-Cedric Labrie (Upper Body, Day-To-Day) and BJ Crombeen (Lower Body, Day-To-Day).

SABRES – Andrej Sekera (Upper Body, Day-To-Day) and Alexander Sulzer (Knee, Placed On Injured Reserve).

Twitter Stat Pack:

With an assist on Stamkos' goal, St. Louis notched his 892nd career point to move into a tie with Peter Bondra for 100th place on the NHL's all-time scoring list.

Tampa Bay averages 3.22 goals per game, good for third in the league, while Buffalo averages 3.06 goals against per game, which ranks 26th in the league.

Buffalo has the league's worst power play at 12.9 percent.

The Lightning have a .733 win percentage when scoring the first goal, ranking eighth in the league.

Notable Quotable:

“We all share the responsibility of where we sit today. There's a lot to play for. There's fighting for a playoff spot, playing for your teammates, playing for your own job, playing for your position.” – General Manager Steve Yzerman, on what he feels there is still left to play for even following the dismissal of Guy Boucher

