



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres will be sellers, but would welcome picks

By John Vogl
Buffalo News
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This does not appear to be the Buffalo Sabres' year. Their attitude heading toward Wednesday's NHL trade deadline will reflect that.

"The things that we will look to add will focus on things beyond this year," General Manager Darcy Regier said by phone Friday evening. "It may include this year, but the focus is going to be on next year and maybe even beyond that. So things that we do are going to be with that light in mind."

It's little surprise the Sabres will begin looking toward the future. They are in 12th place in the Eastern Conference heading into back-to-back home games, with visits by Washington tonight and Boston on Sunday. They are 4-4-4 in their last 12 games and 13-16-5 overall, meaning they don't qualify as buyers.

Instead, Regier will focus on the buyers, but he figures draft picks might be tough to acquire.

"With the cap going down and the new contracts on the other side that have been signed, I think it's added value to draft picks," he said. "In some ways, it's going to be harder to acquire draft picks for players in the event you're trying to trade a player to get draft picks."

This week, though, three significant trades made by Pittsburgh involved picks. The Penguins included a first-rounder in their deal with Calgary for Jarome Iginla; sent two second-round selections to San Jose for defenseman Douglas Murray; and received a third-round pick along with Brendan Morrow in a trade with Dallas.

"I believe what we gave up for Douglas Murray is the market for defensemen, rental defensemen," Pens GM Ray Shero said at a news conference. "It's what you pay, and it's what the price has been over the last year."

By that logic, the Sabres should be in position to acquire picks. Blue-liners Jordan Leopold and Robyn Regehr are pending unrestricted free agents who fit the criteria as trade targets.

"Right now what I'm really trying to think about is my game and our team," Regehr said following practice in Northtown Center at Amherst. "But to say that I didn't think about it a little bit? I'd be lying to you. That's just the reality of the situation."

Regehr is among several prominent Sabres with full or partial no-trade clauses. The list also includes goaltender Ryan Miller and Jason Pominville, who can submit a list of eight teams to which they do not want to be traded.

“I haven’t been asked anything. I’m not worried about it,” said Pominville, who nonetheless was visibly agitated by the trade talk. “You hear your name, and I think you hear your name from people that want more followers on Twitter.”

It’s significant that Pominville says he has not yet been asked for a list. Pominville’s agent rebuffed a report that such a list was required at the beginning of the season.

“The team has to ask Jason for the list if they have interest of dealing him,” Normand Dupont said via email.

Regier declined comment on his players with clauses.

While Pittsburgh has made an early splash in the trade pool, activity elsewhere has been minimal. That should change.

“Teams generally have an order in which they would like to acquire players, so the players in front have to drop before the other moves take place,” Regier said. “It’s bottlenecked right now, but I think it’ll open up as we get closer to Wednesday.”

Part of the reason for the standstill is the number of teams still near a playoff spot. Entering Friday’s schedule, the 14th-place team in both conferences was six points out of eighth.

“It’s usually supply and demand as we say, but Economics 101 in this case is demand and supply,” Shero told reporters in Pittsburgh. “The demand is greater than the supply.”

The closer to the trade deadline it gets, the better it might be for sellers like the Sabres. For evidence they need to look back only to last year. Buffalo wanted a first-round pick for third-line center Paul Gaustad, and in the final hours it finally shipped him and a fourth-round pick to Nashville for an opening-round selection.

“The pressure builds until the buyers and sellers match and agree on a price,” Regier said. “The closer you get to the deadline the prices can go up.”

Sabres approaching deadline in different ways

By Joe Buscaglia

WGR 550

March 29, 2013

Amherst, NY (WGR 550) -- It's always a tricky time of year for players around the National Hockey League. If they're on a member of a team that looks destined for a year without the playoffs, it's likely their employers could be branded with the 'sellers' tag at the trade deadline. The way the season has gone for the Buffalo Sabres, the overwhelming sentiments are that the front office could move some pieces to help their future by the time business closes on April 3.

Every player approaches the situation differently, at least in the way they publicly speak about it. Take forward Drew Stafford, for instance. Mired in a slump throughout the season, his name has been thrown around as a player that could be in line for a fresh start elsewhere.

Stafford is staunchly sticking with how he's approaching the deadline.

"No, I am 100-percent focused on getting back to where I need to be as a player to help this team win games," he said. "Anything else doesn't matter to me right now."

Then, there's defenseman Robyn Regehr. He's a player that has an expiring contract that a team may find attractive for a late-season and post-season rental to try to make a run for the Stanley Cup. Regehr gives in a little more than his teammate Stafford did.

"Well you're always thinking and preparing yourself for different situations. But right now what I'm really trying to think about is my game and our team," he said. "That's the main thing right now. But, to say I didn't think about it a little bit, I'd be lying to you. That's just the reality of the situation, but it's not something I'm focused on."

On the opposite end from Stafford, is captain Jason Pominville. For the first time in his many seasons with the Sabres, his name has been one of the leading stories revolving around trade rumors. Speaking about the trade deadline in generalities, the captain kept steady with the basic mindset a team would like to have while going through all of the rumors.

"You hear your name, I think you hear your name from people that want more followers on Twitter," Pominville remarked. "I mean, you hear your name hear and there, but where are those things really coming from? So I think we've just got to worry about playing. There's going to be rumors every year. It's the way it is, it's the nature of the sport. Is it what it is. We've just got to worry about what we've got to do."

As a follow up, Pominville was asked how all the extended rumors about him in particular has affected him leading up to April 3. The normally diplomatic captain became a bit edgier in his response.

"It doesn't affect me at all. I just answered the question," he replied. "It makes no sense to me right now. Again, I have a contract that has a clause in it and I haven't been asked

anything, so I'm not worried about it. I've just got to go out there and play, and if something happens, then I'll worry about it. But right now, it's just trying to win games."

The important part of that answer is that Pominville has not been asked by the Sabres' management to compile his list of eight teams that he would not go to. Still, with under five days to go, there is time for those conversations to happen.

In Regehr's case, he has a no movement clause on his contract, but said he has spoken with General Manager Darcy Regier.

"I've talked with him, just more mainly about the team and where we're at and what kind of things we need to do to improve," he said. "That was the main part of the conversation."

Not only do the players have to go through it, but so do the members of the coaching staff. Interim head coach Ron Rolston is going through many firsts in his first time behind the bench in the NHL, and he's getting his first taste of the lead-up to deadline day.

"It's there, and the guys know it's there," the coach said. "They've been through it, these guys have been through a lot of trade deadlines, so they understand what the consequences are. Their job, just as professionals, is just to come to the rink every day and do their best where they're at. Our guys have really had a good focus, so we'll see. We'll see what happens."

With only days to go before the trade deadline, the 'We'll see what happens' approach is running rampant throughout both the Sabres' locker room and western New York. Only time will tell who stays, and who goes when April 3 is over.

Sabres' Vanek doubtful vs. Capitals

By Joe Buscaglia

WGR 550

March 29, 2013

Amherst, NY (WGR 550) -- While the Buffalo Sabres approach a back-to-back home game stretch over the weekend, they'll likely have to go through the first leg without one of their top players. Thomas Vanek sat out of the team's shortened practice at the Northtowns Center Friday with an upper-body injury.

After the session concluded, interim head coach Ron Rolston said it was looking "doubtful" for Vanek to be ready for the team's home game against Washington on Saturday night. Rolston added that the forward is day-to-day. He was spotted on an exercise bike just as practice concluded.

Vanek sat out of the Sabres' last loss to the Florida Panthers. He has 16 goals and 17 assists in 29 games this season. Buffalo takes on Washington on Saturday, and Boston on Sunday at First Niagara Center.

Struggling Sabres facing possible make-or-break weekend with trade deadline approaching

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 30, 2013

BUFFALO – A stone-faced Ryan Miller was in no mood to dissect his team’s season-long struggles. The 13th-place Sabres still have 14 games left in what has again become a forgettable year. Technically, they’re not finished yet. When and if the time comes, the goalie will breakdown what went wrong.

“We’re trying to figure it out and battle,” Miller said Friday after the Sabres prepared for the Washington Capitals inside the Northtown Center in Amherst. “It’s not post-mortem.”

They’re getting awfully close to that toe tag, though.

The Sabres, losers of two straight, host the Capitals tonight inside the First Niagara Center and the Boston Bruins on Sunday. With 35 points, the Sabres trail the eighth-place New York Rangers, who have a game in hand, by four points.

The Sabres’ third straight win just a week ago ignited optimism and spirits as they crept to within two points of the final Eastern Conference playoff spot.

Now, fresh off earning a single point from two losses in Florida, their postseason chances have dwindled to just 3.2 percent, according to sportsclubstats.com.

This weekend could seal the Sabres’ fate and heavily influence their plans prior to Wednesday’s trade deadline.

Not surprisingly, some Sabres look and sound agitated.

“I’m frustrated, as you can see,” Miller said.

What frustrates Miller?

“We aren’t consistently playing to where we need to be, myself included,” said Miller, who lost Thursday’s 5-4 shootout loss to the Panthers, the fifth time in eight starts he allowed at least four goals. “Every night there’s something else going on where you just look back, these mistakes on my end, need to be better. It’s just night after night. Just got to clean it up and be consistent.”

Defenseman Robyn Regehr thinks the Sabres’ struggles are “mainly mental.”

“Being prepared, knowing what you have to do and going out there and doing it,” he said. “We haven’t done a good enough job of that this season.”

The responsibility to prepare falls on the players, Regehr said.

“You have to put the work in to warm up physically, to get in shape physically during the summer,” he said. “But some guys, I think they lacked a little in the mental preparation part coming up with a routine that worked mentally for them, and that’s the biggest challenge in this game.”

Naturally, trade speculation is heating up. The Internet became a cesspool of rumors years ago. Some players take it in stride. Others, well, don’t like it very much.

Sabres captain Jason Pominville, who has a limited no-trade clause, bristled at the suggestion he could be dealt, saying rumors don’t affect him.

“It makes no sense to me right now,” a visibly agitated Pominville said. “Again, I have a contract that has a clause in it. I haven’t been asked anything. So I’m not worried about it. I just got to go out there and play, and if something happens, I’ll worry about it.”

Pominville, normally the coolest of customers, believes most rumors are made up by people seeking attention.

“I think you hear your name from people who want more followers on Twitter,” he said. “They’ll come out and say different things. I mean, you hear your name here and there, but where are those things really coming from?”

“I think we really just got to worry about playing. There’s going to be rumors every year. That’s the way it is. That’s the nature of the sport.”

The rumors, Regehr said, don’t bother him. They’re part of being an NHL player.

“If you want to know any more about them, I think you’re asking the wrong Regehr right now,” said the 32-year-old, an unrestricted free agent this summer.

Of course, Regehr was referring to Sabres general manager Darcy Regier.

Regehr the player has a no-trade clause, something he waived to come to the Sabres from Calgary in June 2011.

The veteran acknowledged he recently chatted with Regier.

“I’ve talked with him, more mainly just about the team and where we’re at and what kind of things we need to do to improve,” Regehr said. “That was the main part of the conversation.”

But has Regehr started thinking about his future?

“You’re always thinking and preparing yourself for different situations,” Regehr said. “Right now, what I’m really trying to think about is my game. That’s the main focus right now. To say I didn’t think about it a little bit, I’d be lying to you. That’s just the reality of the situation. It’s not something I’m focused on.”

Defenseman Jordan Leopold and forwards Jochen Hecht and John Scott are the Sabres' other unrestricted free agents currently on the roster.

Defenders are always at a premium, especially in the playoffs. Leopold and Regehr could be coveted as rental players.

Leopold has been dished twice at the deadline –from Colorado to Calgary in 2009 and from Florida to Pittsburgh a year later – so he's used to all the speculation.

"I've been through it enough," Leopold said. "It's not always easy. ... Everyone has their rumors and philosophies and stuff like that. ... Sometimes it can motivate you as well."

Sabres prospect Tropp healed and playing again

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 30, 2013

BUFFALO – Sabres prospect Corey Tropp, thought to be done for the season after suffering ligament damage in his right knee playing for Rochester opening night, made a surprising return to the Americans' lineup Friday in their 4-1 home loss to the Toronto Marlies.

Tropp damaged the medial collateral ligament and anterior cruciate ligament Oct. 15 after scoring twice in the Amerks' 6-5 win over the Syracuse Crunch.

The 23-year-old winger underwent surgery later in the fall. He had an assist Friday.

Prior to the lockout, it was expected Tropp would have the inside track for a roster spot during NHL training camp. He won't be joining the Sabres soon, interim coach Ron Rolston said Friday inside the Northtown Center.

"He's had a good recovery," said Rolston, who coached the Amerks until his Feb. 20 promotion. "He's worked on it, though, his rehab. He's put a lot of time into rehab, getting himself where he needed to be."

Tropp played 34 NHL games last season, compiling three goals, eight points and 20 penalty minutes. He solidified a spot in late February and never gave it up.

The Sabres selected Tropp 89th overall in 2007. He played three seasons at Michigan State University before joining the Sabres' AHL affiliate in Portland for the 2010-11 season. He made his NHL debut Nov. 4, 2011, becoming the first forward summoned from Rochester.

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Winger Thomas Vanek, the Sabres' leading scorer with 16 goals and 33 points, didn't practice Friday and is doubtful for tonight's contest against the Washington Capitals inside the First Niagara Center, Rolston said.

A muscle strain sidelined the Austrian on Thursday, the fifth game he missed this season.

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The Sabres have signed forward Tim Schaller, an NCAA free agent from Providence, to an entry-level contract, according to several reports. The 22-year-old will finish school this year, according to the Providence Journal.

Schaller, 6-foot-2 and 210 pounds, compiled eight goals, 23 points and 61 penalty minutes in 38 games with the Friars this season.

Sabres On Edge as Trade Deadline Approaches

By Stu Boyar

WGRZ

March 29, 2013

AMHERST, N.Y.-Thursday was a long night for the Sabres. They returned to Buffalo after losing a 5-4 shootout decision to the Panthers in Florida. They arrived at home between three and four in the morning Friday.

Later in the day the team did some land training and then spent some time on the ice at the Northtown Center in Amherst. Forward Thomas Vanek did not practice with the team and head coach Ron Rolston said Vanek remains day to day and is doubtful for Saturday's home game against Washington.

Each year when the NHL trade deadline approaches it is a nerve wracking time for players. Although an accepted part of their profession the thought of packing up and moving their families at a moment's notice isn't fun to contemplate. Naturally players are asked about the trade deadline every year and when a team struggles there are more frequent questions are more rumors about different players.

Captain Jason Pominville is hearing his name in trade rumors for the first time since he's been with the Sabres. Pominville who seemed agitated by line of questioning said he thinks the rumors come from people trying to gain followers on twitter. Then said "It doesn't affect me at all. I just answered that question. It makes no sense to me right now. Again, I have a contract that has a clause in it, and I haven't been asked anything. I'm not worried about it. I've just go to go out there and play. If something happens, then I'll worry about it. Right now its just trying to win games." Forward Steve Ott had a different take on your name being out there at this time of the year. He said "I take it as a complement. "If your name is being mentioned its usually because other teams want you so that's a pretty solid complement to a lot of players and mostly I've thought of my aspect at the deadline as control what you can control and I do that by being a professional and working hard and letting the business take care of itself. That's something that's out of every single player's control but the thing you can control if your individual talents."

The NHL trade deadline is next Wednesday April third. The Sabres play in Pittsburgh Tuesday night.

Goaltender Ryan Miller is frustrated with his own performance and the Sabres overall play. "I think we're frustrated. "I'm frustrated, as you can see. I would hope they all feel the same way I do. I don't know, you're going to have to ask them. Just we aren't consistently playing to where we need to be, myself included. Every night there's something else going on where you just look back and there's mistakes; in my end, reads that need to be better. It's just night after night. We've got to clean it up and be consistent."

The Sabres are home Saturday against Washington. Face off is scheduled for 7-pm Saturday night. Buffalo is also home Sunday night as they will host the Boston Bruins. Face off for that game is scheduled for 7:30 pm.

Sabres dealing Miller seems unlikely

NHL.com

March 29, 2013

Would the Buffalo Sabres attempt to deal their rock between the pipes, Ryan Miller, in an attempt to acquire the assets necessary to re-establish themselves as a Stanley Cup contender?

Though it isn't out of the realm of possibility, the chances are unlikely leading up to Wednesday's NHL Trade Deadline at 3 p.m. ET.

Miller has one season remaining on his contract that comes with an annual salary-cap hit of \$6.25 million, according to Capgeek.com.

According to ESPN.com's Craig Custance, Miller does have trade protection in that he can submit a list of teams he won't accept a trade to, but some clubs believe the All-Star goalie, who has spent the past 10 seasons in Buffalo, wouldn't mind a change in scenery.

It was reported earlier this week that before the season Miller provided Sabres brass with a list of eight teams he wouldn't accept a trade to. Miller is 11-14-5 with a 2.91 goals-against average and .911 save percentage.

In addition to Miller, possible trade targets for teams seeking a goalie could come from the Calgary Flames with Miikka Kiprusof or Vancouver Canucks with Roberto Luongo.

Still, the odds of a team paying a huge price for any of the three remains slim.

Luongo is in the third year of a 12-year deal, and Kiprusof has one season remaining before becoming an unrestricted free agent in the summer of 2014.

Capitals, Sabres meet clinging to playoff hopes

By Corey Masisak

NHL.com

March 29, 2013

CAPITALS (15-17-1) at SABRES (13-16-5)

TV: CSN-DC, MSG-Buffalo

Last 10: Washington 5-5-0; Buffalo 4-3-3

Season series: The Capitals have won the first two meetings of the season; they have swept the season series against the Sabres once in franchise history (1988-89). Both games this season were in Washington -- the Capitals have won just 23 times in 73 trips to Buffalo since joining the NHL in 1974-75.

Big story: These teams are level at 31 points, and the one that doesn't claim two more in this contest could be pushed to 14th place in the Eastern Conference by the end of Saturday night.

Team Scope:

Capitals: Washington did everything it needed to by winning the final three games of its most recent road trip to squirm back into the Stanley Cup Playoff race. The schedule also set up perfectly for a postseason push: The Capitals play seven straight games against clubs outside the top eight in the East.

Well, the Capitals started this stretch with a 3-2 loss to the New York Islanders on Tuesday night after yielding a late goal to John Tavares. The prior time Washington lost to New York, it was just after a hot streak and triggered a three-game skid that nearly ended any hope of a sixth straight playoff berth.

This is the first of three road games in four nights, and the Capitals probably need four points to keep their fleeting hopes alive. Any fewer than that, and general manager George McPhee might be forced to consider trading Mike Ribeiro, who will be an unrestricted free agent in July.

Sabres: Lindy Ruff was fired after a 6-10-1 start, and though the Sabres haven't been winning a lot more for interim coach Ron Rolston, they have been collecting more points. Rolston's record sits at 7-6-4, and those extra non-regulation losses are the reason Buffalo still has scant postseason aspirations.

Buffalo's schedule isn't nearly as favorable as Washington's in the coming days. After this contest, the Sabres play six straight against teams currently in the top seven in the conference. Including this game, seven of the next nine are at home, but the Sabres are going to need to knock off teams well ahead of them in the standings to not be out of the playoff race in two weeks.

Who's hot: Capitals forward Alex Ovechkin has seven goals and 12 points in the past eight games. ... Sabres forward Tyler Ennis has two goals and five points in his past five contests.

Injury report: Capitals defensemen John Erskine (upper body), Tom Poti (back) and Tomas Kundratek (knee) and forward Eric Fehr (upper body) are all likely out. Ovechkin needed more than 20 stitches for a cut on his chin during practice Thursday but is expected to play. ... Sabres defenseman Alexander Sulzer (knee) is out, and forward Thomas Vanek (upper body) is questionable.

Capitals-Sabres Preview

By Taylor Bechtold

AssociatedPress

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After giving the Washington Capitals a lift during their last road swing, Braden Holtby looks to continue his recent success away from home as they begin another trip.

He might not have to face the Buffalo Sabres' leading scorer in the opener.

Holtby and the Capitals seek their fourth straight road win and a season sweep of the Sabres for the first time in 24 years on Saturday night.

While they appeared to be the verge of falling out of the Eastern Conference playoff hunt with five losses in seven games earlier this month, the Capitals (15-17-1) responded with three straight wins to close out their recent four-game trip.

Washington, however, had its run stopped in a 3-2 home loss to the New York Islanders on Tuesday.

"I don't think we came out with the fire we needed, the intensity we needed," center Matt Hendricks said.

Holtby, though, has two shutouts and a 0.99 goals-against average while winning four of five road starts. He'll try to continue that success in the opener of a three-game trip and lead the Capitals to their first sweep in this series since the 1988-89 season.

He'll catch a break if Buffalo is again without Thomas Vanek, who missed Thursday's 5-4 shootout loss at Florida because of an upper-body injury.

Vanek, who leads the team with 16 goals and 33 points, has four goals and six assists during a nine-game scoring streak against the Capitals.

The injury has come at a bad time for the Sabres (13-16-5), who are tied with Washington for 11th in the East, four points back of the New York Rangers and Islanders for the eighth and final playoff spot.

"There's 28 games on the table, we have to go get them," goalie Ryan Miller said.

Now the Sabres will try to end a two-game skid and build off their 3-0-1 record at home this month. They'll get their first look at the Capitals in Buffalo after losing the first two meetings on the road.

Jason Pominville, who had two assists in a 5-3 loss on March 17, has four goals and eight points in his last eight games against Washington.

The Sabres will likely have to give Miller some support since the Capitals have reached him for eight goals in two games this season.

Miller has just two wins and a 3.14 GAA in his last nine starts and has only three victories and a 2.82 GAA in his last 10 against the Capitals.

Alex Ovechkin has scored in both wins over the Sabres, giving him 19 goals and 31 points in 29 career meetings.

Ovechkin has three power-play goals in the last five meetings and leads Washington with 10 man-advantage goals on the season.

The Capitals are among the NHL's best teams on the power play at 24.1 percent and had scored with a man advantage in five straight contests before failing to convert on three chances against the Islanders.

They should be able to get back on track against the Sabres, who are near the bottom of the league in penalty-kill percentage (77.0) after killing only 11 of 17 penalties over their last four games.

"It's something different every day," coach Ron Rolston said of the team's struggles on the penalty kill.

While the Capitals have won three of four overall in this series, they've lost their last two trips to Buffalo.