



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

Tuesday, March 5, 2013

Kaleta's on-ice image takes another hit

By John Vogl
Buffalo News
March 4, 2013

RALEIGH, N.C. — Patrick Kaleta has taken pride in trying to rehabilitate his image. He's played on the edge — and over it — throughout his career, but repeated penalties and a four-game suspension last season led him to re-evaluate his style. He focused on legal hits rather than borderline blows and said even referees noticed the difference.

A hit delivered over the weekend has put Kaleta back on the bad-boy list.

The NHL delivered a five-game suspension to the Buffalo Sabres right winger Monday, one day after he boarded Brad Richards of the New York Rangers. Kaleta had an afternoon phone hearing with Brendan Shanahan about the major penalty, and the league's senior vice president of player safety issued the suspension a couple of hours later.

“In spite of the fact that Kaleta does not shove Richards with great force, he does so at an extremely dangerous distance from the boards,” Shanahan said in a video detailing the punishment. “Richards does not turn his back just prior or make any sudden movements that contribute to this illegal check. Kaleta is in full control of this play and has ample opportunity to make a better decision.”

Shanahan took into account Kaleta's status as a repeat offender and the fact Richards returned to the game in determining the suspension length. The five-game benching will cost Kaleta \$76,219.25, which goes to the Players' Emergency Assistance Fund.

“I just play hard, and I was on the penalty kill trying to do my job,” Kaleta said in the team hotel prior to talking with Shanahan.

It's the longest suspension of Kaleta's career. He earned a four-game sitdown last season for head-butting Philadelphia's Jakub Voracek and was sentenced to two games in 2009 for boarding the Flyers' Jared Ross.

Kaleta will miss tonight's game against Carolina in PNC Center and road games against New Jersey on Thursday and Philadelphia on Sunday. He'll also sit when the Rangers come to Buffalo next Tuesday and when Ottawa visits March 16.

“I have changed my game,” Kaleta said. “I know I have. I know players have seen that, and even referees have come up said, ‘Hey, I respect what you've done so far. As long as you keep showing that respect towards us, then we'll respect you.’”

“I loved hearing that and know that they've seen a change in my game, so I know I've changed my game.”

The Rangers disagreed, mocking Kaleta's style of play and calling the hit "disgusting." Richards sat out practice Monday with soreness, but coach John Tortorella told reporters in New York he expected the center to be fine.

Asked if he had a message to send to Richards, Kaleta paused for eight seconds before saying, "I'm fine for right now."

Kaleta felt worse for taking a five-minute penalty that gave the Rangers a five-on-three power play. They scored twice during the first minute of Kaleta's infraction to turn a 1-0 deficit into a 2-1 lead. New York beat the Sabres, 3-2, in a shootout.

"I'm just sorry for the position I put the team in trying to kill that penalty," Kaleta said. "I feel for that, for putting the penalty killers out there and them getting the two goals. It makes me feel like a bag of garbage after seeing that."

The Sabres will not make a roster move due to Kaleta's suspension. Left wing Thomas Vanek is expected to return for tonight's game after missing the past two games with an upper-body injury, and Buffalo also has enforcer John Scott available to dress.

The biggest hole to fill will be on the penalty kill. Kaleta is tied with captain Jason Pominville for the lead among forwards with 2:10 of short-handed ice time per game.

"Obviously, we've had some adversity already with Van being out a couple games and other guys stepping into roles," interim coach Ron Rolston said. "We have players that will go in, and the opportunity will be there for them to help our team be successful. We'll deal with whatever we have."

Rolston seeks cure for ailing power play

By John Vogl
Buffalo News
March 4, 2013

RALEIGH, N.C. — The Buffalo Sabres' power play ranks last in the NHL with a 10.7 percent success rate. They only wish it was clicking that well.

The Sabres enter tonight's game in Carolina in a 3-for-59 nose-dive with the man-advantage. That equates to only 5 percent during the last 16 games, so 10.7 percent would look pretty good right now.

Though they've struggled for much longer than the six games Ron Rolston has been behind the bench, the interim coach absorbed the blame Monday.

"Since I've been here, it's probably more my fault than anybody in a sense that with limited practice time coming in it's something that we really haven't put a lot of focus on," Rolston said from the team hotel after canceling practice. "We've had to focus on some other areas to get where we are more structurally, so it's my job now to make sure we put a lot of emphasis on that."

The Sabres are likely to work with the unit during the morning skate in PNC Arena before taking on the Hurricanes.

"We'll look at personnel, and we'll look at everything we can to make it better," Rolston said.

The unit could get a boost with the return of leading scorer Thomas Vanek, who is expected back after missing two games with an upper-body injury. But it will take more than one person to get the faltering unit on track.

"We just have to get more pucks on net, and the second opportunities are huge a lot of the times," defenseman Christian Ehrhoff said. "We get the puck to the net, and the team will get it and throw it down, and we have to start over from scratch. If you get those second opportunities, you get the teams scrambling and stuff will open up for you.

"Obviously, a huge part, too, is net presence. A lot of the time now with goalies being so good, with a clean shot they'll make the save. You've got to get screens so that they don't see the puck."

A personnel swap could include Mikhail Grigorenko, who skated with the unit for 1:51 during Sunday's 3-2 shootout loss to the New York Rangers.

"That was really the first since I've been here where he was able to put two in a row together of the same consistency and compete level and the details," Rolston said. "If he continues to play the way he is, those are possibilities for him."

...

Rolston elected not to practice following back-to-back games.

“We thought it was important for the guys to have a day where they could kind of recharge physically, mentally, emotionally to get back to where we needed to be,” he said. “We want to make sure we have the right energy.”

Several players had an off-ice workout, including Vanek and defenseman Jordan Leopold, who will miss his seventh game with an upper-body injury.

“Leo, he’s feeling better,” Rolston said. “He’s making good strides, but he still will probably be a little bit longer.”

Forward Ville Leino, who hasn’t played all season because of a hip injury, is also on the road with the team.

“We want those guys around so they can start getting back into things, getting back into practice situations with the guys,” Rolston said, “so when they’re ready to go there’s a better transition period there.”

...

Hurricanes goaltender Cam Ward could miss the remainder of the season with a knee injury, the team announced Monday. Ward suffered a third-degree sprain of his medial collateral ligament Sunday and will miss six to eight weeks.

Ward is 9-6-1 with a 2.84 goals-against average and .908 save percentage. Dan Ellis, who is 3-2 with a 2.53 and .923, inherits the crease.

“That’s tough,” Sabres goalie Ryan Miller said. “I don’t know if they’re going to be missing too much. Cam obviously is a big leader for them, but Ellis has played well.”

A complete statistical analysis of Rolston's first six games

By Matthew Collier

WGR 550

March 4, 2013

One of the biggest criticisms of Lindy Ruff was that he struggled to figure out the right roles for the players on his roster. Maybe he'd lost the room, maybe not. We'll probably never know from what went on behind closed doors. But from what we could quantify, Ruff was attempting to use many of his one-dimensional players in two-way roles. This led to poor defensive players being exposed by high amounts of defensive zone time. In the same vein, offensive players were limited by their lack of offensive zone time.

How much was intangibles and how much was qualifitiable? It's hard to seperate the two, but the Sabres' roster failed to perform up to potential under Ruff outside of the Sabres' top line of Thomas Vanek, Jason Pominville and Cody Hodgson.

Rolston took over an under-performing roster that was projected by Hockey Prospectus as somewhere in between a 6 and 8 seed – far from a bottom feeder.

After losing his first two games, Rolston has gained seven of a possible eight points in his last four including the team's best tape-to-tape performance on Sunday against the New York Rangers.

Despite the improvements the defensive struggles have not greatly improved. The Sabres have blown three third period leads and allowed 33.6 shots per game – nearly identical to their figure under Ruff.

Effort, poise and execution is improved and confidence is up after a few wins, but how has Rolston done from a statistical standpoint at using his players?

We explore...

Offensive Zone Starts

Cody Hodgson is dead last in the NHL amongst players with more than 200 minutes in goals against while on ice per 20 minutes at even strength at 1.665 and sixth worst in shots against while on the ice at 12.0 per 20.

Yet under Rolston – albeit in a small sample size – data collected by WGR by analyzing NHL.com's official Play-by-Play shows Hodgson has just a 39.0 Offensive Zone Start percentage in the six games since Ruff was fired. Under Ruff, his O-zone start percentage was 52.1.

To demonstrate how poor Hodgson's defense has been, New Jersey's Travis Zajac has been on the ice for 0.217 goals against and Jonathan Toews 0.232. And in terms of shots, David Backes is allowing 5.9 shots per 20 minutes while on the ice – less than half of Hodgson. (For examples of Hodgson's D-zone struggles, see 1:16 and 3:20)

None of this is by any means to suggest Hodgson is a bad player or shouldn't be on the ice, rather that his slowly developing defensive skills may be costing his team goals.

Why are offensive zone starts important?

An NHLnumbers.com study found that a positive offensive zone start differential of +100 over defensive zone starts resulted in an average of 3.3 points per season. That's the average skater. For an extremely talented offensive player it can be much more. Cam Charron wrote:

“In 2011-12, Daniel Sedin had a differential of +423 per 82 games, in about 876 zone-start-affected minutes. For every extra 100 zone starts, the above says he would gain 3.3 points, so our results suggest he gained about 14 extra points over the whole season from zone starts alone.”

The Canucks are most well known for understanding this effect. Vancouver GM Mike Gillis went so far as to admit the Canucks used Hodgson in the offensive zone 83.3 percent of the time during January of last season to bump up his offensive statistics to make him more attractive to deadline buyers.

Simply put: Talented players who receive more offensive zone starts than defensive will put up better scoring numbers. Many teams have caught on including the Pittsburgh Penguins, who use Evgeni Malkin in the O-zone 67.1 percent of the time. St. Louis's Alexander Steen has an O-zone start percentage of 67.5 and Rangers scorer Marian Gaborik is posting a 67.3 percent.

Sabres O-Zone Start chart

Name	Total Zone Starts	O-zone Start %	Adjusted O-Zone %
John Scott	2	100	104.3
Mikhail Grigorenko	11	90.9	95.2
Patrick Kaleta	27	66.7	71
Jochen Hecht	19	63.1	67.4
Marcus Foligno	39	61.5	65.8
Tyler Ennis	48	51.2	55.5
Drew Stafford	39	48.7	53
Kevin Porter	45	44.4	48.7
Thomas Vanek	40	35	39.3
Cody Hodgson	69	34.7	39
Jason Pominville	69	34.7	39
Steve Ott	52	34.6	38.9

While O-zone starts can be dished out to get the most scoring out of their one-dimensional players, spreading them around can be a delicate balance for coaches.

Rolston has used some O-zone starts to protect his rookies from more difficult situations. As you'll see, Marcus Foligno and Mikhail Grigorenko have the highest figures outside of John Scott's two O-zone starts.

Rolston has to juggle the players he'd like in the offensive zone with the players he needs to keep out of the defensive zone. But he's fighting an uphill battle in part because the Sabres' roster lacks two-way forwards – and for that matter, defensively talented players. Ott, Hecht, Kaleta and Pominville are the only players with a track record of defensive usage.

The Sabres' coach does not have an extremely talented two-way player like Zajac, who is only receiving 48.9 percent O-zone and still keeping pucks away from his net. So Rolston's been making due with using his top line in all the toughest situations.

The problem? It takes away offensive opportunities from his best scorers Hodgson, Vanek and Pominville and puts second-year Hodgson in situations that he's struggled with.

While again it is still an extremely small sample, you can see a clear pattern of Rolston using his top line to play in the defensive zone more often than the offensive. Even when adjusted to 50 percent from the Sabres' 45.7 percent team O-zone start percentage, Hodgson, Vanek and Pominville are still seeing many more D-zone starts than they even saw with Lindy Ruff in charge. Ruff used all three around 50 percent.

You can see by the chart who Rolston does not trust in the defensive zone: Grigorenko, Kaleta, Hecht and Foligno. Two of which are proven defensive players. While it certainly isn't as easy as it sounds, it may pay off in the long run to use Kaleta and Hecht in difficult defensive situations more often than Hodgson – who, again, is more or less the statistically worst defensive forward in the NHL this season.

Special Teams

The Sabres' power play has scored just three times in 59 opportunities. Player usage has clearly been an issue under the interim head coach.

Why? Hodgson ranks fifth in power play ice time despite having the highest scoring rate per 60 minutes on the Sabres last season with 5.52 points per 60. By comparison, Tyler Ennis, who ranks second in ice time, scored 2.01 points per 60. Hodgson also dominated the AHL under Rolston, leading the Amerks' top five power play.

Name PP TOI/Game

Forwards

Jason Pominville	05:13
Tyler Ennis	04:28
Steve Ott	04:09
Thomas Vanek*	03:47
Cody Hodgson	02:37

Nathan Gerbe	02:21
Drew Stafford	02:01
Marcus Foligno	01:33
Mikhail Grigorenko	00:22
Defenseman	
Christian Ehrhoff	04:43
Tyler Myers	02:11
Andrej Sekera	01:36

Stafford's 5-on-4 scoring rate also outranked Ennis last season with a 2.37. During his 31-goal season in 2010-11, the winger topped the Sabres with a elite 6.74 points per 60. Statistically, Stafford has shown the ability to be not only a good power play player, but a great one. He certainly should be getting more ice time than Ennis and Steve Ott – whose career high in power play points is 12. Stafford has seen seasons of 17 and 19.

Rolston suggested he will consider shaking the power play rotations from how Ruff had them. Don't be surprised if you see a boost if Hodgson and Stafford see more time. And if top draft pick Grigorenko is given more chances.

Penalty Kill

The Sabres have allowed six power play goals in six games under Rolston so far. The best team in the NHL has only allowed seven goals in 19 games. But the root of the penalty kill problem does not appear to be deeply related to player usage. Since Rolston took over, the only improvement in terms of TOI is possibly seeing long-time Sabres PK'er Jochen Hecht seeing more ice time than Hodgson and Stafford.

Name PK TOI/Game	
Defenseman	
Robyn Regehr	04:29
Mike Weber	03:59
Tyler Myers	02:18
Christian Ehrhoff	01:59
Andrej Sekera	01:10
Adam Pardy	00:23
Forwards	
Steve Ott	02:32
Jason Pominville	02:20
Drew Stafford	02:09
Patrick Kaleta	02:03
Cody Hodgson	01:57
Kevin Porter	01:47
Jochen Hecht	00:31

Schedule Advantage and Going Forward

Rolston's first six games have been against easier competition than Ruff did in the 16 games before his firing. WGR's research found the combined goal differential of the Sabres' first 16 opponents was +2.5, which ranked as the fourth hardest schedule in the NHL. At the time of Ruff's dismissal, Rolston's first six opponents had an average -2.8 goal differential. By traditional methods, this is easy to see as well. Only two of the six are currently in the top eight in the Eastern Conference standings.

There is also law of averages coming into play. PDO, a statistic that demonstrates how much good or bad luck a team has had in terms of shooting percentage and the performance of goaltenders against them showed the Sabres to be well below average under Ruff and, unsurprisingly, coming back to life in the past several games. Under Ruff, 10 players on the Sabres have below average "luck" by the PDO measure. Some, such as Nathan Gerbe, Drew Stafford and Marcus Foligno were well underneath the average.

What does it all mean?

Your eyes tell you Rolston has had an impact on some of the intangibles involved with winning hockey games. The Sabres did not panic after losing leads in the third period. Several important players have seemed more confident and overall execution at 5-on-5 has improved. His decisions to bring up Adam Pardy and Kevin Porter are also paying dividends on the defensive side of the ice, it appears. But by statistical measures, there are still improvements that need to be made. The stats say Rolston should work to find more ways to get Hodgson and Vanek in the offensive zone to maximize their production. It also appears he should give Hodgson and Stafford more power play time and Ennis and Ott less.

Overall, a 3-2-1 start is as good of a start as anyone could have hoped for. The ship is headed in the right direction and the Sabres have a chance to reach their original projection finishing spot. However, improvements in the roster in terms of two-way forwards and more focused player usage could improve the chances of that actually happening.

Sabres get a rest day that Miller needs

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 4, 2013

Raleigh, NC (WGR 550) -- Ryan Miller leads the NHL in minutes played so he could use the day off Ron Rolston gave the team on Monday.

Miller has been in the crease for 1254:28. Next is Ilya Bryzgalov of the Flyers with 1196:04.

Miller is used to a heavy work load, but he's not used to 33 shots against him per game. Miller said, "I feel fine, trying to maintain, it's tough on everybody and you just have to get your rest and recover and go back out. It's funny, it kind of feels like playoffs, it's almost every other day, you grind it out, you feel tired, but you're in it so you kind of except it and you just do it and it's just where I'm trying to get my head." Miller added, "As far as the shots, it's whatever the team needs right now. We're slowly improving in little areas and I've got the guys around me a lot more now so you're going to see more perimeter shots and I know when they get inside, I'm going to have help and guys working hard trying to get back, so I'm trying to key up on the first shooters, read a play quickly and just try to commit and put a little energy into the play and try to get a hold of the first shot knowing that the boys are going to work hard to clean up some stuff."

Ron Rolston hasn't been around long, but he has a read on his players. He said, "We thought it was important for the guys to have a day where they could recharge physically and mentally, emotionally to get back to where we need to be tomorrow, so with the lockout schedule, it's very important to be in tune to where's the energy level of the team and you want to make sure you have the right energy."

Thomas Vanek was able to work out on Monday. Rolston said, "He seemed good, he's going to a workout and he seems like he's got good energy so we're very hopeful that's going to be the case."

As far as Jordan Leopold and Ville Leino go Rolston said, "Leo, he's feeling better, he's doing well, he's making good strides, but he'll still probably be a little bit longer, but I don't think it's going to be too long." Rolston added, "We wanted Ville and Leo on the trip just because we feel they're close and we want to get them involved back acclimated with the team and practice situations with the guys and being around the guys so when they're ready to go, there's a better transition period."

We all know Jhonas Enroth hasn't won a game in 12 starts. On the other hand we've seen Enroth play where he's been very good. Miller has a good relationship with his backup and he is trying to do anything he can to help him along, "He's a tremendous goaltender and I've been trying to put myself in his position, just trying to stay positive and talking to him and see what's going on in his life and just make sure we're always checking in day to day. We're talking about situations when we can and I try to keep him engaged in that kind of stuff."

Enroth this season is 0-2-0 with a 4.73 goals against and .847 save percentage. He hasn't played since February 5th in Ottawa. Miller said, "I feel for him. He's played some really strong games where he really hasn't had any puck luck or we've had situations at the start of the season we weren't picking up defensively where we have been in the last few weeks or so where we've gotten better. Those odd man rushes and stuff have been cleaned up a lot more. He's gotten a few games where that's really all he's seen so he gets out there and he battles and I know next time he's in the net he's going to do the same thing. I hope he can get a little bit of puck luck on his side because he's always trying to do the right things."

Sabres Kaleta is sorry for one thing

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 4, 2013

Raleigh, NC (WGR 550) -- Pat Kaleta is well deserving of the suspension he receives from the NHL. He blatantly hit Brad Richards with a cross check from behind on Sunday night and the photo that goes along with this article shows beyond any doubt, that he did not take a dive.

We got a chance to speak with Kaleta before his phone meeting with the NHL and Brendan Shanahan. Kaleta was sorry for only one thing, "I'm going to keep it as limited as I can, but I'm just sorry for the position I put the team in trying to kill that penalty. I feel for that, putting the penalty killers out there and them getting the two goals, it makes me feel like a bag of garbage after seeing that, but I'm glad our team responded with that, I'm proud of it and I'm just going to go forward."

As far as if he has anything to say to Richards, Kaleta waited for nine seconds and said, "I'm fine for right now."

As far as what Kaleta saw right before the hit he said, "I was on the penalty kill, you're playing a zone, you're not really supposed to finish checks and I just play hard and I was just trying to do my job."

Kaleta is a repeat offender with his suspension for a head butt, but he has made an effort to change his game. The winger said he's gotten feedback from the referees, "I have changed my game, I know I have and I know players have seen that and even referees have come up and said, 'Hey, I respect what you've done so far and as long as you keep showing that respect towards us, then we'll respect you' and I loved hearing that and knowing that they've seen a change in my game."

The one thing that hurts Kaleta the most is not being able to get out there with them because of a suspension, "It's like watching your teammates go out there and battle and you're not able to."

Sabres Future Blueliners McNabb, Pysyk Impressing in Rochester

By Matthew Coller

WGR 550

March 4, 2013

So I've been trying to think of a name for the Rochester Americans' top defensive pairing of Brayden McNabb and Mark Pysyk. Here's what I have so far: Bark McSyk. Mayden PyNabb. BraySyk.

Well, I'll have to keep working on it.

The clever fans of Buffalo might want to start thinking about a nickname now because the Amerks' top pair could very well be their one of their top combinations for the Sabres next season. McNabb – who fans became acquainted with last season – and first-year professional Pysyk have done a great deal of impressing in the American Hockey League and are getting closer and closer to being ready for The Show.

Neither is quite up for the Sabres' lineup this season. McNabb struggled out of the gate and didn't begin to look like the NHLer he was last season until around the time the NHL lockout came to an end. Since the lockout's end, however, he's taken off with 15 points in 18 games and a plus-2 rating.

“I've seen some significant changes in his game in the last month and a half,” Amerks head coach Chadd Cassidy said. “When he's playing at his best, he runs the game. He's gotten away from trying to make plays when they are not there. I think you see a lot more of him making strong plays, just high flips out of the zone when he's in trouble or just getting it deep in the offensive zone if there's nothing there.”

McNabb played 25 games for the Sabres last season and scored eight points last season. In the American Hockey League, McNabb has totaled 63 points in 98 games and is plus-17.

As for Pysyk, the 21-year-old had to make the usual adjustments involved with coming from juniors – namely getting used to playing against guys twice his 6-foot-1, 190-pound size.

“I think the biggest thing is my stick battles,” Pysyk said after practice last week. “Earlier in the year, I was a little softer with stick and body battles in the corner. I'm playing against bigger, stronger guys than in junior, so it took me a little while to rap my mind around the fact that every time you go for a puck, you have to go your hardest. No free passes.”

Speaking of passes, Pysyk, who is plus-8 in 51 games this season with 15 points, hits his teammates' tape at an NHL level. That combined with his solid skating ability, quick decision making behind his own net and vision to find open forwards on defensive zone exists have made it obvious why he was a top draft pick.

“When you watch him play, there's a very low panic point,” Cassidy said. “He never gets rattled and he never puts himself in bad situations. He also has an unbelievable stick. It's amazing how many times he goes into a scrum and comes out with the puck and puts it on our centerman's tape and we're out of the zone.”

Cassidy adds that his young D-man is, well, a pretty bright guy.

“He's as smart and heady a defenseman as we've had in the couple years I've been here,” the Amerks' coach said.

Though he isn't going to have outbursts on the ice or drop the gloves, Pysyk's makeup showed through in juniors. He was the captain of the championship-winning Edmonton Oil Kings and played a great deal of the end of the season with a broken foot. During the playoffs he was plus-9 with 11 points in 20 WHL playoff games.

Current Sabres interim head coach Ron Rolston was impressed early on by Pysyk's play. After the fourth game of the season, he said, “he's catching on quickly, that's what the good ones do.”

In order to make the Sabres' roster next season, Pysyk needs to bulk up. While it isn't his game to throw his body around, he'll have to be stronger to match up nightly with the NHL's strongest forwards.

“The biggest thing in his development is getting bigger physically,” Cassidy said. “Even at this level there are nights where he'll get moved off the puck playing against bigger forwards.”

Pysyk agrees with Cassidy about bulking up. He also said he's still taking the opportunity in Rochester to learn from the NHL'ers who are playing (or have played) in the minors this year from veterans such as Adam Pardy, Cody McCormick and Matt Ellis.

When will we see McNabb and Pysyk...err, McSyk? It's possible they both could see a few games in the NHL if there's a deadline move or the injury bug strikes again, but with Jordan Leopold and Robyn Regehr set to become free agents at the end of the year, it's a pretty safe bet Sabres' fans will see one or both (PyNabb?) in the lineup every night in 2013-14.

MONDAY UPDATES: KALETA GETS FIVE GAMES

By Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

March 4, 2013

UPDATE (5:30 p.m.) – Following a phone hearing this afternoon, Patrick Kaleta has been handed a five-game suspension by the NHL for his hit on Brad Richards during the third period of Sunday's game in New York. Because the hearing took place via the phone, five games was the maximum number of games that Kaleta could have received.

From the NHL:

Buffalo Sabres forward Patrick Kaleta has been suspended for five games, without pay, for boarding New York Rangers forward Brad Richards during NHL Game No. 317 in New York on Sunday, March 3, the National Hockey League's Department of Player Safety announced today.

Kaleta is considered a repeat offender under the terms of the Collective Bargaining Agreement. Based on his average annual salary, he will forfeit \$76,219.25. The money goes to the Players' Emergency Assistance Fund.

The incident occurred at 3:28 of the third period. Kaleta was assessed a major penalty for checking from behind and game misconduct.

UPDATE (1 p.m.) -- The Sabres are off today, but both Patrick Kaleta and interim head coach Ron Rolston met with reporters this afternoon at the team hotel in Raleigh.

Not surprisingly, Kaleta wouldn't comment specifically on the hit on Brad Richards that landed him a disciplinary hearing with the league at 3 p.m. Kaleta did say how upset he was for what his actions immediately resulted in, and that was two power play goals by the Rangers to pull ahead 2-1 at the time.

"I'm sorry for the position I put the team in trying to kill that penalty ... makes me feel like a bag of garbage after seeing that."

With the Sabres already having to deal with the absence of an injured Thomas Vanek for the past two games, Rolston said the team will just have to continue on with another lineup change if Kaleta is forced out for any period of time.

"Obviously we've had some adversity already since I've been here with Vanek being out a couple of games, and other guys stepping into roles. We have players that will go in and their opportunity will be there for them to help our team be successful. We'll do with whatever we have."

RALEIGH, NC (9:45 a.m.) – The NHL announced this morning that Patrick Kaleta will have a hearing with the league at 3 p.m. today for the game misconduct he received during Sunday's game in New York.

Below via the NHL:

Buffalo Sabres forward Patrick Kaleta faces a hearing with the Department of Player Safety on Monday afternoon for an incident in a game Sunday night against the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden.

Kaleta received a five-minute major for checking from behind and a game misconduct for a hit he delivered against Brad Richards at the 3:28 mark of the third period.

The Sabres are off today, but Kaleta is scheduled to meet with the media around Noon at the team hotel in Raleigh. Stay tuned to Sabres.com and @BuffaloSabres for updates and reaction.

SABRES PROSPECTS REPORT

By Kris Baker

Sabres.com

March 4, 2013

Wisconsin defenseman Jake McCabe (2012, second round) walked away with a goal, assist and a season-high plus-four rating Saturday as the No. 16 Badgers finished off a WCHA road sweep with a 6-2 win over No. 13 Nebraska-Omaha. The two-point night gives the Eau Claire, Wis. native three goals and 15 points through 30 games, tops among Badgers defenders.

McCabe began his production at 2:56 of the second period when his shot bounced off the back boards into the crease, where it was tapped in by Ryan Little to give Wisconsin a 2-1 advantage. Later in the frame, McCabe charged to the paint for a rebound goal to extend the Badgers' lead to 4-1. The tally, McCabe's third of the season and first since returning from the World Junior Championship, snapped the sophomore's 19-game goal drought.

Sophomore forward Brad Navin (2011, seventh round) registered one shot on goal in the weekend set for the Badgers, who close the WCHA regular season next weekend versus St. Cloud State.

European Leagues

Joel Armia (2011, first round) continued to be a key offensive cog last week, notching an overtime assist on Tuesday and striking for a pair of goals Thursday as Assat Pori extended their SM-liiga winning streak to 13 games. With 18 goals through 45 games, including five in his last eight, the 6-foot-3 winger equals his previous career best achieved in both 2010-11 (48 games) and 2011-12 (54 games). The Aces, who remain in third place in the SM-liiga standings with three games to play, will look to keep the good times rolling Thursday when they face JYP.

In Sweden, Linus Ullmark (2012, sixth round) made 22 saves Thursday as MODO dropped a 3-1 decision to Brynas IF. Ullmark, who surrendered a pair of goals to 2013 draft eligible Elias Lindholm, saw his SEL record move to 3-1 with a 2.07 GAA and .934 save%. MODO wraps up the regular season schedule Tuesday versus Skelleftea AIK.

WHL

In Sunday action, Saskatoon goaltender Andrey Makarov stopped 34 shots but his franchise record 18-game winning streak was snapped in a 5-4 overtime loss at Moose Jaw. The Blades squandered a four-goal lead in the final frame before Makarov ventured far out of his net in the opening minute of overtime to allow the Warriors to cash an open net. The Russian backstop was outstanding throughout the historic run, posting a 1.54 GAA and .952 save% along with three shutouts.

Logan Nelson (2012, fifth round) sparked the Victoria offense with four goals and seven points in the week's three games, but the struggling Royals came away empty to extend

their losing streak to a season-high nine games. The 6-foot-1 forward will shoot for four-straight multi-point outings on Tuesday when Victoria visits Kamloops.

Colin Jacobs (2011, fourth round) went without a point Friday as Prince George was defeated by Kamloops 4-1. Jacobs has amassed a team-leading 22 goals and 45 points in 57 games for the Cougars, who enter the week winless in their last four and eight points behind Seattle for the final Western Conference playoff spot.

OHL

Justin Kea (2012, third round) notched an assist Saturday as Saginaw came up short in a wild 8-7 loss to Sarnia. The hard-working forward has 21 goals on the year, including four short-handed, three on the power play and three game winners.

Dan Catenacci (2011, third round) went without a point in the week's three games as Owen Sound maintained the third-overall position in the Western Conference standings. Catenacci continues to lead the Attack with 34 goals and 72 points

Belleville defenseman Brady Austin (2012, seventh round) put his mobility and physicality on display as the Bulls ran their winning streak to 10 games before dropping a pair of weekend tilts. Austin has 19 points (5+14) and plus-10 rating for the Bulls, who sit atop the Eastern Conference standings with seven games left.

Alex Lepkowski (2011, fifth round) netted a plus-one rating as Barrie earned a pair of victories, including a 2-0 shutout of Mississauga on Friday that clinched first place in the Central Division. The rugged defender has eight assists and a plus-nine rating in 53 games.

NCAA

Christian Isackson (2010, seventh round) moved up to a scoring line with Florida prospects Nick Bjugstad and Kyle Rau on Saturday as No. 2 Minnesota claimed a victory over No. 10 Denver. The sophomore forward has collected 16 points (3+13) through 34 games heading into the Gophers' season-ending series at Bemidji State.

Despite 'changed' style, Sabres' Kaleta banned 5 games for boarding Richards

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 4, 2013

BUFFALO – Patrick Kaleta insists he has changed his game over the years, calming his ultra-aggressive style down to become a more complete and responsible player.

Players have noticed, he said. Referees have even lauded the Sabres' top agitator.

"The referees have come up and said, 'Hey, we respect what you've done so far. As long as you keep showing respect toward us, then we'll respect you,'" Kaleta told reporters Monday in Raleigh before the NHL suspended him five games for cross-checking the Rangers' Brad Richards from behind into the boards. "I loved hearing that knowing that they've seen the change in my game. So I know I've changed my game."

Clearly, Kaleta hasn't changed enough.

Following a Monday afternoon phone hearing, NHL discipline czar Brendan Shanahan suspended the "repeat offender" the maximum number of games he could without meeting him in person.

Kaleta, who had two previous suspensions, can return to the lineup March 17 in Washington. He will forfeit \$76,219.25 in salary. The ban starts tonight in Carolina against the Hurricanes.

He was assessed a five-minute boarding major and a game misconduct at 3:28 of the third period Sunday in New York after cross-checking Richards at the outside edge of the left faceoff circle while killing a penalty. In a scary scene, Richards tumbled headfirst into the boards, his neck twisting as he hit.

"In spite of the fact that Kaleta does not shove Richards with great force, he does so at an extremely dangerous distance from the boards," Shanahan said in a video posted on NHL.com explaining his decision.

Shanahan also noted: "Richards does not turn his back just prior or make any sudden movements that contribute to this illegal check. Kaleta is in full control of this play, and has ample opportunity to make a better decision."

Richards grimaced in pain on the ice for a minute or two before skating off. The center later returned to the Rangers' 3-2 shootout win, something Shanahan noted.

He sat out practice Monday, although Rangers coach John Tortorella expects him to be fine.

The Rangers scored two quick power-play goals after Kaleta was ejected to briefly grab the lead.

“I’m sorry for the position I put the team in trying to kill that penalty,” Kaleta said. “I feel for that, putting the penalty killers out there and them getting the two goals makes me feel like a bag of garbage after seeing that. But I’m glad our team responded with that. I’m proud of it, just going to go forward.”

Kaleta didn’t offer many details about the hit itself.

“You’re playing a zone,” he said about killing the penalty. “You’re not really supposed to finish checks, etc. I just play hard. I was on the penalty kill trying to do my job.”

Does Kaleta have a message for Richards? He paused several seconds after being asked.

“I’m fine for right now,” he said.

Not surprisingly, the hit incensed the Rangers.

“It’s probably one of the most dangerous hits I’ve seen,” a “fuming” Tortorella told reporters following the game, according to the New York Daily News. “It’s ridiculous. ... It’s disgusting. It’s a lack of respect. Each team wants to beat the other team, but you need to respect what’s going on on the ice.”

Richards said Kaleta’s hit was “a little different than a head shot.” He called it “just stupidity.”

“If we’re all going to look at each other’s numbers, ram each other from behind headfirst into the boards, it’s going to be a tough game to play,” Richards told reporters. “It’s not hockey. I don’t know what game he plays, actually. He doesn’t play hockey to begin with. It’s the same guy all the time.”

Richards said he “couldn’t breathe to start” following the hit.

“I just kind of tried to collect myself, do a mental check ... (then) I got in the tunnel and heard a goal right away,” he said. “We needed to get something going so at least we got something out of it.”

Opponents have loathed Kaleta for years. The 26-year-old winger’s aggressive play and history of questionable hits have put him under the microscope.

When Shanahan suspended Kaleta four games for head-butting Philadelphia’s Jakub Voracek early last season, he cited several previous incidents.

The league hasn’t reviewed Dan Girardi’s minor boarding penalty on Tyler Ennis 54 seconds into overtime. The Rangers defenseman quickly zoomed in and hit Ennis, who had his back turned, from behind as the center grabbed the puck along the end boards.

Ennis went down briefly before slowly getting to his feet.

xxx

Interim Sabres coach Ron Rolston told reporters in Raleigh he was “very hopeful” leading scorer Thomas Vanek (upper body) could return tonight following a two-game absence.

In other injury news, defenseman Jordan Leopold (hand) is “making good strides” but will miss a little more time, Rolston said. Defenseman Alexander Sulzer (lower body) isn’t expected back “for a while.”

The Sabres had Monday off.

NHL suspends Sabres RW Kaleta 5 games for boarding

Associated Press

March 4, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) -- The NHL suspended Buffalo's Patrick Kaleta for five games Monday, its stiffest punishment of the season.

The Sabres forward shoved Rangers center Brad Richards from behind and into the boards on Sunday night.

The suspension will cost the gritty right winger more than \$72,000 in salary, and he won't be eligible to return until March 17, when the Sabres play at Washington.

The ruling came down a day after Kaleta blindsided Richards in the back and sent him sliding headfirst into the boards in the third period of Buffalo's 3-2 shootout loss at New York. Kaleta was assessed a major penalty for boarding and a game misconduct, which resulted in an automatic review by the league's department of player safety.

In reviewing the play on a video posted on the league's website, NHL disciplinarian Brendan Shanahan noted Kaleta shoved a defenseless player from behind. He added, "Kaleta is in full control of this play, and has ample opportunity to make a better decision."

Shanahan took into account that Richards was shaken up, but returned soon after. He also noted Kaleta had been suspended twice before in his career.

The suspension is one game longer than the suspension handed out to Philadelphia Flyers forward Harry Zolnierczyk a day earlier. Zolnierczyk was suspended four games without pay for a charging penalty against Ottawa Senators defenseman Mike Lundin on Saturday.

Kaleta is one of the Sabres' top penalty killers, and noted for his aggressive style. He has no points and a team-leading 46 penalty minutes in 18 games this season.

The Sabres (9-12-2) are in the midst of a four-game road trip, and play at Carolina on Tuesday.

Kaleta hit on Richards could become rally big deal

By Brett Cyrgalis

New York Post

March 5, 2013

Brendan Shanahan, the NHL's disciplinarian, decided to punish Sabres' repeat mugger Patrick Kaleta over the phone, suspending him for five games yesterday with no requirement for a face-to-face meeting.

Kaleta's third career suspension (among many other similar incidents) was a result of his reckless and dangerous hit from behind to Rangers center Brad Richards in the third period of the Blueshirts' 3-2 shootout victory on Sunday. The hit left Richards writhing in pain on the Garden ice, but not seriously injured.

Richards missed practice yesterday, but coach John Tortorella seems to expect him to play in tonight's Garden match against the Flyers (11-11-1).

"He'll be fine," Tortorella said.

According to Shanahan's video explanation and the league's mandated policy, the lack of a long-term injury was one factor in limiting the amount of games for which Kaleta was banned.

"Kaleta is in full control of this play," Shanahan said, "and has ample opportunity to make a better decision."

What remains to be seen is whether Kaleta will take Shanahan's message to heart in the same way he took it in the wallet, forfeiting \$76,219.25 of salary. Luckily for Kaleta's own health, the forced absence will keep him out for next Tuesday's matchup, when the Rangers and Sabres square off in Buffalo.

"I just play hard, and I was on the penalty kill trying to do my job," Kaleta told the Buffalo News before he spoke with Shanahan. When asked if he had anything to say to Richards, there was an eight-second pause before Kaleta said, "I'm fine for right now."

The good news for the Rangers (10-8-2) is that this singular act of what Richards termed "stupidity" seemed to galvanize their team. They came out on the ensuing power play and scored two goals in 43 seconds, going on to win back-to-back games for just the third time this season.

"You win a couple games, it always helps [team confidence]," Tortorella said after yesterday's practice. "I thought we stayed with it, we make them pay for their stupidity and follow through getting the two points."

There was also some noise made from the dark corners of NHL fandom about the hit Rangers defenseman Dan Girardi put on the Sabres' Tyler Ennis that resulted in a boarding minor, 54 seconds into overtime.

“I was just trying to get the puck, I’m not really trying to hit him hard or anything,” Girardi said. “It’s really not comparable at all. But I don’t bother myself with the stuff at all.”

Instead, the Rangers killed off that penalty and won in the shootout. So if it was a shove in the back to Richards from some rogue malcontent that becomes a kicking-off point to finally get the Rangers’ Stanley Cup aspirations back on track, so be it.

“The only way you can win in this league consistently,” Tortorella said, “is just continue to go about your business, and try to be as hard as you can in trying to find a way to win.”

* Forward Arron Asham did not participate in practice and it looks as if he’ll miss his sixth straight game with back spasms. ... The Rangers signed free-agent forward Josh Nicholls to an entry-level contract. The 20-year-old was a seventh-round pick of the Maple Leafs in 2010, and after Toronto chose not to sign him, he reentered the 2012 draft and went unpicked. This season he had 41 goals and 32 assists in 65 games for the Saskatoon Blades of the Western Hockey League.

Hurricanes go for four in a row, sweep of Sabres

By Brian Hunter

NHL.com

March 4, 2013

SABRES (9-12-2) at HURRICANES (12-8-1)

TV: MSG-B, FS-CR

Last 10: Buffalo 4-5-1; Carolina 6-4-0

Season series: Third and final meeting of the regular season. The Hurricanes will try to complete the season sweep, after taking a home-and-home from the Sabres in the season's opening week. Eric Staal had the hat trick in a 6-3 win in Carolina on Jan. 24, while Dan Ellis made 40 saves to spur a 3-1 victory the following night in Buffalo.

Big story: The Hurricanes lead the Southeast Division while the Sabres are last in the Northeast, but only five points actually separate these teams in the standings. Carolina comes off a home-and-home sweep of rival Florida over the weekend, but Cam Ward had to leave Sunday's game with what was diagnosed Monday as an MCL sprain and will miss 6-8 weeks.

Team Scope:

Sabres: Chasing a fourth consecutive win, Buffalo went to the shootout for the third game in a row on Sunday at Madison Square Garden. The third time wasn't the charm, as the Rangers dealt the Sabres a 3-2 setback, but the team is slowly climbing the standings since Ron Rolston took over as interim coach. A five-minute major to Patrick Kaleta in the third period for checking from behind turned the tide, as New York scored twice in 43 seconds to take a 2-1 lead, but the Sabres earned the point on the strength of Nathan Gerbe's shorthanded goal near the end of that penalty.

"We keep getting points in games, and that's what matters," Gerbe told The Buffalo News.

Hurricanes: This is the start of a three-game homestand for Carolina, which has scored 13 goals during its current three-game win streak. A quick burst near the end of the first period Sunday night sent the Hurricanes on their way to a 3-2 win over the Panthers, as Justin Faulk and Alexander Semin scored goals a minute apart. Jordan Staal extended the lead to 3-0 in the middle period, and after Ward had to leave due to injury Ellis stopped 19 of 21 shots in relief despite playing with the flu.

"Considering our record against the Southeast coming into this wasn't very good (0-5-0 prior to Saturday), we knew we needed to get some points to get some separation and to really get ahead in the game," Staal said. "It was a big weekend. A lot of guys chipped in to help us win this one."

Who's hot: Steve Ott set up Gerbe's game-tying goal Sunday and has four assists in the Sabres' past three games. Ryan Miller is on a 3-0-1 run with a .932 save percentage during that stretch. ... Semin has two goals and seven assists in the Hurricanes' past five games. Eric Staal has three goals and three assists during a three-game points streak. Jiri Tlustý has three goals and two assists during a three-game points streak.

Injury report: Buffalo forward Thomas Vanek missed a pair of games over the weekend with an upper-body injury. Defensemen Jordan Leopold (upper body) and Alexander Sulzer (lower body) and forward Ville Leino (hip) are on injured reserve. ... Ward is out long-term for Carolina. Defenseman Joni Pitkanen and forward Tim Brent missed Sunday's game with lower-body injuries. Forward Tuomo Ruutu (hip) is on injured reserve.

Sabres-Hurricanes Preview

By Noey Kupchan

Associated Press

March 4, 2013

While the Carolina Hurricanes have climbed to the top of the Southeast Division, staying there could prove difficult with their starting goalie sidelined.

The Hurricanes try to overcome Cam Ward's absence as they go for a season-best fourth consecutive win and three-game season sweep of the visiting Buffalo Sabres, who are hoping to have Thomas Vanek available Tuesday night.

Carolina (12-8-1) completed a home-and-home sweep of Florida with Sunday's 3-2 road win. That result, though, came at a steep cost for the Hurricanes, who saw Ward leave in the second period with a sprained knee.

Ward doesn't need surgery and is expected to miss six to eight weeks. He had gone 8-3-1 with a 2.38 goals-against average since the start of February.

"It kind of (stinks) to lose such a good goaltender, such a big piece to our team, and such a good person," said backup Dan Ellis, who has posted a 0.67 GAA in three wins and 6.68 GAA in two losses while starting five games.

The Hurricanes rank as one of the NHL's higher scoring teams with 3.0 goals per game and figure to rely on their offense all the more with Ward out. Captain Eric Staal and Alexander Semin combined for three goals and four assists in the sweep of the Panthers.

"We've got a lot of positive things in our game right now," coach Kirk Muller told the league's official website.

Carolina has killed 23 of its opponents' 24 power-play opportunities over the last eight games. The Hurricanes, though, have converted one of 25 chances during that stretch.

"When we're moving our feet and playing our game, we're not taking many penalties," Jordan Staal said after scoring his fifth goal Sunday. "That's what our game is."

Carolina also thrived during a home-and-home sweep of Buffalo (9-12-2) in the first week of the season. Eric Staal, who's notched 23 points in 22 meetings in the series since 2007-08, recorded a hat trick during a 6-3 win Jan. 24 and Ellis made a season-high 40 saves in a 3-1 victory the following night.

Carolina has gone 12-3-1 when Eric Staal has at least one point compared to 0-5-0 when he doesn't. He leads the team with 12 goals and 25 points.

Buffalo had won a season-best three straight before kicking off a four-game road trip with Sunday's 3-2 shootout loss to the New York Rangers.

"We need to come through with points," Ryan Miller said after stopping 26 of 28 shots.

While the Sabres could get a boost with Vanek hoping to return from a two-game absence due to an upper-body injury, they will be without Patrick Kaleta. The right wing was suspended five games without pay Monday for shoving Rangers forward Brad Richards from behind and into the boards.

"Obviously we've had some adversity already since I've been here with Vanek being out a couple of games, and other guys stepping into roles," interim coach Ron Rolston told the team's official website. "We have players that will go in and their opportunity will be there for them to help our team be successful. We'll do with whatever we have."

Leading Buffalo with 27 points, Vanek has recorded 29 over 28 career matchups against the Hurricanes. He's notched four goals and four assists during a six-game point streak in the series.

Miller is 1-4-1 with a 2.52 GAA over his last six starts versus Carolina.