



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

Thursday, March 7, 2013

Carryover effect may lead to sizzling rematch

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

March 7, 2013

NEWARK, N.J. — When a game between teams features a bit of feistiness, the tendency is to build up the drama for the rematch. It's time to do it again.

The Buffalo Sabres and New Jersey Devils, who met just five days ago, resume their rivalry tonight in Prudential Center. The first game featured a fight just 27 seconds in, a scuffle at the end of overtime and trash-talking following the shootout.

Though most return matches fizzle in terms of emotion, two of the Sabres' protagonists feel this one might carry some heat.

"It was a hard-fought game, and tempers were flaring," center Tyler Ennis said Wednesday. "We're competitive guys, so I expect another hard game."

Ennis earned a roughing penalty at the final buzzer in Buffalo after a scrap with the Devils' Adam Henrique. Ennis shot the puck toward the New Jersey net as the horn blew, and Henrique, who was near the line of fire, took exception.

Minutes later, Ryan Miller riled up Henrique again. The Sabres goaltender ended the 4-3 shootout victory with a glove save on Henrique, then celebrated and shouted. Miller stretched out his glove arm, swatted the puck with a baseball swing and yelled toward Henrique. The Devils' second-year player jawed back before heading to the dressing room.

"I just didn't think going after Tyler Ennis is any proof that you're a tough guy," Miller said. "The kid's scrappy, but it probably went a little further than it needed to go."

"Henrique's a good player. I'd like to see both teams get into it emotionally, and I think you'll see more of that. We're in position where we have to win, they have to win, so I expect a challenging game."

Ennis could use a spark after a rough outing Tuesday.

Carolina captain Eric Staal and wingers Alexander Semin and Jiri Tlustý dropped a minus-3 on Ennis during the Hurricanes' 4-3 victory. Ennis fell to minus-6 against the Hurricanes in three meetings this season, a big reason he's minus-5 on the year despite seven goals and 17 points in 24 games.

"Tough games against Carolina, it seems," Ennis said. "They're a good team. They play fast. It's too bad I couldn't have had a better game, but you've got to move forward and have a good one against New Jersey."

Ennis has two goals and four points in the seven games since Ron Rolston replaced Lindy Ruff, and the interim coach likes what the center brings despite the setback in Carolina.

“There’s a lot of centers in this league that struggle with Staal,” Rolston said. “I like Tyler. Tyler cares a lot about his game. You can just see his details are getting better. He wants to help the team win in any way we can, and he’s willing to do what it takes. He’s got a lot of talent, so that’s a good combination.”

Miller, meanwhile, practiced lightly in Prudential Center, signaling he’ll likely get his 15th straight start in net tonight. He wants a better effort in front of the Buffalo net.

The Sabres took several steps back against Carolina after putting together a 3-0-1 run. They let the Hurricanes dominate the first period and needed to scramble to make it close.

“I’m not happy with the game, honestly,” Miller said. “I think we have to have an answer to that first period. I don’t think we can let teams dictate if we’re going to have a chance here. We have to go out and control the game.

“The Rangers game was a good example of just playing a good, smart road game,” Miller said of the 3-2 shootout loss Sunday that the Sabres commanded until Patrick Kaleta’s third-period boarding major against Brad Richards. “We kept the crowd out of it, kept them out of it emotionally until late in the third period when they got the power-play opportunities, which is really the only way they were going to get back in that game.

“But with the Carolina game, we kind of went the other direction. We hesitated and we chased the puck a little too much. Hopefully, we see the contrast between the two games and how one game gave us a better opportunity to get points than the other.”

The Devils are just 1-6-2 in their last nine games, so getting points is Rolston’s main objective. The carryover of emotions is an afterthought.

“The focus is always for teams now accumulating as many points as possible,” he said. “I think that you’ll see two teams that are playing hard, but I don’t think you’ll see anyone going over the top.”

Sabres notebook: Leino, in high spirits, plans his return

By John Vogl
Buffalo News
March 7, 2013

NEWARK, N.J. — Ville Leino was feeling so good Wednesday, he didn't want his first full regular-season practice with his teammates to end. The workout showed that his year could soon start.

Leino, who has yet to play for the Buffalo Sabres this season, skated with vigor in Prudential Center. He hadn't done contact drills with the team since training camp because of a hip injury, but it's healed enough to allow him to envision a return to the lineup.

The forward is aiming for Sunday in Philadelphia against his former Flyers teammates.

"Philly would probably be one of the good options here," Leino said. "I'm having a lot of fun out there. I wish practices would run longer, and that normally doesn't happen during the season. It's pretty exciting."

Leino isn't 100 percent, but he says he's in good shape and should be able to play through any lingering pain.

"It gets a little sore, but hockey players don't really feel well ever, so it's quite fine," he said. "I've been able to do a lot of other stuff other than skating, and my conditioning is good. The oxygen runs pretty good. My lungs are pretty good. I've been [lifting] a lot of weights, so it's pretty good."

Jordan Leopold, who has an upper-body injury, also practiced. The defenseman, who hasn't played since Feb. 17, does not have a timetable for returning.

"It's just not quite there," Leopold said. "Getting close and making progress every day. The good thing is I haven't taken any steps backward."

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At least once per season, the debate about making visors mandatory re-ignites. It's happening now after New York Rangers defenseman Marc Staal got hit in the right eye Tuesday night on a shot by Philadelphia defenseman Kimmo Timonen.

The Rangers announced Wednesday night they expect Staal to make a complete recovery.

"The league continues to support a rule that would make visors mandatory in NHL games," Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly said in an email to the New York Times. "It has been the consistent position of the players' association that they are opposed to mandating visor use, that it should be a matter of 'player choice,' and that increased

visor use by players should be achieved through continued education and sensitization to the dangers associated with non-use.”

The Sabres are a visor-friendly team. Defenseman Robyn Regehr does not wear one — he says sweat dripping on the shield impairs his vision — but 18 members of the Sabres do.

“Does it provide more protection? Yes,” Regehr said. “Can sticks still come up and get under it? Yes, I’ve seen that, too, so by no means is it going to take away all injuries that way. But it is going to provide a little bit more protection.”

...

New Jersey coach Pete DeBoer said goaltender Johan Hedberg will start against the Sabres tonight. Hedberg gave up three goals on 11 shots before being pulled during the second period of the Devils’ 5-2 loss to Tampa Bay on Tuesday.

The Devils returned tough guy Cam Janssen to the minors on Wednesday, so the Sabres likely won’t need to dress enforcer John Scott. Interim coach Ron Rolston used the same forward lines and defense combinations in practice that he used Tuesday during the 4-3 loss to Carolina.

Sabres need more on ice conversation

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 7, 2013

Newark, NJ (WGR 550) -- If you sit in the lower bowl of some arenas, you can hear the players talking to each other during the play. The Buffalo Sabres aren't one of those teams and if they would talk more, they'd likely play better.

In the defensive zone, the defensemen and the goaltender can really help each other by communicating about how much time they have and where the open plays are.

Buffalo has players like Hodgson, Ennis, Pominville, Foligno, Grigorenko, Sekera, Myers, Sulzer, Ehrhoff, Brennan, Leino, Flynn and Hecht. All are quiet and don't say much. Ron Rolston said, "These guys are pretty quiet. We've got a couple of vocal guys, but we've got to be better there with communication and that really eliminates a lot of confusion and right now getting out of our zone is a big part of our communication factor and guys talking to each other and supporting each other both offensively and defensively, so it's something we're definitely trying to make a focus point."

My next thought was when it's done correctly, how much of a factor can good verbal communication on the ice be? Rolston said, "It's huge, more so in the transition part, but you certainly need it in the defensive aspect of things, but especially when there's loose pucks and opportunities where there's transition is where you need it the most." Rolston added, "Normally, in this league when you do get a touch of the puck, you've got to get it out. It's got to be out of the zone and you can't give teams more time in your zone and communication is a big part of getting it out."

One of the best talkers on the ice is Mike Weber. He's playing with an inexperienced player in T.J. Brennan. Weber said, "There's lots of talk between us on the bench and in the zone. I'm a big talker, I like hearing people talking to me, helping me out, making the game easier for me so I try to do the same for him. Last night I thought there were times where we did a great job of that, reversing the puck to the weak side and we were out of the zone with ease." Weber added, "It's been the message in all my years here in Buffalo with Lindy and now with Ron. We've always had a quiet group here, guys have just relied on their skills, but what a huge difference when you go out for a couple of shifts and you do hear everyone talking, what a difference it is and how easily you come out of the zone. It's been a big stressor and guys talk about it in the room and it's just one of those things that we need to get everyone on board with and it would just make the game so much easier."

Ryan Miller is another one who talks on the ice. He said, "I think it's been a consistent thing over the years where we've tried to get better and for whatever reason, it's not the most vocal group. Personally I just try to keep my calls simple for the guys, if they've got a man on them and what I see, but yes, we've got to let one another know where the openings are and getting out of your zone is a little bit more of a challenge now, forchecks have become two men hard with a third guy high and they're going to pressure

the first guy and his first obvious play, much harder than I can remember and they still have the ability to trap you up in the neutral zone so you've got to have support, you've got to come together. It's not always the obvious soft spot, you have to hear and locate it, so yes, we can definitely improve."

Sabres Leino is closer than Leopold

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 7, 2013

Newark, NJ (WGR 550) -- Both Ville Leino and Jordan Leopold are practicing with the team but Leino seems closer than the defenseman.

Leino hoped to play by Thursday's game in New Jersey, but now he's set his sights on Sunday in Philadelphia. The winger said, "Yes I felt good. Earlier I had been able to do a lot of stuff like skating so my conditioning is good, I've done a lot of weights so it's pretty good. It gets a little sore, but it's quite fine." He added, "Next week at the latest." He also admitted that Philadelphia would be a good option too.

As far as Leopold goes, he was a healthy scratch for a game and then got hurt in practice the next day. The defenseman is not close yet, "I'm making progress let's just say that. Unfortunately it's been a few weeks now and I'm looking to get back into the lineup. We've made a few changes since I've been in the lineup last and I want to get out there as soon as I can, but I want to be smart too."

We don't know what the injury is, but Leopold expanded on the circumstances, "It happened in practice, midway through practice and then I ended up working through it the whole time and I don't know if I did more damage or what, but it ends up being a slow process right now." He added, "It's day to day right now and I'm getting closer and closer. You guys will see when I start practicing hard and longer."

The team worked for about 30 minutes today at the Devils home rink with everybody on the trip hitting the ice.

T.J. Brennan again worked on the power play Wednesday so I would assume he'll play again Thursday against the Devils.

Viewing Value - Clock ticking on Miller Time

By Jeremy White

WGR 550

March 6, 2013

It's nothing new to suggest that an NHL team can survive without an "elite" goaltender, but with a little over a year on his contract, the Sabres are approaching a crossroads with Ryan Miller. As the franchise looks to move forward, what's the right move on Miller? Jeremy White takes a crack at it...

Let's treat a few things in this piece as constants.

1. Ryan Miller is a good goalie.
2. The comment section of this piece will likely be dominated by a discussion of the first constant.

Ok, moving on.

Ryan Miller is a good goaltender but one has to ask...what's the real value? What's the point in having a 6.25 million dollar goaltender when he's frequently beaten by counterparts who make 1/2, 1/4, or even 1/8 his salary?

This isn't about Miller, it's about goaltending in the NHL.

You need good goaltending to win the Stanley Cup. You might even need great goaltending. You do not need the person that sits back between the pipes to be considered "elite" though.

If you break it down in its simplest form, a goaltender's job is to stop the other team from scoring. Everything that you build around that player is to prevent the other team from getting shots on your goaltender. Puck possession is the very root of this discussion and if you were designing a team you'd have a few different ways to do it.

#1 - You could sink a ton of money into your "last line of defense" and hope that he (in this case Miller) could bail you out when you make mistakes.

#2 - You could almost disregard the position (with the exception of keeping the hot guy just for continuity) and put all of your focus on making sure that your "last line of defense" is called upon as infrequently as possible.

Sign me up for a model that's much closer to #2.

Ryan Miller is a good goaltender that's frequently wasted on this team. The Buffalo Sabres are currently 30th in the league in puck possession. It's not a surprise that they have the most losses in the NHL, and they sit near the bottom of the Eastern

Conference. You can't score if you don't have the puck. You can only be scored on when you don't. Pretty simple - have puck, will win.

The Sabres have faced backup goaltenders 11 times this season. ELEVEN times in 24 games, and while the record is 6-5, let's look at that a bit closer.

The Sabres have 6 wins against backups:

Montreal - Peter Budaj - 5-4 Shootout win

Boston - Anton Khudobin - 4-2 win

Florida - Scott Clemmensen - 3-2 shootout win (Theodore in relief)

TB - Mathieu Garon - 2-1 win

NJ - Johan Hedberg - 4-3 shootout win

Toronto - Ben Scrivens - 2-1 win

5 Losses:

Carolina - Dan Ellis - 40 saves on 41 shots

Carolina - Justin Peters - 37 saves on 40 shots

Boston - Anton Khudobin - 25 saves on 26 shots

Washington - Michael Neuvirth - 22 saves on 24 shots

Toronto - Ben Scrivens - 31 saves on 32 shots

Let's go simply on a point percentage: In their 11 of their games with the Sabres, the Island of misfit backups has picked up 13 of 22 potential points. 5 wins, and 3 shootout losses means that backup goaltenders have picked up 60% of the available points in their games with the Sabres.

Ryan Miller played in every one of those games for Buffalo. He picked up 12 points.

Backups - 13

Miller - 12

This is not about Miller. The answers to the "WHY" of this are actually pretty easy to come up with:

Because the Sabres aren't good...

Because the Sabres defense corps is a mess...

Because the other teams have elite centers..

Because....yadda yadda....

But every time that you say "The Sabres" you have to know that they are built with Ryan Miller as the biggest piece of that. Struggles all over the ice lead to Miller not turning in the type of Win/Loss numbers that he should.

Again, I'm putting very very little of this on Miller. I'm simply asking...what's the advantage?

Tomorrow night the Devils will likely go to journeyman Johan Hedberg to face Miller. Who has the advantage?

In net it's the Sabres right?

On the ice, like so many of their matchups, it would appear it's the opposition.

The reason for existence for this franchise is not to have the best goalie. It's to win.

So here we have the decision that the Sabres must make on Miller - Re-sign, trade, or let the contract expire.

Re-Sign - If the Sabres are to do this it likely wouldn't be something that crushes the team on salary cap. The Sabres spend 6.25 million on Miller, and don't spend much on backup goaltender. Truth is, the 2 goalie salaries combined for any given team in the NHL run from about 5-8 million for most teams. Re-signing Miller would not put them in cap jail at all.

Trade - This might be the toughest to figure how it would go. Does Miller have value around the league? He's MOST valuable to the Buffalo Sabres because of his brand. He's a name. He's well known throughout the league and if the Sabres traded him it would likely be viewed as giving up. They'd trade away another great goaltender. There would be some poking fun at the franchise for sure. What's he worth to...a team that contends this year? Chances are if they're contending they feel pretty good about their goaltending, right? With Miller's big salary comes the potential for cap jail for another team (if they're adding him to the mix with a well paid goalie to begin with) and there's another year left on the contract. I think it's more likely he'd have value as a rental next year. Even then, I'm not convinced you could get very good return value for a goaltender who, for the most part, is only as good as the team in front of him (as so many are). He's a good goalie. He might be one of the best. What is a team going to give you for him? If it's a contending team....they're not stripping elite forwards or D off the team to give to you. It's likely prospects that wouldn't play in the playoffs, right? Good enough value for you?

Let the contract expire - Self explanatory. Delay your decision to the end of next year. The Sabres could make this decision before next season though. If Terry Pegula and Darcy Regier (if he's here) have eyes on keeping Miller, my guess is that he's signed well before he hits the market. Book it.

The game has changed. Between shot-blocking, defensive schemes, giant pads, obstruction, and everything else...goaltenders are being rendered almost irrelevant in a way.

It happened last night. Four goals against in Carolina and the immediate breakdown is "Never had a chance on that one". It's something that makes me think "Then why have a goalie" every time.

If the best in the world didn't have a chance 4 times...how come these so-called scrubs seemed to have chances on all but 3.

How does one of the best lose to the also-rans? (I know, I know...see the excuse board up top...it's never about the goalie, right? That's the point here.)

It's quite possibly the biggest issue for the Sabres going into the offseason. It's going to take a GM to notice that you don't build from the net out anymore. You build the best team you can, and then toss your best option in goal.

Ryan Miller is a very good goaltender that could win a lot of games and take a good team to the next level. Perhaps he could win a Cup. With the way the team in front of him is currently constructed...he'll never have a chance.

Halfway through disappointing season, Sabres' playoff chances slim

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 7, 2013

BUFFALO – Forget about merely making the playoffs. Forty-six days ago, a long postseason run felt like a real possibility following the Sabres' season-opening 5-2 home victory over Philadelphia.

The next day, a 2-1 road triumph in Toronto only strengthened the belief the veteran club could be an Eastern Conference heavyweight.

The Sabres possessed offensive firepower, a deep defense corps, unyielding muscle and a franchise goalie, right?

Well ...

The 13th-place Sabres (9-13-2) open the second half of the lockout-shortened campaign tonight in New Jersey against the Devils as arguably the NHL's biggest disappointment.

In the midst of a 4-12-1 run on Feb. 20, the Sabres' spectacular implosion cost longtime coach Lindy Ruff his job, a stunning development.

If the Sabres miss the postseason for the second straight year and fourth time in six seasons, could general manager Darcy Regier be next?

With 20 points, the Sabres are only four points behind the eighth-place New York Rangers. But that sounds much better than the reality.

The Rangers have three games in hand. The Sabres have played more contests than 11 conference foes.

The Sabres still must climb five teams to reach a playoff spot. And three-point games are killer this season with conference-only play. The Sabres gave up two points with two shootout wins last week.

The Rangers are on pace for 55 points, so the Sabres probably have to win at least 18 of their remaining 24 games to have a realistic postseason chance.

As of Wednesday afternoon, sportsclubstats.com pegged the Sabres' playoff chances at a miniscule 1.2 percent.

Interim Sabres coach Ron Rolston certainly has an arduous task ahead of him.

Here's some of what has gone wrong (and well) this season.

Where do we start? We'll have to whittle a 10-part series down to a single story.

The defense is terrible

Last season, when the Sabres claimed injuries contributed heavily to their ninth-place finish, they pointed to the banged-up defense corps.

If the defense had stayed healthy, they said, the Sabres probably would've made the playoffs.

The defense began performing wretchedly after the 2-0 start this season, quickly becoming the Sabres' greatest weakness.

Tyler Myers' stunning regression has fans (and certainly the Sabres) fretting. The youngster looks nothing like a franchise defenseman. Four years into his career, Myers was supposed to be a Norris Trophy candidate.

Instead, he's a mess, committing gaffe after gaffe while contributing little offensively. The 23-year-old looks slow and tentative. His confidence appears shot. Ruff scratched him twice.

Don't forget, Myers is in the first season of a seven-year, \$38.5 million contract.

Veteran Jordan Leopold, once the team's most underrated presence and its ice time leader, performed brutally before finally getting benched.

The list goes on.

The Sabres often run around their own zone, looking like a disjointed, ugly mess. They frequently wilt under pressure, although they've been flinching less under Rolston, especially during their three-game winning streak last week.

They're wasting a terrific season from goalie Ryan Miller, who looks as locked in as ever, stopping almost everything he sees.

The Sabres have allowed 3.17 goals (27th overall) and 33.2 shots a game (28th). Miller has faced an NHL-high 723 shots, 194 more than Evgeni Nabakov, who ranks second.

Other than a poor outing in a 4-3 overtime loss to Toronto on Jan. 29, Miller has given the Sabres a chance every game. He could be close to his 2009-10 Vezina Trophy level.

Few realize it, though. The Sabres keep offering Miller little support while hanging him out to dry.

His numbers – 9-11-2, a 2.82 goals-against average and a .914 save percentage – don't reflect how well he has played.

During the early portion of the season, the Sabres were scoring three goals a game (a gold standard) and still losing.

There's at least one bright spot on the struggling blue line, however.

Christian Ehrhoff, a slick, steady presence while skating a team-high 25:01 a game, has been terrific all season.

The feeble offense is too top heavy

The top combination of Cody Hodgson, Jason Pominville and Thomas Vanek has scored 31 of the Sabres' 60 goals (2.50 a game, 22nd overall). That's 51.7 percent of the offense from one line. That percentage has actually gone down recently as the trio has cooled off and a few other Sabres have started chipping in goals.

But any true secondary scoring has been nonexistent all season.

With 12 goals and 28 points in 21 games, Vanek has performed brilliantly much of the year. But the law of averages and some nagging injuries have slowed him down. The winger has only one goal and five points in his last 10 games. An undisclosed injury sidelined him for two weekend tilts.

Pominville recently had one point in an 11-game stretch.

Hodgson, meanwhile, has 10 goals and 21 points. Nineteen points have come at even strength. The other two are short-handed.

The 23-year-old hasn't gone more than three games without a point. He clearly wants to be the Sabres' top center badly. Just look at his highlight-reel goal late in the Sabres' 4-3 loss Tuesday in Carolina for proof.

The Sabres have 18 goals from their other forwards, including one from touted rookie Marcus Foligno and two from Drew Stafford, a 31-goal scorer two years ago.

Not surprisingly, the Sabres' awful power play has converted a pathetic 11.5 percent of its chances (30th overall).

The second half

Clearly, the Sabres have overvalued their own talent.

Myers may never reach the next level. Stafford, who has two years left on his four-year, \$16 million contract, is probably really a 20-goal man at best. The Sabres don't trust backup goalie Jhonas Enroth enough to start once a month. They're burning a year of rookie Mikhail Grigorenko's entry-level contract as he plays sparingly. Jochen Hecht has one goal after being re-signed prior to training camp.

The trade deadline is creeping up. The players with real value – Miller, Pominville and Vanek – all have one year left on their contracts after this one.

Maybe the Sabres will start improving once Rolston, a respected hockey mind, gets a better grasp of the team and starts putting a greater imprint on it.

But if the Sabres really want to start fresh, they have assets to deal.

LEINO EYES SUNDAY RETURN

By Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

March 6, 2013

NEWARK, NJ – Ville Leino has yet to play in a game for the Buffalo Sabres this season, but that could change very soon. The injured winger skated in full during Wednesday's practice at the Prudential Center, and said he could be back in the lineup as soon as Sunday night in Philadelphia.

"I would say (next week) at the latest hopefully," said Leino. "But we'll see how it goes, today was a hard working day. Philly (on Sunday) would probably be one of the good options here."

There were reports in early February that Leino's hip injury would require season-ending surgery, but he said they didn't alter his rehab at any point to speed the process up.

"It was more about time, and to get the inflammation out. And the treatments paid off. It's one of those things that you never know what it's going to be. I was feeling pretty good and hopefully we can continue with that."

Jordan Lepold hasn't played since February 17 after sustaining an upper-body injury during practice. He didn't have a timetable for his return, only saying that he was progressing.

"It happened in practice, midway through practice. I ended up working through it the whole time and I don't know if I did more damage or what. It just ends up being a slow process right now."

Sabres-Devils Preview

By Jeff Mezydlo
Associated Press
March 6, 2013

New Jersey coach Peter DeBoer is holding out hope that his team's worst stretch of the season is nearing an end.

The Devils look to avoid losing seven straight for the first time in 27 years Thursday night when they host the Buffalo Sabres, the only team DeBoer's squad has earned a point against in the last six games.

New Jersey (10-8-5) might have bottomed out by falling behind 4-0 in Tuesday's 5-2 home loss to a Tampa Bay team that was in the midst of its own five-game skid. The Devils, who have allowed the first goal in seven straight games, are 1-6-2 since starting 9-2-3.

They have not lost seven in a row since Jan. 24-Feb. 8, 1986.

"This is our adversity," DeBoer said. "Every team faces them at different points in the year and this is ours.

"You hope that you get to the bottom here so you start climbing up. I'm hoping this is rock bottom and we can start getting off the mat and getting on to bigger and better things."

New Jersey's current 0-5-1 stretch has coincided with future Hall-of-Fame goaltender Martin Brodeur sidelined with a sore back. With backup Johan Hedberg starting in the last six games, the Devils have been outscored 25-11.

Despite being pulled after allowing three goals on 11 shots Tuesday, Hedberg is expected to be in goal Thursday looking to end a personal 0-6-1 stretch with a 3.98 goals-against average.

Searching for anything positive to take from Tuesday's defeat, the Devils hope to build on a third period where they scored twice and showed some life.

"We've just got to keep moving forward, keep playing, keep battling," said forward Adam Henrique, who scored for the second time in three games. "It'll come."

Henrique's other goal during that span came in a 4-3 shootout loss at Buffalo on Saturday. New Jersey's Andrei Loktionov tied the game in the third but the Devils failed on both attempts in the shootout. Hedberg stopped 20 shots and allowed Jason Pominville and Tyler Ennis to score in the shootout.

Pominville had two regulation goals in that contest for the Sabres (9-13-2), who are 0-1-1 since that victory and in the midst of a 3-1-1 stretch where each game has been decided by one goal.

Buffalo was unable to overcome three different two-goal deficits during Tuesday's 4-3 loss at Carolina. Cody Hodgson scored twice and Pominville added two assists for the Sabres, who recorded 34 of their 40 shots on goal after the first period.

"We were trying to fight back in it, and they would get one right after that," said interim Sabres coach Ron Rolston, who is 3-3-1 since replacing the fired Lindy Ruff. "We've got to do a better job of taking care of those next couple shifts after we score."

Buffalo went 1 for 3 on the power play at Carolina, but is converting a league-low 11.5 percent (10 of 87) of those chances and is 3 of 43 on the road.

New Jersey recorded its first power-play goal in 19 opportunities Tuesday. It's 3 for 34 in the last 10 games.

Devils hope to end slide against Sabres

By Mike G. Morreale

NHL.com

March 6, 2013

SABRES (9-13-2) at DEVILS (10-8-5)

TV: MSG-B, MSG PLUS

Last 10: Sabres 4-5-1, Devils 2-6-2

Season series: This is the second meeting in six days between the teams -- the Sabres scored a 4-3 shootout decision March 2 at First Niagara Center. The clubs will meet one more time in the regular season -- April 7 in Buffalo.

Big story: Since Ron Rolston took over as interim coach of the Sabres on Feb. 20, the team has gone 3-3-1, so the jury remains out on whether or not the situation gets turned around. The Sabres are 13th in the Eastern Conference with 20 points, four behind the eighth-seeded New York Rangers. The Devils have are winless in six straight (0-5-1) for the first time since 2010, and sit seventh in the East with 25 points.

Team Scope:

Sabres: Thomas Vanek returned to Buffalo's lineup Tuesday in a loss to the Carolina Hurricanes after sitting out the previous two games with an upper-body injury. The team's leading scorer logged 17:25 of ice time, had one assist and a plus-1 rating in a 4-3 loss. The team was on a 3-0-1 run before the loss to the Hurricanes. Vanek resumed his role at left wing on the top line, with center Cody Hodgson and right wing Jason Pominville.

"It just didn't get any better," Vanek told the Buffalo News of his injury. "Now I feel at the point where I can deal with the pain and be able to play."

Devils: Coach Peter DeBoer replaced starting goalie Johan Hedberg with Keith Kinkaid midway through the second period after Hedberg allowed three goals on 11 shots in an eventual 5-2 home loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning on Tuesday. Kinkaid made 12 saves on 13 shots -- the Lightning scored an empty-net goal -- in his NHL debut. At 23 years old, he was the youngest goaltender to play for the Devils since J.F. Dampousse on Jan. 24, 2002 at Atlanta (4-2 loss).

"I made a [goalie] change to try and kick start our team ... it's a tool we've used before," DeBoer said. "We're busy this week and we'll need [Hedberg] back on Thursday [against Buffalo]. Kinkaid stepped in and gave us some energy and did a nice job."

Martin Brodeur remains sidelined with back soreness.

Who's hot: Sabres goalie Ryan Miller, who is expected to make his 15th straight start, currently leads the League in saves (661), shots faced (723) and minutes played (1,313), and is tied for first in games played (22) with Philadelphia's Ilya Bryzgalov. ... Since returning from an upper-body injury that sidelined him four games, Ryan Carter has recorded a point in three straight games (four assists).

Injury report: The Devils are without forward Dainius Zubrus (wrist) and Brodeur (back soreness). ... Defenseman Jordan Leopold, who is dealing with a hand injury, has missed the past seven games and remains doubtful for the Sabres. Forward Patrick Kaleta will be serving the second of a five-game suspension for his hit on Rangers forward Brad Richards on March 3.

New coach Ron Rolston leads culture change for the Buffalo Sabres

By Andrew Hirsh

CBS Sports

March 6, 2013

Lindy Ruff is not the Buffalo Sabres coach for the first time since 1997 and for everyone in the organization, this season is now in a full transition phase. And the man leading the Sabres into this fresh chapter -- at least for the time being -- may possess the kind of hockey mind needed to recreate a winning culture: 46-year-old Ron Rolston.

Currently working as Buffalo's head coach on an interim basis, the odds of Rolston remaining in charge beyond this spring may not be particularly high. But the style of hockey he preaches appears to mesh well with GM Darcy Regier's expensive, previously underperforming roster.

"Ron's come in and really reiterated the strengths in our system, especially defensively," Steve Ott said. "We're making smarter plays, working off each other better. The little details of the game matter more now.

"We've definitely seen some players here improve under Rolston. He's brought fresh ideas that have helped a lot of guys out."

Coming to the Sabres from their AHL affiliate, the Rochester Americans, Rolston brings a strong emphasis on the X's and O's of the game. Rather than donning hockey mitts during Tuesday's morning skate at PNC Arena, as coaches typically do, he wore workman gloves. Why? So he can easily write on his whiteboard-- something he does just about every chance he gets.

"He's always drawing on that board," Ott said with a laugh. "He's a real smart hockey man. He's really meticulous on the right structure of the game, and it makes it a lot easier for players to play structuralized and smart.

"We're definitely benefiting from him being here."

While some current Sabres players remain somewhat mystified by the departure of Ruff, the clubhouse has also embraced Rolston's methodology, including Mike Weber.

"Coach has us sticking to the game plan, never straying from the game plan," said the young blue-liner. "He gets things across differently than Lindy did."

The Sabres didn't look very sharp against the Carolina Hurricanes on Tuesday -- falling by the score of 4-3 -- but their showing is an outlier compared to how they've performed of late. Buffalo earned seven of eight possible points in their previous four contests, including an inspiring shootout victory over New Jersey.

And while their loss to the Canes was sloppy in many respects, they generated their fair share of chances, putting 40 shots on goal to Carolina's 28. Had it not been for the

stellar net minding of youngster Justin Peters, this game could have turned out very differently.

“We've been seeing a process here over the last couple of weeks, and we've been getting better every single day,” Ott added. “Even tonight, we have a lot of good things to look back on and build on.”

Despite such a slow start to the season, the Sabres 3-1-1 stretch has them thinking about the playoffs. While some may roll their eyes at the thought of them clawing their way into the top eight of the Eastern Conference, it's certainly achievable if they can build on their recent success.

Still, a lot of work needs to be done before the postseason can become a realistic objective for this team.

“The playoffs are our goal, but before we can jump to that we have to play more consistent hockey,” Rolston said. “We're in a situation where we're putting more periods together. There's a lot of positive things going.”

Heading into Wednesday's action, the Sabres sit just four points out eighth in the parity-filled East. They have quite a few teams to leapfrog, as they currently reside in 13th in the conference and have played more games (24) than most; but the postseason is undoubtedly in reach.

“We absolutely believe we can make the playoffs,” Ott concluded. “Carolina has definitely been one of the best teams in the league, and we're right there with the top teams.”