



Buffalo Sabres

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Canadiens-Sabres Preview

By Tom Castro
Associated Press
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If the Buffalo Sabres want to make the playoffs, they can't afford too many more sloppy efforts like they had in their last game.

The Sabres hope to bounce back from a costly defeat and resume their late postseason push Thursday night when they host the Montreal Canadiens, whom they've surprisingly dominated this season.

A three-game winning streak had Buffalo (16-18-6) thinking playoffs, but a 4-1 loss at Winnipeg on Tuesday damaged those hopes. The Sabres, 11th in the Eastern Conference, gave up three goals in the second period in falling to one of the teams they're battling for a postseason berth.

"Three wins in a row. ... We're really close to the playoffs again, and this was a huge game for us coming here and this is that much more disappointing tonight," defenseman Christian Ehrhoff said.

The Sabres will be opening a three-game homestand, and play six of their final eight at home. They also got leading scorer Thomas Vanek back after a six-game absence due to an upper-body injury, but he didn't record a point and was minus-4 for the game.

"It's a tough break at this time of the year. It's unfortunate," Vanek said of the loss.

Vanek, though, has five goals in the season series with Montreal.

A visit from the Canadiens may also be reason for optimism, given how the season series has gone.

Since losing 6-1 on Feb. 2 in the first matchup, Buffalo has taken three straight meetings by one goal. The Sabres won the latest one 2-1 on the road March 23 behind a stellar effort from Ryan Miller, who made 38 saves and stopped 15 of 16 shots in the third period.

Vanek had two second-period goals in that game and the Sabres won despite managing just 18 shots. They were also outshot in the previous matchup, 34-21 in a 3-2 overtime victory March 19.

The Canadiens (25-9-5) are also coming off a defeat, though they're much more secure in their position in the conference. Montreal, second in the East with an 11-point edge over third-place Washington and five points behind Pittsburgh, fell 3-2 to the red-hot Capitals on Tuesday.

Lars Eller scored two goals, opening the scoring in the first period and then cutting the deficit to one with 3:22 remaining, but Montreal couldn't complete the comeback.

"They got away with two points they probably shouldn't have tonight," said Eller, who ended an 11-game goal drought. "All I can say is we're going to be looking forward to the next game."

The Canadiens play six of their final nine away from home. Though Montreal is 12-4-2 on the road, it's dropped two of its last three there.

"Now you're nine games, 10 games away from the playoffs and the intensity picks up," right wing Brian Gionta said. "You've got teams that are fighting to get in, teams that are fighting for position."

Teammate Alex Galchenyuk recorded two assists Tuesday and has two goals and three assists during a four-game point streak.

Buffalo's Steve Ott has three goals and an assist in the four matchups with the Canadiens. Ott had a three-game goal streak snapped Tuesday.

Black says patience will have a payoff for Sabres

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

April 11, 2013

Ted Black knew the answer could get him in trouble. The goal of the Buffalo Sabres, after all, is to win the Stanley Cup. With fans on the verge of crumpling useless playoff invoices, the Cup doesn't seem to be in the immediate future.

But Black, the team president, is more of a big-picture guy. He analyzed the organization now compared to when Terry Pegula assumed ownership in February 2011, and he plowed ahead with his answer despite anticipated cries to the contrary.

"Do I think we're better off now than we were when Terry bought the team?" Black said Wednesday. "I think we're closer to building that roster that is going to win the Stanley Cup, so I'll have to say yes."

Sabres management and ownership still believe they are on a path to a championship, although it's a different path than they originally mapped. They're disappointed the goal likely won't be achieved during their initial time frame of three years – the Sabres enter tonight's home game against Montreal in 23rd place overall – but they see positives on a macro level that outweigh the obvious issues along the micro plane.

"The good news is our owner is going to be patient with doing everything he can to build a championship team and not at the expense of building a team that's just good enough to make the playoffs," Black said during a nearly two-hour lunch meeting. "Everything else needs to fall in place from there. I think what we need to do is just let the fans know how we're going about trying to do this."

The plan involves rebuilding from within through the draft, and Black says it's already well under way.

The Sabres had two first-round picks last year and one second-round selection. They have a pair in each round this June. Through the recent trades of Jason Pominville, Robyn Regehr and Jordan Leopold, they have a total of two first- and five second-round picks in 2014 and '15.

That's a collection of six first-rounders and eight second-rounders in a four-year span. By comparison, it took them 10 years (2002 to 2011) to draft the same number of second-rounders and six years ('06 to '11) to select an equal number of first-round prospects.

"That's a total of 14 top-60 picks," Black said of the current stockpile. "We need to be right more often than we're wrong. In that case, we'll have eight players that will be impact players. That's better than a third of your roster."

Even the right selections will take time to develop.

"I want to win the Stanley Cup," Black said. "If it takes a little longer and we have a more certain opportunity to win, I'll take that."

The most pressing question throughout Sabreland is whether the team has the right general manager in place to continue the rebuild. Darcy Regier has been GM since 1997. If, as expected, the Sabres miss the playoffs, they will have done so for the second straight year, fourth time in six seasons and seventh in 11.

“My opinion of Darcy is based on my work history with him, which is two years,” Black said. “That’s how I judge him. I think the opportunities that he’s had, whether it be through free agency to the trade deadlines and the draft, I think he has done well in each of those instances.

“That doesn’t mean that I think Darcy has built a championship team right now since we’ve bought the team. I think he has used those opportunities to improve us.”

It hasn’t shown up in the standings, however. That’s why the Sabres are changing paths and embracing a full-scale rebuild.

When Pegula purchased the team, Buffalo had eight players who participated during the Eastern Conference final run of 2007. Only four (Thomas Vanek, Ryan Miller, Jochen Hecht and Drew Stafford) remain from that foundation.

“What we tried to do – and it didn’t work – was add some pieces to that the year Terry bought the team, bring in some free agents, make some trades and hopefully get that team back to where it was,” Black said. “It didn’t work.

“You make a plan. If it doesn’t work, you’ve got to be prepared to pivot and move in another direction. ... We do know where we are with building a team. In the new CBA, it’s even more important than years past that you have to do it through the draft and the accumulation of young talent.”

Among the other topics discussed by Black:

- Pegula’s absence from the public eye after being visible early in his tenure. The Sabres cautioned the media during the owner’s opening few months that he would step back from the spotlight.

“If there was more availability then, and there probably was, it was just by virtue of ‘we want to know who this new guy is,’” Black said. “It doesn’t have to all be negative, either. He’s not going to come out and talk after a 10-game winning streak.”

- The increasing number of empty seats in First Niagara Center for games that are sold out.

“No-shows have always been give or take 1,000,” he said. “I don’t think that’s an indictment. I think it’s just Junior got sick and I can’t go to the game tonight. I don’t think I’m alarmed by anything that I’ve seen so far with empty seats. People are buying seats and they’re coming to the games, and God bless them because we haven’t delivered what we promised we’re going to do.”

- Booming and an apparent disconnect between the fans and organization.

“Fans were booing a 2½-minute shift where we couldn’t get the puck out of our zone. Those same fans all stood and cheered when we won that same game in a shootout,” Black said. “I

think we've analyzed the boo phenomenon way too much. My guess is it was more visceral with the frustration of not being able to clear the puck for what seemed like an eternity. If it's deeper than that, we'll find out.

"Fans here deserve a winner more than any city I have ever driven through, read about in a book, than I can possibly imagine. Fans here are among the best and most passionate in any sport. They deserve a winner. We're going to do everything in our power to give them a winner. The disconnect, if there is one, is because we're not delivering that winner. I'd be more concerned if fans stopped caring."

Commentary: Sabres lay foundation for new 'core'

By Kelsey Auman

Buffalo News

April 11, 2013

The 2013 NHL trade deadline has come and gone. Sabres general manager Darcy Regier is known for making big moves at the deadline, and this year was no exception.

Veteran defensemen Jordan Leopold and Robyn Regehr were traded to the St. Louis Blues and L.A. Kings, respectively. Rookie defenseman T.J. Brennan was sent to the Florida Panthers. Despite all of this, it still came as a surprise to everyone when the Sabres announced that they had traded captain Jason Pominville to the Minnesota Wild. Pominville, drafted by Buffalo in the second round of the 2001 entry draft, had played his entire career with the Sabres to that point.

In exchange for these players, the Sabres received prospects and draft picks. Between the 2013 and 2014 drafts, they now have three first-round picks and five second-round picks. In the Pominville trade, the Sabres also received prospect Johan Larsson, a responsible defensive-minded forward, and goaltender Matt Hackett, a solid goalie with potential to be a starter.

With the Pominville trade, the Sabres became the youngest team in the NHL. Regier refuses to label it as such, but it is clear that the Sabres are rebuilding. Pominville was part of a core group of players including Ryan Miller and Thomas Vanek, who had been part of the team for several years. These players led a team that consistently underachieved, season after season, despite changes in ownership, coaching personnel and players. In the last five years, the Sabres either missed the playoffs completely or lost in the first round. This is simply unacceptable for a team whose reason for existence is to "win the Stanley Cup," according to owner Terry Pegula.

Although the rebuilding phase may take some time, it can eventually pay big dividends. Inevitably the team will get worse before it gets better. Fans who stick with this young team through its growing pains should eventually see it begin to improve beyond its current status. The current makeup of the team is a better alternative than mediocrity and stagnant veteran players. Meanwhile, in the remainder of this season, AHL players such as Kevin Porter and Mark Pysyk can get valuable NHL experience.

If the Sabres use their draft picks wisely in the next few years, they will end up with several of the top young players in the world. These players will not immediately be ready to enter the NHL, of course, but they can continue improving and developing until they're ready. They are the future leaders of the team. They will form another core group that will hopefully, unlike Pominville, Vanek and Miller, lead the team to a Stanley Cup.

Kelsey Auman is a junior at Orchard Park High School.

Kilgore gets an offer from Pegula that he can't refuse

By Alan Pergament

Buffalo News

April 11, 2013

A few months ago, when Channel 2 was celebrating his 40th anniversary at the station, sports anchor Ed Kilgore jokingly warned Adam Benigni not be too comfortable in his seat just yet.

Tuesday, Kilgore decided to give up his seat at 6 p.m. to Benigni in a move that surprised his Channel 2 boss.

Kilgore is leaving the NBC affiliate at the end of the May sweeps to work for a company owned by Buffalo Sabres owner Terry Pegula.

The timing of the announcement was the only thing that was surprising. There has been speculation that Kilgore – who relinquished the 11 p.m. sports shift to Benigni more than a year and a half ago – was in his final year at the station and that Benigni would then take over the 6 p.m. shift, as well.

Kilgore, 66, surprised Channel 2 General Manager Jim Toellner on Tuesday by telling him that he had received an offer from Pegula's East Management and was going to take it now.

Channel 2 said in a news release Wednesday that "it is important to note that Ed's position will not involve the Buffalo Sabres, so Ed will continue to objectively cover the Buffalo Sabres during the final weeks of his time at Channel 2."

That conclusion certainly is arguable. Kilgore will still be working for Pegula after he leaves Channel 2, which can be looked at as a conflict of interest. However, there is some precedent for a local sports anchor to stay at the station while reporting on a team owned by his future employer. Channel 4 kept former sports director John Murphy on the air last year after he announced he was leaving to work for the Buffalo Bills.

In a telephone interview, Kilgore dismissed suggestions that his hiring by Pegula will influence what he says about the Sabres.

"I've been saying for several months that the Sabres are awful, but they have the greatest owner in professional sports," Kilgore said. "He will get it figured out, but people need to be patient. The team is not good enough. I've been critical and will continue to be."

Kilgore said that Pegula recently asked him to start working for his company now. "I've spent a lot more time talking with Terry than a lot of people in the media over the last couple of years," Kilgore said. "He watched me when he was a [Sabres] fan."

Kilgore isn't sure what his role with Pegula's company will be. "My job description is still being discussed, but it won't involve the Sabres," he said. "I report directly to Terry and Kim [Pegula's wife]. The HarborCenter [development] will be part of it."

"It is truly the end of an era for Buffalo broadcasting," Toellner said in a Channel 2 news release. "Ed is the last of the TV sports pioneers here. He has been a part of and chronicler of huge changes in media and especially pro sports. A couple sentences are woefully inadequate to

summarize his contributions to sports fandom in Western New York. We will miss his daily examinations and enthusiasm.”

In a telephone interview, Toellner said that Benigni will add the 6 p.m. shift to his 10 and 11 p.m. duties after Kilgore leaves in May.

Kilgore said he has been at Channel 2 through 20 general managers and seven or eight owners.

Besides anchoring sportscasts, Kilgore was the host of several Bills-related shows and “Bowling for Dollars” and was the host of Sabres games for a decade when they were carried by Channel 2. He is a member of the Buffalo Broadcasting Hall of Fame and won a New York State Emmy 20 years ago.

Why, at 66, is Kilgore moving into a new job?

“This will be fun,” he said. “It is hard to say no to Terry. And two years ago, I climbed Mount Kilimanjaro. I’m not ready to retire yet.”

Canadiens can clinch playoff berth against Sabres

By Arpon Basu

NHL.com

April 11, 2013

CANADIENS (25-9-5) at SABRES (16-18-6)

TV: CBC, RDS, MSG-B

Last 10: Montreal 6-4-0; Buffalo 5-3-2

Season series: This is the fifth of five meetings. The Buffalo Sabres have won three of the first four matchups, two of them after regulation.

Big story: The Sabres remain on the periphery of the Eastern Conference playoff chase. For all intents and purposes, they simply can't lose the rest of the season if they want to have any chance of playing into May. The Montreal Canadiens, on the other hand, could clinch a playoff spot with a win following the New Jersey Devils' 5-4 loss to the Boston Bruins on Wednesday.

Team Scope:

Canadiens: Montreal has been nearly unbeatable this season – except when it plays games within its own division. The Canadiens enter this game with a 7-5-3 record against the Northeast Division and an 18-4-2 mark against the rest of the conference. The Sabres have had the most success with three wins in four games, but Canadiens coach Michel Therrien feels his club can build on their last meeting, one where Montreal outshot Buffalo 39-18 but lost 2-1 in a game which Ryan Miller shined.

“They play good hockey against us,” Therrien said. “But I think the last time against them we played an excellent game, it was just Ryan Miller was outstanding. It happens in the NHL where you face a goaltender who stops everything. But I liked our intensity and I want to make sure we play the same type of game.”

Therrien will give Peter Budaj the start one day after he signed a new two-year, \$2.8 million contract extension with the Canadiens. Budaj, 6-1-1, has won five straight starts, allowing more than two goals just once in that span.

Sabres: While the Sabres are mathematically still alive, any realistic chance of them making a last gasp push toward the playoffs probably died Tuesday night when they lost 4-1 to the Winnipeg Jets, snapping a three-game winning streak that had rekindled some degree of hope in Buffalo. The Sabres do finish the season with six of eight games at home starting with this one against Montreal, but their final five opponents are the Bruins, New York Rangers, Pittsburgh Penguins, Jets and New York Islanders, all teams ahead of them in the standings. Running the table could prove daunting.

Thomas Vanek returned from a five-game absence with a lower body injury in Winnipeg, playing on a line with Drew Stafford and Tyler Ennis that combined for six shots on goal and – most importantly – a minus-12 rating.

The Sabres were off Wednesday, so it is unclear who interim coach Ron Rolston will go with in goal.

Who's hot: For the Canadiens, rookie Alex Galchenyuk has a four-game points streak, with two goals and three assists over that span to run his season total to 20 points. Michael Ryder, who will be playing opposite Galchenyuk on a line with Lars Eller, has three goals and an assists in his past three games. ... For the Sabres, Steve Ott had a three-game goal streak snapped Tuesday in Winnipeg and Kevin Porter has three goals and an assists in his past four games. Miller has a .936 save percentage in his past five starts.

Injury report: The Canadiens are missing defensemen Alexei Emelin (knee) and Raphael Diaz (concussion) and forward Colby Armstrong (knee). ...The Sabres are without forward Ville Leino (upper body) and defenseman Alexander Sulzer (knee).”

Sabres Vanek claims he did not rush back

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

April 9, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- As I watched Thomas Vanek flounder for two periods in Winnipeg, I was thinking he came back too early. Vanek had said he wouldn't be 100%, but he totally disagreed with me, "No, I think I played well. I think I created a lot of chances, had a lot of chances and should've had two, three, maybe four and just didn't get one. A couple of two on ones I think I should've shot it, but if it goes the way I think it goes, it's an empty net and then on the defensive side, I couldn't buy anything, but as a goal scorer, I've got to bury those chances." Ron Rolston didn't think he came back too soon either, "No, he was ready to go." Vanek was on the ice for all four Winnipeg goals.

The problem was what Vanek was doing on the rush. The Sabres are by far the worst passing team I've seen in the National Hockey League. By using one or two extra passes, it just increases the chances the play will fail. Christian Ehrhoff said, "It's the same story, we talk about it a lot, we talk about it before the game, then we go out there and we don't execute it right and it ends up in the back of our net." The defenseman added, "We just tried to make too many passes. We should just try to get the puck to the net a little more."

Vanek is a creative player and it was always a debate with Lindy Ruff, the line between creativity and being dumb. Ron Rolston thinks it's simple, "We should be shooting the puck, forget the creativity, shoot the puck. We had several of those where we tried to make the extra pass and that's the difference. At times we want to be cute, we want to be easy and and you're not going to win that way."

Folks I don't know what to tell you about the passing. If you were at practice you'd see the same thing there. These are NHL players and if they consistently pass this poorly, it might just be who some of them are.

