



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Jets-Sabres Preview

By Jeff Bartl
Associated Press
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The Winnipeg Jets' stellar homestand boosted their playoff chances, but they still have plenty of work to do over their final three games to secure a postseason berth.

For the second straight year, the Buffalo Sabres will be watching the playoffs from home.

Winnipeg looks to improve its postseason chances by earning a sixth straight victory over host Buffalo on Monday night.

The Jets followed a season-worst four-game losing streak by going 5-0-1 on their homestand, which concluded Saturday with a 5-4 shootout loss to the New York Islanders.

Winnipeg (23-19-3) trails the New York Rangers by one point for the Eastern Conference's last playoff spot and Washington by three for the Southeast Division lead.

The Jets, who play at Washington on Tuesday, have only qualified for the postseason once - in 2006-07, when the franchise was located in Atlanta.

"I think it's a point gained (rather than a point lost)," coach Claude Noel said. "We could've gotten none and we got one, so let's move forward and try and win the next game. We're not doing the math, we're just trying to win. Guys know what's at stake."

Captain Andrew Ladd, who has four goals and 10 assists during a seven-game point streak, believes Winnipeg is in the right frame of mind heading down the stretch.

"We're going to stay positive and focus on Buffalo now," Ladd said. "It's easy to sit there and dwell on what we could've done, but we don't have time to feel sorry for ourselves."

The Jets have outscored the Sabres 15-5 while holding Buffalo to one goal in each of the last five meetings, including a 2-1 win Feb. 19 and a 4-1 victory April 9.

Ladd has scored in each of the last four matchups, and the Sabres will look to slow him down after having their three-game winning streak snapped with an 8-4 loss to the Rangers on Friday.

Buffalo (19-20-6), which fired longtime coach Lindy Ruff one day after falling to the Jets in February, will not be in the playoffs for the fourth time in six seasons.

"It hasn't been easy," leading scorer Thomas Vanek said. "We've stuck with it, but ultimately we weren't good enough."

Interim coach Ron Rolston became angry at his press conference following Friday's loss despite the team having played well in its previous three games.

"Of course it's disconcerting," Rolston said. "Do you think I'm not concerned about it? Of course it's disconcerting. We lost a game we should have won. We didn't have it, and there's no excuse."

Ryan Miller had another poor performance, allowing four goals on 14 shots before being pulled and was booed by the home crowd. He has a 4.24 goals-against average over his last four starts and a 3.06 GAA while losing his last four versus Winnipeg.

"He's done a lot for this franchise," Vanek said. "Fans are entitled to whatever they want. Personally, I give him a pat on the back. He's won us a lot of hockey games."

It's unclear if Miller or Jhonas Enroth will get the nod in this contest, though the Jets could start Ondrej Pavelec in net.

Pavelec is 5-0-1 with a 2.26 GAA over his last six and has a 1.00 GAA while winning his last five starts versus Buffalo.

Sabres' Pysyk still has plenty to play for

By John Vogl
The Buffalo News
April 22, 2013

Mark Pysyk's mom, Sherry, finally got a chance to journey to Buffalo to see the defenseman play Friday. For 59 minutes, it had to feel like a wasted trip. The Sabres got blown out by the New York Rangers in a game that eliminated them from playoff contention, and the evening was memorable primarily for being so disappointing.

But with 40 seconds left, after most folks had turned their attention elsewhere, a magical moment happened.

Pysyk took a one-timer from the top of the left faceoff circle, and the shot struck Rangers defenseman Steve Eminger. It caromed past goaltender Henrik Lundqvist, and the puck was soon in Pysyk's possession as the rookie celebrated his first NHL goal in an 8-4 loss.

"Obviously, not where we wanted to be in that hockey game in the last minute there, but I saw it go in and I couldn't believe it," Pysyk said Sunday. "I wanted to make sure it didn't hit one of our guys on the way in. I was definitely pretty excited."

While the goal meant little to most, it set off a celebration for the Alberta native's friends and family members.

"Lots of people were pretty excited," Pysyk said. "My mom was actually here for the game. That was the first game that she saw, so it was pretty cool to score while she was here."

It was the highlight of Pysyk's season, and he will try to add more tonight when the Sabres host Winnipeg in First Niagara Center.

The 21-year-old is in his first professional season, and the ultimate goal was to try to appear in a game or two in Buffalo. As the Sabres enter their final week, Pysyk has already played 16 times.

"I wasn't really expecting any opportunity like this at the start of the year," said Pysyk, who made his debut March 17 after Andrej Sekera got hurt. "I got called up sort of out of nowhere. I tried to just do my best and enjoy my time up here.

"It's been a great surprise for me. The coaches have been showing some confidence in me in different situations, which is a good sign."

The rookie's goal came on the power play. He has topped 17:30 of ice time in six of the eight games since the trade deadline, bringing his season average to 15:56. He has two assists to go with the goal but also lugs a minus-7 rating.

Since the organization no longer has anything to play for, inexperienced guys like Pysyk are expected to get a larger role in the final three games.

"For a young guy," Pysyk said, "these are still pretty big games. There's going to be a lot of eyes in the organization on you. You've got to do your best and leave it all out there. Obviously, you

suppose you're playing for a spot next year. You want to show that you're still committed and still want to win."

Unlike most Sabres, hockey won't end for Pysyk and rookie winger Brian Flynn after Friday's season finale against the New York Islanders. Rochester clinched a playoff spot over the weekend, and the duo is slated to rejoin the Amerks for their postseason run.

"Ultimately, this is where I want to play," Flynn said, "but if they want me to go down there and play in the playoffs, then obviously I'm more than happy to. I played most of the year down there with those guys, so I'd still feel like I was part of it."

Flynn recorded 16 goals and 32 points in 45 games with the Amerks, while Pysyk put up four goals and 18 points in 57 outings.

Pysyk might add more stats and memorable moments in the coming weeks, but few will stick out like the final minute of an otherwise forgettable game.

"You want to just get that first one out of the way so you don't have to worry about it," he said. "Lucky enough, it went in."

Grigorenko in, Kaleta out on Monday

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

April 22, 2013

Mikhail Grigorenko has a lot to prove to the Sabres' organization. He'll get a chance during Buffalo's final three games.

The team's top prospect will return to the lineup tonight when the Sabres host Winnipeg in First Niagara Center. He has dressed 22 times for the Sabres, but he hasn't played since March 12 after getting sent back to his junior team for the playoffs.

"I feel good now," Grigorenko said Sunday. "I have some experience, had good playoffs and got my confidence back.

"When I first came here when the season started, I was a little nervous and stuff. I didn't have a lot of confidence. After I went to juniors and came back here again, I felt more comfortable. I felt like it's my team and I belong here."

The 18-year-old's first stint with the Sabres could be classified as a disappointment. The 12th overall draft pick recorded a goal and four assists, but he skated just 9:44 per game and was usually in a fourth-line role.

"For a guy like Mikhail who will be in there again, with another opportunity to do what he needs to do to be a member of this team and be somebody who can help us be successful, it'll be an opportunity for him," said interim coach Ron Rolston, who had the center between Jochen Hecht and Nathan Gerbe during practice in First Niagara Center.

"We're going to see these next three games with Mikhail. He's got skill. You watch him out there, he's got big skill. It's going to be all, just like the rest of them that we ask them every game and every practice, just the compete. So we're going to see the next three games where that's at and then continue the evaluation."

Grigorenko, who was recalled from Quebec on Tuesday, will take the lineup spot of Patrick Kaleta. The right winger blocked a shot off his right hand Friday and is out for at least one game and possibly more.

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The Sabres' practice was their first gathering since officially being eliminated from playoff contention with Friday's 8-4 loss to the New York Rangers.

"It's definitely tough because we still had hope and we were trying to do everything we could to finish strong and try and get in the playoffs," defenseman Andrej Sekera said. "Even though we aren't in the playoffs, we want to win every game when we play. That's why you're in this sport — because you want to be a winner. We want to go out, do our best and try to win these last three games."

The Sabres have extra incentive tonight. They lost, 4-1, to the Jets two weeks ago in a game that put a severe dent in their playoff chase. Winnipeg is three points behind the eighth-place

Rangers for the final playoff spot, and Buffalo can get payback by trying to ruin the Jets' season.

"I guess you can say jealousy breeds a little bit of frustration, and if they have a chance at this, we can possibly knock them off and make them feel the same way that we feel," left wing Steve Ott said. "Personally and pride-wise, I would like to do that to another team so they can have this same feeling."

Rolston is using the lockout, which wiped out the first four months of the season, as a motivational tool to keep his eliminated club focused.

"Guys were dying to play," Rolston said. "We talked about guys were dying to play games when the lockout was on. Everyone was dying to play hockey. Now they still have hockey to play. There's three games and they have to be excited about it."

Miller's time with Sabres is near the end

By Jerry Sullivan

Buffalo News

April 21, 2013

Sometimes, you just know. If you've seen enough hockey stars reach the end of the line in Buffalo, you can feel it coming.

You knew it was over for Phil Housley when he didn't go down to block Stephane Richer's game-winner here in the 1990 playoffs. You knew it was the end for Dominik Hasek when he bolted out of the locker room after giving up the overtime winner to Darius Kasparaitis in Game Seven in '01.

When Danny Briere was the last Sabre to leave the home ice after the Sabres lost to Ottawa in the '07 conference finals, you knew he was saying goodbye.

Now, the time has come for Ryan Miller to move on. In fact, if the Sabres were a forward-thinking organization, Miller would have been gone by now. But after Friday night's debacle at First Niagara Center, it's hard to imagine Miller coming back to Buffalo next season.

It's no revelation to suggest that Miller won't be here next season. He has one year left on his contract. There's virtually no chance the Sabres will offer him a lucrative extension. What use does a mediocre, rebuilding team have for a \$6 million goaltender?

But Miller's departure seems like a foregone conclusion after Friday night's humiliating home-ice meltdown against the Rangers.

When Miller waved sarcastically to the jeering crowd, he might as well have been waving farewell to Buffalo. It was a sad moment, the ugly culmination of a hockey season that began with high promise but quickly collapsed into public disappointment and disgust.

There have been countless low moments the last two seasons. But Friday was the nadir for this sorry franchise. It's one thing to be eliminated; it's another for it to happen on a night when the franchise goalie, the guy who is supposed to be the team's emotional pillar, snaps under the pressure.

To an extent, I can sympathize with Miller. The Rangers' first two goals bounced in off skates. The fans treated him harshly, just the same. But Miller let the crowd get in his head. He seemed distracted when he flubbed the puck and handed the Rangers a third goal with 3.2 seconds left in the first period.

Miller should have left his rage in the locker room between periods. But the crowd was still on his mind in the second period. Early in the period, he fielded a harmless dump-in and fired the puck angrily into the boards as the crowd hooted at him. Then, as play resumed, he gave a mock wave to the crowd.

It was classic Miller. Sometimes, he can't let things go. That was part of Hasek's twisted genius. He had a very short memory. Miller can be great for stretches. But misfortune has a way of distracting him and allowing mistakes – either his or his teammates – to be compounded.

That's why he has never lived up to the myth of the elite goalie. Miller has been very good at times. But he has been average for prolonged stretches and never quite good enough to carry the Sabres to the promised land.

Three years ago, he was the MVP of the Olympics and nearly carried the Americans to the gold medal against Canada. It was a heady time for Miller and for Buffalo. I felt Miller had arrived as one of the world's elite goalies, capable of leading the Sabres on a long Stanley Cup ride.

In retrospect, it seems like an emotional overreaction. Miller's star flickered soon enough. The Sabres haven't won a playoff series since 2007. They've missed the playoffs two years in a row. The idea of Miller as the cornerstone of a championship franchise seems fanciful and dated.

Miller has played well enough this season. He has been the least of the Sabres' troubles. His even-strength save percentage is roughly the same as it was when he won the Vezina in 2010. The defense in front of him has been dreadful. The specialty teams have been bad, and Miller's numbers have suffered.

So there's no point in keeping him around any longer. Miller was the most popular athlete in town for awhile. Now he's the victim of a toxic environment, where disgruntled fans express their disdain in the only way they can.

It's like a doomed marriage, where the parties try to reconcile but realize that a breakup is the best option. Even your friends know that starting over is best for everyone.

Miller is 32. It's difficult for him to live apart from his wife, who is an actress in Los Angeles. He is entering the latter part of his prime. He's running out of time to win the Cup and knows it's not going to happen here any time soon.

He admitted as much after Friday's debacle, when he was reminded that Patrick Roy had a similar experience at the end in Montreal.

"Well, I would love to have what happened after that," Miller said. "Just saying. It doesn't mean I want to leave, but if that's what you're getting at. [Roy] won two Stanley Cups after that so, hey, why not?"

Why not, indeed? Roy went directly to Canadiens management after getting a Bronx cheer from fans in 1995. He was traded to Colorado and won two Cups. Like Roy and Hasek, Miller would welcome the chance to win it elsewhere.

It's in everyone's best interest for the Sabres to move him as soon as possible. The longer Darcy Regier fiddles, the less bargaining power he has.

There are many logical reasons for it to happen. There's money, of course. The Sabres could put that \$6 million to better use in a rebuilding. By moving Miller, they could find out once and for all if Jhonas Enroth is a No. 1 goalie. He's not going to prove it playing once a week behind Miller.

It's time for the Sabres to abandon the notion of the franchise goalie. The top teams moved away from it years ago. Miller has been the primary force on the ice, and in the locker room, for too long. There can be no genuine culture change while Miller remains in Buffalo.

I don't mean to vilify him. Miller has given the Sabres some very good years. He tries to do and say the right thing, sometimes to his detriment. It's not easy for a bright, emotional player to strike the right tone all the time, to find the balance between raw honesty and diplomacy.

Miller deserves better than being humiliated on his home ice. After Friday, there's a belief that the Sabres won't put him back out there this season, that he has played his final home game in Buffalo.

I hope that's not the case. Miller wanted desperately to win here. His heart was in the right place. I can't imagine he wants it to end this way. If his time really is short, Miller ought go out there for one more home game, so he and the fans can say a proper goodbye.

Opportunities squandered did in Sabres

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

April 21, 2013

The elimination was sudden. The road toward it was painfully long.

The Buffalo Sabres' offseason will be, too.

Though three games remain on the schedule, the phrase "wait till next year" is ringing through Sabreland for the 43rd straight spring. The Sabres were officially eliminated from Stanley Cup playoff contention Friday with an 8-4 loss to the New York Rangers, rendering them an also-ran yet again.

"It's frustrating," right wing Drew Stafford said after the debacle, which featured five goals by New York in less than three minutes. "You can't pinpoint this on the one game. We had chances all year to get points."

They squandered them for a variety of reasons, ranging from internal factors of talent level and effort to external dynamics such as bitterness and atmosphere. Whichever reason fans, players, coaches, management and ownership choose, it points to another postseason on the sidelines — the second straight during an unacceptable slide of four of six and seven of 11.

A tumultuous season — which featured a lockout, the firing of Lindy Ruff, bickering between the team, fans and media, and more losses than wins — could lead to a tumultuous offseason. The Sabres might have changes in everything from management to players to their television and radio broadcasts.

Buffalo, which has simulcast Rick Jeanneret's play-by-play on television and radio since 1997, is expected to split the two feeds beginning next season, multiple sources tell The Buffalo News. Different announcing teams would represent MSG and WGR-AM 550.

Jeanneret has already said he promised to call every game for this season only, which will leave an undetermined void for the television broadcasts.

Meanwhile, the team needs to examine whether to retain General Manager Darcy Regier after another team assembled by him failed.

The GM, whether it's Regier or a replacement, will need to determine whether to remove the interim title from coach Ron Rolston or hire a new bench boss.

The GM also will need to decide which players should be part of the rebuild and how best to use the organization's growing number of draft picks.

Now that the Sabres have been eliminated, they have a lot of time to address those situations and a variety of others.

“If they want change, if they’re [ticked] off, that’s fine,” goaltender Ryan Miller said of the fans. “It’s not like we haven’t been searching for a way to satisfy our needs to basically satisfy their needs. We just haven’t gotten the job done.”

As would be expected for a team that’s won only 13 of its 45 games in regulation or overtime, the Sabres need help in various areas:

- They have just two players in the top 60 in scoring, with Thomas Vanek entering Saturday’s schedule ranked tied for 32nd (36 points) and Cody Hodgson tied for 48th (32 points).
- They have scored 2.49 goals per game, which ranks 22nd, and have allowed 2.98, which ranks 24th.
- They are allowing an NHL-worst 33.2 shots per game while generating 28, which ranks 20th.
- Their power play was tied for 28th at 13.8 percent, while their penalty kill was 26th at 78.6 percent.
- Miller ranks 41st with a 2.89 goals-against average and 22nd with .912 save percentage, though he leads the league in shots faced (1,197) and saves (1,092).

The Sabres took Saturday off to regroup following the loss to the Rangers. They will practice today before hosting Winnipeg on Monday in First Niagara Center. The other remaining games are Tuesday in Pittsburgh and Friday at home against the New York Islanders.

None of them mean a thing.

“It’s very disappointing,” goalie Jhonas Enroth said. “It’s a shame that we ended like this.”

Sabres in worse shape than before Pegula

By Bucky Gleason

Buffalo News

April 21, 2013

You know the storylines. The Sabres have missed the playoffs two years in a row, four times in six years, seven times in 15 years. Their franchise goaltender and top forward have one foot out the door. Their owner, once considered a godsend for a championship-starved hockey town, had one foot in his mouth last weekend.

Terry Pegula purchased a franchise going nowhere, and it's in worse shape than when he arrived. He's clueless as an owner. Top advisor Ken Sawyer has told people General Manager Darcy Regier is a genius, an absolute mystery. President Ted Black hasn't come up with any solutions. Lindy Ruff is gone.

At least nobody is stuck in a fax machine.

Pardon me. That was a little inside joke.

The real joke is on people, like me, who thought a new regime would be intelligent enough to make obvious changes. In simple terms, it meant getting the right person in charge, making strong decisions and supporting them with money. It would have improved their reputation around the league and made recruiting much easier.

Instead, they kept the wrong person in charge, made weak decisions, threw big money at a problem when it wasn't necessary and compromised the salary cap. Their reputation is now worse than it was when Pegula arrived. If a player signs a big contract in Buffalo now, you have to wonder if it's little more than a money grab.

The Sabres refuse to believe that others around the league view them as a small-time operation. They haven't realized executives from other places are publicly cordial and privately mocking them and taking advantage of them. Do they have any idea how many GMs and agents despise dealing with Regier, for example?

I'm not sure if it's pure stubbornness or downright arrogance, but the Sabres' actions, or inactions, suggest that they think they have the answers. Their strategy, lowering the standards and making them easy to exceed, is straight out of the handbook for failure. What to do when all else fails? Blame the bloodthirsty media.

The Sabres were furious last week because the media had the audacity to ask Pegula longstanding hockey questions at a news conference for HarborCenter. There are some in the organization who believe my sole purpose is getting Regier fired when actually it's nothing more than maintaining the same opinion about the same problem.

It hasn't occurred to them that I'm stating the obvious.

Obviously, despite a mountain of evidence to the contrary, they believe Regier is the best man available. Obviously, they haven't done their homework. All this less than three years after Camp Pegula was outraged when Regier was given a secret contract extension, a parachute, months before Pegula bought the team.

And they wonder why players are reluctant to come here and often aren't interested in sticking around after a few years. Robyn Regehr and Jordan Leopold couldn't split fast enough when the opportunity arrived. You know about all the others who either left or felt they were forced to leave because of the circumstances in Buffalo.

That's how Ryan Miller has looked for some time. Say what you will about Miller, but he saved the Sabres from much worse this season. The Bronx cheer for him against the Rangers, which was grossly unfair, was similar to fans booing a few weeks ago. It was their frustration boiling over because management doesn't listen.

Thomas Vanek has had just about enough, too. When good players line up at the exit, others around the league get the message. For years, Long Island was where careers were sent to die. The thought of going there turned players' stomachs. I would imagine that's how a growing number now feel about playing in Buffalo.

Perhaps it would be different if the organization tried something new. Why not tap into a guy like Pat LaFontaine or Rick Dudley? Why not open the doors to anyone who might be interested in helping an organization that clearly needs help? They would be surprised at the number, and the names, of people with strong resumes.

Instead, they get the same old results.

And with them, the same storylines.

Oilers changing it up again

Oilers president Kevin Lowe, who won six Stanley Cups as a player, responded poorly to the heat last week after firing GM Steve Tambellini and hiring Edmonton retread Craig MacTavish to replace him.

One of the primary complaints in Edmonton is that too many from the old guard have their fingerprints on the current administration. Lowe became snippy when asking why the same people who made the mess were allowed to clean it up, which is the same question that has been asked in Buffalo.

"I think it's safe to say half the general managers in the National Hockey League would trade their roster for our roster right now," Lowe said.

Apparently, the Sabres don't have a monopoly on delusion.

MacTavish was replaced as coach four years ago, returned to college for a master's degree in business and began taking steps toward becoming a general manager. He has a good group of young players, including three who were taken first overall after lousy seasons, to build around. He plans to make "bold moves."

"It's not about yesterday," he said. "Maybe there are some skeptics out there and there are in this business. You don't take a position like this with rose-coloured glasses. It's not for the faint of heart. I walked in completely understanding the situation. ... I'm an impatient guy and I bring that impatience to this situation."

Too much of a good thing?

The Winter Classic has evolved into one of the marquee events during an NHL season, but a six-pack of the born-in-Buffalo event is five too many. Apparently, the league sees dollar signs and isn't concerned about diluting its own product.

ESPN reported last week that the NHL plans to hold two outdoor games in Yankee Stadium in an effort to piggyback the Super Bowl and have others in Chicago, Vancouver and Los Angeles. One game was already set for the University of Michigan.

The Rangers would play in both games in Yankee Stadium against the Devils and Islanders. ESPNNewYork.com reported that the Blueshirts would be the visiting team in both games, making sure they didn't lose any home games at Madison Square Garden. The Devils and Islanders for years have had slow attendance in their home arenas.

Los Angeles should be interesting. The Kings and Ducks would play in Dodger Stadium on Jan. 25. The low temperature was 59 degrees in L.A. on that date this year with a high of 67 degrees. The rink experts face a tall order regardless of the refrigeration system.

'Canes Rutherford on hot seat

You can't help but wonder how long Hurricanes GM Jim Rutherford can hang onto his job after Carolina failed to reach the postseason for the sixth time in seven years. The Canes had a good start before a monumental collapse.

The other six teams to miss the playoffs with the same regularity – Toronto, Florida, Winnipeg/Atlanta, the New York Islanders, Edmonton and Columbus – have changed general managers over that stretch. All but the Islanders have had two GMs over that period.

Rutherford has survived, presumably because the Hurricanes won a Stanley Cup after the 2005-06 season when they beat the Oilers. Buffalo missed the postseason for the fourth time in six years and seventh time in 15 seasons with the same man running the operation.

It's remarkable.

Penner needs to step up

The Kings are hoping enigmatic forward Dustin Penner can turn up his game for the playoffs much the way he did last season. Penner had just two goals in 30 games this season and 11 goals in 114 games with Los Angeles.

Penner (6-foot-5, 245 pounds) could be a horse but for years has been a dog. He provided an ample supply of aggression and competitiveness in the postseason last year, however, and had three goals and 11 points in 20 games en route to the Stanley Cup.

"There's no deep, dark answer or anything like that," Kings coach Darryl Sutter said. "That's what we're trying to do. How's he played? He hasn't played well enough, but that's obvious. We've played 40 games, and he's got two goals."

Matt Greene's return should help the Kings and could help Penner. Greene is one of their better leaders and gives them another banger. The veteran defenseman was sidelined with a back injury that required surgery after the season opener. He returned Thursday night for a 2-1 win over Columbus.

Quotable

Blues coach Ken Hitchcock after earning his 600th victory: "It's basically because I'm old. If you last long and you're old, you get this."

Around the boards

- The Blues are back winning the Hitchcock way, with defense. St. Louis scored seven goals during a seven-game stretch going into the weekend and came away with a 5-2 record. The stretch included shutout victories over Detroit, Nashville and Minnesota.
- Philadelphia made a good move when signing forward Zac Rinaldo, who has earned his keep and expanded his fan base with his Kaleta-ian style, to a two-year extension. It wasn't clear why the Flyers did the same for Jay Rosehill, a fringe player who ended up with his first one-way deal in the NHL.
- Toronto had a 99 percent chance of making the playoffs going into the weekend, but Leafs fans still feared the slight possibility of failure. Relax, folks. Toronto plays Tampa Bay and Florida this week. If enough snaps into place, Toronto would finish the regular season against Montreal and play the Canadiens in the first round.
- Sticking with the Maple Leafs, winger Phil Kessel entered the weekend two assists shy of his total after 82 games a year ago. Kessel had three assists in Thursday night's 5-3 loss to the Islanders, giving him 30 helpers along with 16 goals.
- The Blue Jackets are certain to reach a milestone of sorts even if they miss the playoffs. Columbus, back in the race after a 16-5-5 stretch, is guaranteed of finishing within 20 points of Detroit. Big deal? It will be a first in the franchise's 11-year history. The Red Wings have reached the postseason in 21 straight seasons.

Jets continue playoff push against Sabres

By Davis Harper

NHL.com

April 22, 2013

JETS (23-19-3) at SABRES (19-20-6)

TV: TSN-JETS, MSG-B

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

Season series: This is the third and final meeting. The Jets prevailed in each of the first two showdowns and have won five straight overall in the series.

Big story: Winnipeg continues to chase the eighth position in the Eastern Conference as it heads to Buffalo. The Jets just went 5-0-1 over a six-game stand at MTS Centre to pull within three points of both Southeast-leading Washington and the eighth-place New York Rangers. The Buffalo Sabres have been eliminated from Stanley Cup Playoff contention.

Team scope:

Jets: A nearly flawless homestand couldn't have come at a better time for Winnipeg, which had lost a season-high four games before the 5-0-1 run. The Jets won big – a 7-2 shelling of Florida on April 11 – and small, prevailing against Tampa Bay in a shootout and Carolina in overtime. Winnipeg finished the stand Saturday against the New York Islanders, who took a 3-1 lead midway through the second period. Kyle Wellwood scored twice to pull the Jets even by the end of the period, and Bryan Little's goal with 2:01 to play erased a 4-3 deficit. The Islanders won in the shootout, but the Jets captured a valuable point.

"I think it's a point gained (rather than a point lost)," coach Claude Noel said. "We could've gotten none and we got one, so let's move forward and try and win the next game. We're not doing the math, we're just trying to win. Guys know what's at stake."

Sabres: With its loss to the New York Rangers on Friday, Buffalo will miss the playoffs for a second straight year. The Sabres had won three straight coming into the game, but the Rangers were quick to drive the final nail in Buffalo's postseason coffin. New York scored three in the final 1:18 of the first period and three more to start the second on its way to an 8-4 victory.

"Of course it's disconcerting," interim coach Ron Rolston said. "Do you think I'm not concerned about it? Of course it's disconcerting. We lost a game we should have won. We didn't have it, and there's no excuse."

Rolston hasn't decided whether Jhonas Enroth will start in favor of Ryan Miller, who was pulled after conceding four goals in 21:13 of ice time and booed by the home crowd.

Who's hot: Winnipeg captain Andrew Ladd has four goals and 10 assists over a seven-game point streak. He also has a goal in each of the past four matchups against Buffalo.

Injury report: Winnipeg will miss some key contributors against the Sabres. Center Olli Jokinen left the game against the Islanders with a high-ankle sprain, and is expected to be out 6-8 weeks. Defenseman Zach Bogosian, who suffered a concussion in the same game, will miss at least a week. Defenseman Tobias Enstrom (back) and center Nik Antropov (lower body) are out indefinitely. Center Jim Slater (hand) and right wing Anthony Peluso (hand) are on injured reserve. ... Sabres right wing Patrick Kaleta is questionable for Monday's game with a hand injury he suffered against the Rangers. Left wing Ville Leino is out indefinitely with an upper-body injury, while defensemen Tyler Myers and Alexander Sulzer will miss the rest of the season with leg injuries.

Sabres believe they have plenty to play for after playoff elimination

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

April 22, 2013

BUFFALO – What’s left for the Sabres now? Three meaningless games, that’s it. With their slim playoff chances smothered Friday, starting with tonight’s home contest against the Winnipeg Jets, the Sabres are skating for pride and hoping to play a spoiler role.

As senior advisor Ken Sawyer, owner Terry Pegula’s close confidant, watched closely from the stands, a rarity, the Sabres practiced quietly Sunday for the first time since an ugly 8-4 loss to the New York Rangers eliminated them.

Normally, their shootout drills are filled with cheering and hollering as they close sessions. Sunday, however, almost no one uttered a word.

Sabres defenseman Adam Pardy called the practice a little “somber” and “low key.”

“Mentally, I guess just a real tough practice, just kind of going through the motions,” Pardy said inside the First Niagara Center.

Pardy added: “It’s never easy. You talk to any team that’s been out of the playoffs for the last couple weeks, they’ll tell you how hard it is to come to the rink and play these games knowing you have no chances at (the) playoffs. For a hockey player, it’s pretty tough mentally.”

Still, Pardy and other Sabres insist the 11th-place club will fight until the bitter end. They’ll keep the same mentality, winger Steve Ott said.

“Now it’s playing for pride and playing for the passion of the Buffalo Sabres organization,” Ott said.

Ott, a playoff bystander the last four years with Dallas, hasn’t handled the Sabres’ elimination well.

“You play this sport to get in the playoffs to get a chance at the Stanley Cup,” Ott said. “You know what it is? It’s that old cliché of being bigger, faster, stronger, and you got a lot of time now to make sure that you start changing your ways and prepping for the future.”

In the meantime, Ott would love to dash ninth-place Winnipeg’s playoff chances. The Jets, who trail the Rangers by three points, have beaten the Sabres both meetings this season, most recently 4-1 on April 9 in Winnipeg.

“You can say jealousy breeds a little bit of frustration, and if they have a chance at this, we can possibly knock them off (tonight) and (make them) feel the same way that we feel,” Ott said. “Personally and pride way, I would like to do that to another team so they have the same feeling.”

The chance to be a spoiler, Ott said, will generate “easy energy.”

“I would be completely disappointed in ourselves if we didn’t show up and have our A game, not only for our fans, but for the pride of wearing that jersey,” he said.

Naturally, with the Sabres out of the postseason for the second straight season and fourth time in six years, players have started lamenting some lost opportunities.

The Sabres have 14 one-goal losses. They went 3-9-2 against the Southeast Division, by far the NHL’s worst group of teams. That includes two losses to hapless Florida, which has 13 wins all season. On Feb. 3, the Sabres blew a two-goal lead at home and lost to the Panthers 4-3.

“There’s so many things you can say for ‘What if?’” Pardy said. “But you’re going to drive yourself crazy doing that. There’s a lot of games during the year we didn’t play as well as we should’ve.

“Obviously, we’re going to look back at those in the summertime and wonder, ‘What if we worked a little harder? What if we were a little sharper that night? What if we didn’t give up that late goal?’ ...

“You don’t realize early in the season, those games, come the end of the year those points are going to count. You got to look at that and realize you can’t take a night off. You can’t relax for one shift and just think, ‘Ah, it’s going to be an easy game.’ Or, ‘We’re playing a weaker team like Florida. We don’t have to go as hard tonight,’ and you end up losing the game. And then you miss the playoffs by two points.”

Ott, who oozes positive energy, fully expected to make the playoffs. This lost season hasn’t shaken his strong belief in the Sabres.

“I truthfully believe in the organization from the ownership all the way down,” Ott said. “The ship is going to be right here. We’re going to be moving forward.”

If the Sabres want move Ott, the 30-year-old would bring them a nice return. He wants to stay, though.

“I’ve truly enjoyed being a Buffalo Sabre,” Ott said. “Obviously, (that’s) left in management’s decision on what they want to do future-wise with everything. But I obviously want to be part of the solution and not the problem.”

Sabres rookie Grigorenko set to return to lineup

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

April 22, 2013

BUFFALO – Mikhail Grigorenko has been playing real hockey games since August. Counting NHL, junior and Team Russia appearances, the 18-year-old Sabres rookie estimates he has skated in 85 contests this season.

Grigorenko insists he's in "real good shape," though. Under normal circumstances, a nine-month season would be trying.

"But I always changed places," Grigorenko, who's in his second stint with the Sabres, said Sunday after preparing for tonight's contest against the Winnipeg Jets in the First Niagara Center. "All the time it's been like new challenge, new season. I came back here and all my emotions, they just started all over again. I feel really good."

With winger Patrick Kaleta (hand) out tonight, Grigorenko will make his 23rd NHL appearance and first since March 12.

A month back with the QMJHL's Quebec Remparts helped the center's confidence.

"I feel really prepared now," Grigorenko said. "I already have some experience. I had a good playoffs. I've gotten my confidence back."

Grigorenko has one goal and five points in the NHL this season. He had five goals and 14 points in 11 junior postseason games.

Is Grigorenko, the 12th overall pick last year, a better player after going back to junior?

"We're going to see these next three games with Mikhail," interim Sabres coach Ron Rolston said. "He's got skill. You watch him out there, he's got big skill."

Not only have the Sabres used a year of Grigorenko's entry-level contract, his next appearance counts this season toward free agency.

Grigorenko's presence could force the Sabres to switch up some lines, Rolston said.

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Rolston said goalies Ryan Miller and Jhonas Enroth will play this week.

It seems unlikely Miller, who was unhappy with the fans' ire before getting yanked from Friday's 8-4 loss to the New York Rangers, would start at home again.

The Sabres also play Tuesday in Pittsburgh and close the season Friday at home against the New York Islanders.

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Rookie defenseman Mark Pysyk on scoring his first NHL goal, a power-play tally, with 40 seconds left in Friday's blowout loss: "It wasn't the ideal time to get the first one, but I think looking back, the first goal was pretty cool to get that one out of the way."

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Kaletka left Friday's game after taking a puck on the hand. He didn't practice Sunday.

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The Rochester Americans clinched the No. 7 seed in the Western Conference on Sunday and will face the Toronto Marlies in the first round of the AHL playoffs later this week.

Miller's long Sabres career could be over after Friday's ugly exit

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

April 21, 2013

BUFFALO – Seriously, in the wake of Friday's debacle, can the Sabres ever play Ryan Miller before the home crowd again? How ugly could it become inside the First Niagara Center?

With only three games left this season, the goalie's 10-year career here looks finished. The Sabres' embarrassing 8-4 loss to the New York Rangers sure felt like Miller's 498th and final appearance.

The fans' love-hate relationship with Miller likely reached its breaking point as the Sabres' slim playoff hopes ended.

After two goals deflected in off teammates late in the first period, the crowd serenaded two Bronx cheers on Miller. In between, he sarcastically saluted the crowd by waving his arm, a scene reminiscent of Patrick Roy's disastrous exit from Montreal in 1995.

It was all tough to watch before Miller, to the crowd's delight, was yanked 1:49 into the second period.

The first barb appeared to fluster Miller. A second later, he nearly whiffed on the puck trying to clear it, creating an easy goal for Ryan Clowe with four seconds left in the period.

"They can mock me for that horrible play," Miller said after allowing four goals on 14 shots. "They made sure to do it after the second period. Yeah, it's fine. It's one of the worst plays I've made since I've been here. (Lousy) timing."

Miller should've stopped there. But he went further when he was questioned about the fans again.

"If they can dish it out, they can take it back," Miller said. "I sat there and took it. I screwed up. I made a critical error."

That quote has incensed some fans. So did his reply to the Roy comparison.

"Well, I would love to have what happened after that," Miller said about Roy, who was dealt to Colorado within days of demanding a trade. "Just saying. Doesn't mean I want to leave. ... The guy won two Stanley Cups after that."

If you read Twitter, message boards or talk to fans, the majority of the team's supporters don't want Miller to play another game for the Sabres.

They're tired of the losses and Miller's angry postgame media sessions. While they've been happening for years, there's a higher frequency this season. They have more bite to them. It's easy to forget how friendly and thoughtful Miller can be.

Clearly, mediocrity – the Sabres have missed the playoffs two straight seasons and four of the last six – has worn Miller out. You can see it in his face and his body language as he walks around the dressing room.

Miller looks beaten down by losing.

The 32-year-old, like many others, has few answers for the Sabres' struggles.

“We haven't done it,” Miller said. “We haven't lived up to any kind of expectation. It's just been years and years of not getting it done. So if they want change, if they're (ticked) off, that's fine. It's not like we haven't been searching for a way to satisfy our needs that basically satisfy their needs. We just haven't got a job done.

“You don't win over Buffalo fans by losing hockey games and putting up mediocre seasons. The last three years have pretty much been that.”

In early January, shortly after the NHL lockout ended, Miller arrived back in Buffalo full of energy and hope. Prior to his first interview, he went around to each media member, shook his hand and asked how he spent the work stoppage.

That seems like three years ago, not three months.

Miller's days in Buffalo are probably numbered. The Sabres are a broken mess. Don't let the recent five-day resurgence fool you. In their current state, they'll probably never win. They need an overhaul.

It's easy to forget, but Miller has performed well most of the season. His numbers or the Sabres' record doesn't reflect some consistently strong play because the rest of the team is so bad.

Miller, who has a year left on his contract, still has trade value. The Sabres have several goalies in their system.

Despite a terrible relief outing Friday, 24-year-old backup Jhonas Enroth has re-established himself as an NHL goaltender recently.

Matt Hackett, a 23-year-old prospect acquired from Minnesota, has big league experience. Most observers believe he should crack the NHL regularly someday.

Right now, Hackett's the No. 2 behind Rochester's David Leggio, one of the AHL's best netminders. Those who have watched the Williamsville native closely believe he deserved league MVP consideration.

Leggio has earned an NHL start. The Sabres have two meaningless home games left, Monday and Friday's season finale.

It would be an excellent public relations move. The 28-year-old's presence would surely create a positive atmosphere, something you can't say about Miller.

The Sabres had Saturday off after their game in Pittsburgh was moved to Tuesday so the Penguins could play in Boston.

Sabres Pysyk tries to enjoy his first goal
By Paul Hamilton
WGR 550
April 21, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- It took Mark Pysyk 16 games to score his first NHL goal. He had four in the 57 games he played in Rochester.

It was a shame the kid scored late in an 8-4 loss that eliminated the Sabres from the playoffs. He said, "We weren't where we wanted to be in that hockey game, but it was the last minute and I saw it go in and couldn't believe it. I had to make sure it didn't hit one of our guys and go in so I was definitely pretty excited."

Pysyk has gotten more comfortable and joined the rush. He's come close to scoring and said, "You don't really want to think about it, but it's definitely in the back of your mind, you want to get that first one out of the way so you don't have to worry about it."

Pysyk's mother was in town and the Ranger game was the first time she saw her son in the NHL.

Pysyk came up in a tough spot with the Sabres so far back trying to get into the playoffs. Since he's been here three key veterans have been traded. He said, "It's definitely been like a world wind. I wasn't really expecting any opportunity like this at the start of the year and then I got called up, sort of out of nowhere for me so I just try to do my best and enjoy my time up here."

Pysyk's ice time has been slowly going up with the injury to Tyler Myers. Lately he's had 19:32, 20:46, 18:30, 18:06, 14:03, 17:31 and 18:23. The bad thing is he's been minus six in his last six games. Team wise his minus seven is only ahead of Myers minus eight, Tyler Ennis minus 13 and Drew Stafford minus 17. Only six players in the NHL are worse than Stafford.

To be quite honest with you, I don't think that stat says how Pysyk's played. On most nights I think he looks good. He's not too bad on battles and gets up ice on the rush. Ron Rolston said, "I think he's played really well since he's been here. He's got some things he needs to work on, but it was good to see him score, I think he has some offensive skill that he can provide the team."

In Pysyk's final two seasons in junior he scored six goals with 32 assists in 57 games and six goals and 34 assists in 63 games. With the Sabres looking to rip down its old core and build a new one, there are many young defensemen in this organization. It starts with Myers, Pysyk and Chad Ruhwedel. Brayden McNabb will also likely be a big part. Buffalo also has 2012 second round pick Jake McCabe out of Wisconsin. He captained Team USA at the World Junior Tournament. 2010 third round picks Matt MacKenzie and Jerome Gauthier-Leduc are both in Rochester.

Sabres prepare for the final week

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

April 21, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Sabres won't have Pat Kaleta in the lineup Monday against Winnipeg. Ron Rolston would not rule him out for the week. That puts Mikhail Grigorenko in the lineup centering Jochen Hecht and Nathan Gerbe.

I asked Rolston if Grigorenko's practice habits have gotten any better and he didn't seem all that impressed, "Ah, he's been a little better I think coming back off the junior experience and the real test is going to be game situations."

Rolston said he anticipates both Ryan Miller and Jhonas Enroth playing in the final three games.

Now that the team has been eliminated from the playoffs, the question is can this team play well in the final three games. Rolston said, "It was good to have a day off, guys regrouping and finish strong. We have three games, you know guys were dying to play, we talked about guys were dying to play games when the lockout was on and everyone was dying to play hockey and now they still have hockey to play. There's three games and they have be excited about it. I know there's not playoffs in the picture, but there's opportunity for guys and there's games. Anytime you can compete, guys should be excited about that."

Practice seemed a little down on Sunday, two days after they gave up eight goals to the Rangers in a must win game to stay alive for the playoffs.

Sabres Alumni play for Paradise House

By Liz Reiman

WIVB

April 21, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - On Sunday, the Buffalo Sabres Alumni took on Colvin Cleaners for a fundraiser game at the Holiday Twin Rinks.

The friendly game was played to benefit the Paradise House, a 90 day living program for women struggling with addictions giving them a new start.

Debra Page gave back to the house that helped her in the past, "Paradise House gave me back hope. It got me back with my children, It made me want to be a productive member just seeing other addicts before me working there. I thought if they can do it, I can do it."

All proceeds benefit the family-style halfway house that opened in 1993.

A reception was held after the game at the Statler Lobby Bar.

