



# **Buffalo Sabres**

**Daily Press Clips**

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## **Islanders-Sabres Preview**

By Jordan Garretson

Associated Press

April 26, 2013

Though the New York Islanders have ensured the end of their playoff drought, they don't exactly appear to be heading into the postseason on a roll.

They'll get once more chance to pick up some momentum Friday night as they finish a five-game road trip against the Buffalo Sabres in both teams' regular-season finale.

New York has fared well recently in Buffalo, winning four of the last five meetings there, including a 4-0 victory Feb. 23.

The Islanders (24-17-6) played excellent hockey for most of the last month, going 11-1-2 from March 24-April 20 to punch their ticket to the playoffs for the first time since 2007. But some may wonder if they're getting complacent with the last two games ending in defeats against non-playoff teams.

New York followed a shootout loss at Carolina on Tuesday with a 2-1 defeat at Philadelphia on Thursday. John Tavares was perhaps the lone positive for the Islanders, scoring his fourth goal in four games and 28th of the season.

Thursday was the first time since March 30 the Islanders failed to record a point.

"We came out flat again," forward Colin McDonald said. "It's just not good enough. We need to be better. It really doesn't matter that we clinched the playoffs. It doesn't really mean anything. We want to be going into the playoffs playing good hockey, so we have one game left to kind of correct it and head into the playoffs with a good feeling."

Though the Sabres (20-21-6) are already guaranteed to miss the playoffs for a second straight season, they've won four of six and are coming off Tuesday's 4-2 victory at Pittsburgh. Buffalo has accounted for two of the defeats by the Eastern Conference's top seed during the Penguins' current 22-3-0 run.

"Obviously we wanted to be in the playoffs, but that's not going to happen. But guys want to make sure they finish strong," coach Ron Rolston said.

The Sabres' power play has clicked well recently, scoring six times on its last 14 chances - a 42.9 percent success rate compared to 14.4 on the season.

Should Ryan Miller start in goal, it would be his 500th career appearance, and speculation has swirled that it could be his last with Buffalo. Miller has one year remaining on his contract but is one of the most enviable assets on a team that may be in rebuilding mode moving forward.

"There's been a lot of could-be last games as a Sabre the last few years," said Miller, whose 2.87 goals-against average is his worst since becoming Buffalo's No. 1 netminder in 2005-06. "I'm just trying to enjoy the moment. I'll approach it the same way I've approached the other 499 - just put the pads on and try to do your best."

"I don't know which way it's going to go, so I'm not going to talk like I'm gone."

Miller stopped 41 shots as Buffalo won the season's first meeting, 3-2 on Feb. 9 on Long Island.

## **With future unclear, Miller savors the present**

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

April 26, 2013

On the day he signed his first contract, Ryan Miller walked with his dad onto the floor of the Buffalo Sabres' empty arena. It was August so the ice was gone, but Miller could surmise where the crease would be. He stood in the spot, looked around and dreamed of playing just one NHL game.

Miller will skate into the crease tonight and look around again. This time, 11 years later, the goaltender will savor his 500th game.

"Everything's been more than I ever could have imagined," Miller said Thursday. "I'm just continuing to enjoy the fact I get to play in the NHL."

Miller's milestone is expected to be the most significant part of the Sabres' season finale against the New York Islanders. He'll become the 62nd goalie to achieve the feat and only the 20th to play 500 for one team.

"Five hundred games with one team for a goaltender is a significant achievement," Mike Liut, Miller's agent and a member of the 500-game club, said via email from Russia. "The accomplishment will take on more significance in retirement as Ryan reflects on Buffalo and all it has meant to him, and he to the city."

Miller and Buffalo have had unforgettable moments during their long relationship. It's possible the union will reach its conclusion tonight. Miller has one year left on his contract, and it's not clear whether the 32-year-old will be part of the Sabres' rebuilding project – or whether he'd want to be. Miller's Buffalo town house has listed for sale.

"There's been a lot of 'could be last game as a Sabre' the last few years," Miller said. "I'm just trying to enjoy the moment. It's going to be my 500th game. I'm going to approach it the same way I've approached the other 499: Just put your pads on and try to do your best. See where it kind of goes, go out and have fun, try and make the saves and see where it all shakes out."

All involved hope the game is more fun than Miller's previous appearance in First Niagara Center. The fans taunted him toward the end of his brief stay, and he acknowledged them with a wave shortly before getting pulled during a 22-minute, four-goal outing.

Miller hopes last week's animosity has faded. He has embraced Buffalo during the past decade while trying to establish a home and legacy.

"I'm not mad at the fans," he said. "It's heat of the moment. You get emotional."

"Some people were giving me some grief, and I just picked my hand up like, 'OK, I hear ya.' It wasn't a, 'Screw you.' It wasn't a, 'I hate you guys.' It was, 'You know, I hear ya. Enough. I get it. Just let me try and do what I've got to do.'

"It's been disappointing for everybody in this room, this organization," he said of another season with no playoffs. "I don't think anybody takes it harder than I do, so I don't think anybody should be able to question me or say I'm mad at the fans or I don't respect or enjoy the fans here. I've done more than my fair share to go out and prove that I'm part of this community and give back as much

as I can. We don't even talk about all the stuff I try and do to make this feel more like my second home.

"That's where I'm going to leave it. I care about the people here. If they're frustrated with the way we're playing, I can acknowledge it and we can move on."

The fans have every reason to acknowledge the milestone. It comes in Miller's 10th season, and only eight goalies reached 500 games in less than a decade. In addition to joining the small group of netminders, Miller will become just the 28th player and first goalie to wear the Sabres' uniform 500 times.

"As a goaltender goes, that's a lot of games in a short period of time," Sabres goalie coach Jim Corsi said. "When you play so many games so often, you really have to have mental strength that is above the norm."

Corsi says Miller, who averaged 66 games during the previous six seasons, manages the workload by thinking like a hockey player instead of a goalie.

"If you see a goaltender play hockey, his skill set can really blossom," Corsi said. "If he's trying to make saves, he's doomed to stopping pucks. In his case, he's playing hockey, and then he'll stop pucks. That's the difference."

Liut, who played 347 games with St. Louis and 253 with Hartford, has watched a client who is "always looking to be better – better at playing the position, better at being a leader, better at supporting those around him."

"As a person," Liut wrote, "Ryan is an athlete who works at doing/saying the right things, while wearing his heart on his sleeve. You may not agree with his stance, but you know he's sincere in his convictions and you must respect his approach."

Miller has stood up to answer questions even more consistently than he's stood up to shooters. He enters tonight with a record of 268-164-56, with a 2.59 goals-against average and .915 save percentage. When the puck drops, Miller will rank 19th among the 62 members of the 500 club in adjusted points percentage, a measure in which all ties, overtime losses and shootout decisions are counted as regulation ties to better compare goaltenders from different eras.

"It should be a good night for him," said Sabres alternate captain Thomas Vanek, who has played alongside Miller since 2004. "To become his teammate and friend, I think that's when you realize how special and how good he is."

Sabres fans have been able to watch Miller since his debut against New Jersey on Nov. 19, 2002. The goalie will be in a crease again next season, but there's no guarantee it will be the one in which he dreamed his NHL fantasy on that warm August day.

"I don't know which way it's going to go, so I'm not going to talk like I'm gone," Miller said. "I think I've got a lot more hockey in me, so being able to just kind of reflect and enjoy a moment is nice, but it's going to be another hockey game and I have to prepare and compete."

"I'm just trying to enjoy that part of it. That's what I like to do. That's what I know to do."

## **Ryan Miller's Buffalo townhouse goes up for sale**

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

April 25, 2013

Ryan Miller said today his future with the Sabres is undecided. He's apparently decided he can unload his Buffalo home, though.

Miller's townhouse in the city has been listed for sale at Realtor.com. Miller purchased the residence in 2006 for \$348,500, according to Buffalo News real estate transactions. It was listed today with an asking price of \$659,900.

The news came on the eve of Miller playing his 500th game, all with the Sabres. The season finale against the New York Islanders will possibly be his final game in Buffalo. The team is rebuilding, and the 32-year-old is in the final year of his contract.

"I don't know which way it's going to go, so I'm not going to talk like I'm gone," Miller said today. "I think I've got a lot more hockey in me, so being able to just kind of reflect and enjoy a moment is nice, but it's going to be another hockey game and I have to prepare and compete."

Though the sale can be taken as a sign Miller believes his time in Buffalo is up, it should also be noted he does not spend his offseasons in Western New York -- and the Sabres are set for another long offseason. He used to go back to his native Michigan for summers, but he now lives with his wife in California.

## **Ryan Miller's final game as Buffalo Sabres goalie?**

By Greg Wyshynski

Yahoo! Sports

April 25, 2013

Last Friday, Ryan Miller had his "Patrick Roy" moment, absorbing boos from the fans and then responding with a mocking wave to the crowd.

With one year left on his contract, a rebuilding team and without question being one of the more desirable goaltending options for any team that needs one, it felt like the end of a long-term relationship between Miller and the city.

This Friday, Miller will be between the pipes when the Sabres close out their disappointing season at home against the New York Islanders. It could be the last time Sabres fans see him in a Buffalo sweater – his 500th game with the franchise.

He told Sabres Edge he's just going to try and enjoy the moment ... and that he doesn't have any ill will towards the fans:

"I'm not mad at the fans," he said. "It's heat of the moment. You get emotional.

"Some people were giving me some grief, and I just picked my hand up like, 'OK, I hear ya.' It wasn't a screw you. It wasn't a, 'I hate you guys.' It was, 'You know, I hear ya. Enough. I get it. Just let me try and do what I've got to do.'

"I've done more than my fair share to go out and prove that I'm part of this community and give back as much as I can. We don't even talk about all the stuff I try and do to make this feel more like my second home. That's where I'm going to leave it. I care about the people here. If they're frustrated with the way we're playing, I can acknowledge it and we can move on."

That's the truth: Miller, unlike teammate Steve Ott, has accepted the fans' reactions at games, to the point where he believes the Sabres earned their boos. His honesty and candor have been both an asset and a distraction for Buffalo over the years – one can only have so many Emopressers before the vibe the fans catch is unmistakably negative.

Caitlin Campbell of Sabres Noise believes Miller's earned the right to have a proper send-off from the fans:

After Miller's last home game he deserves a chance to go out there again and put on a better performance. See if he can get a win and give the Sabres' faithful a proper salute, let Miller have his moment with the fans. Let Ryan Miller go out on top and leave the Sabres' faithful with happy memories.

Is this the end? As Miller told the Buffalo News: "There's been a lot of 'could be last game as a Sabre' the last few years."

## **Miller: Wave at booing Buffalo fans wasn't 'screw you' gesture**

By Mike Halford

NBC Sports/Pro Hockey Talk

April 25, 2013

Ryan Miller will play his 500th career game tonight, at home, in front of the Sabres faithful.

And he's probably hoping it'll go better than last time.

On Apr. 19 — Miller's last start at the First Niagara Center — the Sabres were eliminated from playoff contention with an ugly 8-4 loss to the Rangers, in which Miller responded to jeering fans with a sarcastic wave...before getting hooked.

On Thursday, he explained himself.

"Some people were giving me some grief, and I just picked my hand up like, 'OK, I hear ya,'" Miller told the Buffalo News. "It wasn't a screw you. It wasn't a, 'I hate you guys.' It was, 'You know, I hear ya. Enough. I get it.'

"Just let me try and do what I've got to do."

The gesture was seen as a possible breaking point for Miller.

The 30-year-old netminder has already been subjected to a season's worth of frustration, trade speculation and uncertainty about his future.

The wave was reminiscent of another incident where a goalie finally had enough.

From John Vogl of the Buffalo News:

Miller, who's been in the organization since 2002, had a moment reminiscent of Patrick Roy's final game in Montreal just 28 seconds into the period.

He stopped another dump-in and fired it toward the boards with authority.

As the crowd again gave a Bronx cheer, Miller waved to the patrons as play continued — much like Roy did during a humiliating game in 1995 that featured him asking for a trade immediately after getting pulled.

Miller's teammates responded following the contest.

"It's very disrespectful after what he's done for Buffalo, what he's done for this team, this organization and this city," Sabres defenseman Adam Pardy told News. "It [ticks] you off when you hear that. He's been great all year. We've had wins when we've had no business winning games. The reason was Ryan Miller.

"To hear that is just absolute disrespect for what he's done for this organization."

Today, Miller stressed he harbors no ill will towards Sabres fans over the incident.

"I care about the people here," he told The News. "If they're frustrated with the way we're playing, I can acknowledge it and we can move on."

## **Sabres wrap up season vs. playoff-bound Islanders**

By John Kreiser

NHL.com

April 25, 2013

ISLANDERS (24-17-6) at SABRES (20-21-6)

TV: MSG PLUS 2; MSG-B

Last 10: New York 6-1-3; Buffalo 6-4-0

Season series: It's the last of three meetings; the road team won the first two.

**Big story:** The New York Islanders and Buffalo Sabres finish their regular seasons at First Niagara Center -- but for the first time since 2007, the Islanders' season will last a little longer. They clinched a playoff berth earlier this week, and a victory could move them as high as sixth in the Eastern Conference, depending on what the Ottawa Senators and New York Rangers do.

**Team Scope:**

**Islanders:** New York had visions of climbing as high as fifth in the East, but that was before a flat effort Thursday night produced a 2-1 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers and dropped the Islanders from sixth to eighth. John Tavares had the lone goal and backup goaltender Kevin Poulin looked sharp, but the Islanders looked a step slow as they lost in regulation for the first time in 12 games this month.

New York is 0-1-1 this week after an 8-0-2 run carried the Islanders into the playoffs.

"We're not going to blow it up into a big story," defenseman Travis Hamonic said. "It's frustrating. Look at our last 15 or 20 games or so, I think we've done a lot of really good things. So heading into the playoffs, we've got one more big game."

**Sabres:** Buffalo will miss the playoffs for the second year in a row, but the Sabres haven't stopped playing hard. They've had two nights off since a 4-2 road victory against the Pittsburgh Penguins and have accounted for two of the Eastern Conference leaders' three losses during a 22-3-0 run.

"Obviously we wanted to be in the playoffs, but that's not going to happen. But guys want to make sure they finish strong," coach Ron Rolston said.

**Who's hot:** Tavares has four goals and five points in New York's past three games. Starting goaltender Evgeni Nabokov leads the NHL with 14 road victories. ... Thomas Vanek had two of Buffalo's four goals in Pittsburgh to reach the 20-goal mark. He has four goals in the Sabres' past four games.

**Injury report:** The Islanders report no injuries, though coach Jack Capuano will have to decide if he wants to sit any of his regulars in the second half of a back-to-back. ... Buffalo is without defensemen Patrick Kaleta (hand), Tyler Myers (leg) and Alexander Sulzer (knee surgery), as well as forward Ville Leino (upper body).

## **Reflective Miller aware 500th game could be last with Sabres, not angry at fans**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
April 26, 2013

BUFFALO – On the eve of what could be his 500th and final appearance with the Sabres, goalie Ryan Miller wouldn't speculate about his future.

Instead, the 32-year-old mostly delved into a past that has made him one of the franchise's all-time greats.

At times, Miller's six-minute chat with the media Thursday sounded more like a goodbye than a reflection of his first 499 games.

He called Buffalo his "second home." He smiled and spoke about becoming part of the community and giving back.

The former Vezina Trophy winner understands tonight's season finale against the New York Islanders could end his 10-year run. The struggling Sabres, a playoff bystander two straight years, have already jettisoned some high-profile veterans.

In the wake of last Friday's 8-4 home loss to the New York Rangers, a game he sarcastically saluted the crowd in between two Bronx cheers, Miller could be next.

On Thursday, Miller, who has one year left on his contract, wanted to make something clear.

"I'm not mad at the fans," Miller said after preparing for the Isles inside the First Niagara Center. "It's what I don't understand. It's the heat of the moment. You get emotional."

It got ugly against the Rangers before Miller was mercifully yanked. It felt like he might never play another game for the Sabres.

"Some people were giving me some grief," he said, "and I just picked my hand up, like, 'OK, I hear you.' It wasn't a, 'Screw you.' It wasn't a, 'I hate you guys.' It was, 'You know what? I hear you. All right, enough. I get it. Just let me try to do what I got to do.' It was just a tough game."

Miller said he cares "about the people here."

"I care a lot about being part of this community and a Buffalo Sabre," he said. "It's been frustrating not to kind of come through in times when we felt like we had a great group of guys and pushed a little bit further. But I've enjoyed my time here so far. I don't know which way it's going to go."

He added: "I'm not going to talk like I'm gone."

Miller bounced back nicely Tuesday in Pittsburgh, stopping 40 shots in a 4-2 win over the mighty Penguins. Following the game, he said he wanted to play tonight.

"That game worked out," he said. "That's how hockey is. It's been disappointing for this room, this organization. I don't think anybody takes it harder than I do. So I don't think anybody should be able to question me or say I'm mad at the fans or I don't respect or enjoy the fans here, and I've done more than my fair share to go out and prove that I'm part of this community and give back as much as I can."

Miller's milestone "means a lot," he said. Sixty-one NHL goalies have already cracked 500 games. He would become the 20th netminder to reach it with one club and the 12th from that group to do it from the start of his career, according to the Sabres.

"I'd love to say I had some Stanley Cups to go along with this," Miller said. "But that's just the nature of things. Every year in this league is a difficult battle."

In the "500 Club," Miller's .915 save percentage would rank fifth. Sabres legend Dominik Hasek (.922) is first. Miller's 268 wins, a franchise record, would place 42nd.

"I believe he's the best goalie in the world," Sabres winger Drew Stafford said.

Interim Sabres coach Ron Rolston added: "To be able to play that many games and (enjoy) that kind of consistency and success is amazing."

Miller won't approach tonight's start any differently than the first 499.

"I put the pads on. I try to do my best," he said. "See where that goes."

Miller, always reflective, recalled signing his professional contract nearly 11 years ago inside the FNC, then called HSBC Arena. He walked out and looked where the ice would be.

"I dreamed about playing one game in the NHL," he said. "I've been able to play 499. So it's pretty cool. I've just going to try to enjoy it."

Game No. 1 came Nov. 19, 2002 in New Jersey against the Devils and iconic goalie Martin Brodeur.

"I remember the flight in more than anything," Miller said. "It was a bad flight and it was my first NHL game. That was pretty special even though we ended up losing that game (4-3 in overtime)."

The Sabres took a 2-0 lead into the third period.

"Then I think I figured out where I was, playing against one of my heroes at the other end," Miller said.

Miller cracked the NHL for good in 2005-06. He won the Vezina Trophy in 2010, the same year he backstopped Team USA to a silver medal at the Vancouver Olympics, briefly becoming one of the country's most popular athletes.

But he hasn't sniffed much NHL team success since backstopping the Sabres to consecutive Eastern Conference final appearances in 2006 and 2007.

"It's been some great moments here. It's been some down moments," Miller said. "It's been the better part of a decade."

That decade could be ending soon.

## **Sabres' Rolston hasn't spoken to management about future**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

April 26, 2013

BUFFALO – If you're wondering, Ron Rolston hasn't spoken to Sabres general manager Darcy Regier or other higher-ups about his future, the interim coach said Thursday.

"No conversations," Rolston said after the Sabres prepared for tonight's season finale against the New York Islanders inside the First Niagara Center.

Rolston's 14-11-5 since the Sabres promoted him from Rochester on Feb. 20.

While the 46-year-old couldn't get the Sabres into the playoffs, he believes the team has "made progress."

"I'm not happy we're not in the playoffs," Rolston said. "We needed to do a better job there. We've made some progress I think as a team and we've played better down the stretch in terms of the success we had. I think we have seen some of the progress we wanted, but we still have a ways to go."

Rolston is a noted talented developer, having spent time in the NCAA and running USA Hockey's development program before the Sabres hired him to run their AHL club in 2011.

The Sabres have turned to their youth recently, becoming one of the NHL's youngest teams. Their average age is 26.825 years, according to NHLNumbers.com. That could work in Rolston's favor.

"That's obviously one of the strong points that I have in terms of helping players move on and get better in development situations and that process," Rolston said. "Right now, we're in that. It's been difficult with the lockout year, just the time that you have. A lot of your time is just trying to get yourself back to preparation for the next game.

"So I think a longer season gives you the opportunity for more development and more of the hands-on stuff that we need to be doing in the future. But certainly it's my dream to be an NHL coach. I had an opportunity this year, and I'd like to continue that."

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Sabres winger Ville Leino, out the last 12 games, suffered a lung injury, Rolston said.

"He had some issues with his lung, yes, he's dealing with (it)," Rolston said. "He's better. He's doing well."

Rolston said Leino's lung isn't collapsed and he didn't have surgery.

"It was a serious injury," he said. "But it wasn't anything that was major."

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Rolston said he isn't sure if 18-year-old rookie Mikhail Grigorenko will be assigned to Rochester this weekend.

The Russian center could receive some power-play time tonight, Rolston said.

## **Sabres Miller not mad at the fans**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

April 26, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- One of the biggest questions I've heard since the Rangers game is, "Is Ryan Miller mad at the fans?"

In the past when something has come up he forgets about it and moves on. This time is no different as Miller said, "I'm not mad at the fans. That's what I don't understand, it's the heat of the moment, you get emotional. You're telling me that if some of the fans came up to me and just spoke to me a couple hours after the game, they couldn't have a civil conversation? Some people were giving me some grief and I just picked my hand up, 'Ok, I hear ya'. It wasn't a screw you, it wasn't I hate you guys it was I hear you, alright, enough, I get it, just let me try to do what I've got to do. It was a tough game and I just tried to bounce back in Pittsburgh and that game worked out. It's how hockey is, it's been disappointing for everybody in this room, this organization and I don't think anybody takes it harder than I do." Miller added, "I don't think anybody should be able to question me or say I'm mad at the fans or I don't respect or enjoy the fans here. I've done more than my fair share to go out and prove that I'm part of this community and give back as much as I can. We don't even talk about all the stuff I try to do to make this feel more like my second home and that's where I'm going to leave it. I care about the people here and if they're frustrated with the way we're playing I can acknowledge it and we can move on, but I'm not going to say I'm mad. It is frustrating not to perform and that's all it was."

If Ryan Miller gets to play against the Islanders, he'll be the 20th goaltender to reach 500 games with one team. Miller said, "I feel lucky to be able to do it. It's been some great moment here, there've been some down moments, but it's been the better part of a decade so things are going to be up and down. There's only one guy I know that's done it the best and that's Brodeur, but even he's had some really down years, it's feast or famine sometimes because the years they didn't win the Stanley Cup they were bounced in the first round or didn't make the playoffs so, I'd love to say I had three Stanley Cups to go along with some of this, but it's just the nature of things."

When making that statement about Brodeur, Miller said there's a message there for him and his teammates, "The part that I hope some of the guys understand here is how you have to be resilient, you have to come back and be professional year after year and game after game. When that lesson kind of comes around, that you just come and do the work, bounce back, be resilient, you're going to start seeing some of those second, third and fourth losses become games that get into overtime and games you sneak out a win."

One thing none of us know is if Friday will be Miller's last game as a Sabre. He said, "I don't know, there's been a lot of could be last games as a Sabre in the last few years. I'm just going to try to enjoy the moment. It's going to be my 500th game and approach it the same way I have the other 499, put the pads on and try to do your best."

Miller has a lot of respect for the history of the game. He says this milestone is special, "It means a lot. I care a lot about being part of this community and being a Buffalo Sabre. It's been

frustrating not to come through in times where we felt like we had a good group of guys and push a little bit further, but I've enjoyed my time here so far and I don't know which way it's going to go so I'm not going to talk like I'm gone. I'm just continuing to enjoy the fact that I get to play in the NHL. I got on the ice early today, I got to be the first guy out. A little over 11 years ago I got to walk out, the ice wasn't in, but I stood right where the crease is down in the visitors end when I came in with my dad to sign a contract here. I dreamed about playing one game in the NHL and I've been able to play 499, so it's pretty cool."

## **Sabres Leino has lung injury**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

April 25, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Sabres will finish the season Friday without Pat Kaleta and Ville Leino. Kaleta hurt his hand blocking a shot while Leino has a lung problem.

I had heard weeks ago that Leino had a collapsed lung and I asked him right away before a game. He flatly told me no. Today I asked Ron Rolston if he had a collapsed lung and he said, "He had some issues with his lung yes that he's dealing with and he's actually a lot better, he's doing well right now."

Ron Rolston says he has not had any discussions yet on if he will be retained as head coach next year. As far as the job he's done the interim coach said, "I think we've made progress. I'm not happy that we're not in the playoffs and needed to do a better job there, but we've made some progress as a team and I think we've played better down the stretch in terms of the success that we've had. I think we have seen some of the progress that we wanted, but we still have a ways to go."

Thursday was the Sabres final practice for this season and it went for just over a half hour. Mikhail Grigorenko did see power play time with the second group as did Jochen Hecht.

## **PERSEVERANCE PAYS OFF**

By Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

April 25, 2013

For the second year in a row, Jochen Hecht found himself sitting on the sidelines as the 2011-12 season came to an end after playing in just 22 games. And once again, a concussion was to blame. This was his third concussion in less than a year, and it was starting to look like this one was serious enough to end his NHL career after 14 seasons.

But just as time can heal all wounds, it also took care of Hecht's symptoms. So when the lockout-shortened 2012-13 NHL season finally got underway on January 20 at First Niagara Center, the 35-year-old Hecht was in the starting lineup when the Sabres defeated the Philadelphia Flyers 5-2 in their season opener.

Hecht has been injury-free this season, playing in 46 of Buffalo's 47 games so far after signing a one-year contract on January 11. The only game Hecht has missed all season was as a healthy scratch in New Jersey on March 7. He enters Buffalo's final game of the season on Friday with five goals and nine assists, including one shorthanded goal, and the game winner against Tampa Bay on April 14.

Hecht's return from injury has made him a natural choice as Buffalo's nominee for the Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy, awarded annually to the NHL player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey. Hecht was chosen as the Sabres' candidate by the Buffalo chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers' Association. A finalist is selected from all 30 teams, and the winner is chosen through a vote of PHWA members.

"I went through a lot last year. I always said I wanted to come back and play," Hecht said with a smile. "I did that, and it's nice to be recognized like this."

There was a time when Hecht's NHL future looked to be in serious jeopardy, with the final blow seemingly coming from a hit in St. Louis' by TJ Oshie on January 21, 2012. Hecht flew back to Buffalo that night, and then traveled with the team two days later to New Jersey to prepare for their next game.

But during the team's morning skate on January 24, Hecht started experiencing serious headaches, and he left the ice in considerable distress. The St. Louis game would end up being his last of the season, and many – including Hecht – started to wonder if he would ever be healthy enough to play again.

"When you have a concussion, especially a few in a row, those thoughts cross your mind. I definitely thought about that for a little bit, that this might be it," said Hecht following the team's final practice of the year at First Niagara Center on Thursday. "But I waited, and all the symptoms went away. Then I started skating and I felt better every day. For a little bit I thought about that, but once everything settled down, and my emotions settled down, I knew I wanted to be back."

Hecht skated with his teammates regularly during the lockout, and then returned home to Germany to play six games with his hometown Adler Mannheim Eagles of the German Elite

League. He collected five goals and 13 points during those six games, further fueling his desire to play another season in the NHL.

“After the season ended I was ready for training camp and ready to get going again. [Playing in Germany] showed me that my level of play and my compete was still there, and I could still play at a high level.”

Many people questioned Hecht’s desire to return, especially after experiencing multiple concussions in such a short period of time. Hecht discussed his situation at length with family and friends, and is confident that he made the right decision in the end.

“Friends would say ‘You’ve had a great career, so why do you still risk it? Why do you want to risk it?’ But there’s something inside of you that just wants to keep going. It just takes a little bit of time and a little bit of distance from it. But things worked out and I feel great to this day.”

