



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

March 16, 2014

Canadiens-Sabres Preview

By Alan Ferguson

Associated Press

March 16, 2014

A stunning comeback might have given the Montreal Canadiens what they need to get back on track. A visit to the league-worst Buffalo Sabres could also help.

The Canadiens will try to earn back-to-back victories for the first time in a little more than two weeks Sunday night by sending the Sabres to a sixth consecutive defeat.

Montreal (36-25-7) looked like it was heading for a season high-tying fourth consecutive defeat Saturday when it trailed Ottawa by three with less than 3 1/2 minutes to play. Instead of folding, the Canadiens produced three quick scores before the end of regulation with David Desharnais' tying goal coming just before the buzzer.

Francis Bouillon gave the Canadiens the second point by scoring 1:26 into overtime in the 5-4 victory.

"We knew if we stuck to our game plan, we would win the game," said defenseman P.K. Subban, who was credited with assists on the final three goals in regulation. "Obviously, we weren't expecting to win like that. We rallied but we did that through our structure. If you look at those goals we scored, there was nothing special about those goals."

The win pushed Montreal six points ahead of ninth-place Detroit in the Eastern Conference. The Canadiens will try to maintain their edge on a playoff berth with their first set of consecutive wins since Feb. 27-March 1.

A matchup with the lowly Sabres (19-40-8) could help them accomplish that goal. Buffalo has been outscored 16-5 in its last five games and Tyler Ellis tallied his team's lone goal in a 4-1 road loss to the New York Islanders on Saturday.

"You can't expect to win if you score only one goal. We had some good looks, but we couldn't finish," said coach Ted Nolan, whose team has produced a league-low 126 goals.

Montreal has outscored Buffalo 6-3 while winning both of this season's matchups and 11-4 during a three-game win streak in the series. The Canadiens scored all of their goals in a 3-2 home victory Dec. 7 in the second period and got one in each frame in a 3-1 win in Buffalo on Nov. 27.

Alex Galchenyuk has scored in each of the last three meetings, and defenseman Andrei Markov has one goal and eight assists during a six-game point streak

against the Sabres. Carey Price has been in net for both matchups this season but won't travel to Buffalo.

Price played in his first game since Feb. 8 in the win over Ottawa. He aggravated a lower-body injury while helping lead Canada to the gold medal in the Sochi Olympics last month.

"We don't want to put him in back-to-back games," coach Michel Therrien said. "He's going to remain in Montreal and make sure he's ready for his next game this week."

Peter Budaj is 4-1-2 with a 2.18 goals-against average in seven career appearances against the Sabres and needed to stop only 14 shots in a 5-1 win in Buffalo on April 11. The team's other backup, Dustin Tokarski, gave up four goals on 15 shots in his only game against the Sabres on March 19, 2012, while with Tampa Bay.

Montreal is 5-1-3 in its last nine trips to Buffalo and has won in each of its last two.

Isles score twice in 1st and 3rd, top Sabres 4-1

By Ira Podell
Associated Press
March 15, 2014

UNIONDALE, N.Y. (AP) -- When the New York Islanders' lead was cut in half in the opening minute of the third period, the sense of impending doom began wafting through Nassau Coliseum.

After all, the Islanders had won just nine of 20 previous games in which they led after two periods. But Ryan Strome scored 39 seconds later to restore the two-goal lead, and New York cruised from there Saturday night to a 4-1 victory over the lowly Buffalo Sabres.

On a recently completed road trip, the Islanders let two-goal leads get away in the third periods of losses to Edmonton and Calgary on consecutive nights.

"When (Buffalo) got that power-play goal to start the third period, I know you guys were thinking, 'Here we go again,'" Islanders coach Jack Capuano said. "We battled back and we were resilient. It was a good bench. Guys were positive."

Frans Nielsen and Kyle Okposo staked the Islanders to a 2-0 lead in the first period. Strome then netted the big goal to push back the Sabres, and Cal Clutterbuck sealed the win with an empty-net goal one night after New York lost 4-3 at home to San Jose.

The Islanders (26-34-9) earned their 10th home win (10-17-8), and did it in a rare matchup against an opponent they are ahead of in the standings.

"Anybody can beat anybody in this league no matter where you are," Okposo said. "That's been proven throughout this whole year. They've got some skill over there.

"We stuck with our game plan and we outplayed them."

Backup goalie Anders Nilsson (3-4-2) earned the win in his 15th NHL game. He lost his shutout bid 56 seconds into the third when Tyler Ennis scored.

Nilsson made 33 saves while subbing for No. 1 netminder Evgeni Nabokov, who lost on Friday.

"I had the post with me one time, and I think the whole team in front of me played an unbelievable game," said Nilsson, who will turn 24 next week. "They cleared the guys who were in front of me, so I got a clear view of every shot. That makes it a lot easier."

Jhonas Enroth stopped 34 shots for Buffalo, which has the fewest points and goals in the NHL.

"Scoring has been our problem all season. Tonight was no different," Enroth said. "The effort was there, but we struggle to finish."

Earlier in this disappointing season, the Islanders and Sabres swapped star forwards Matt Moulson and Thomas Vanek, but both impending free agents have both been dealt elsewhere since.

Fans periodically voiced loud chants of "Snow Must Go," directed toward Islanders general manager Garth Snow.

Despite being outshot 14-10 and short-handed three times in the first period, the Islanders took a 2-0 lead.

Nielsen put New York in front before the game's first stoppage, and Okposo doubled the lead with a power-play goal.

After holding his stick in the air waiting to fire, Nielsen unleashed a hard drive from the left circle that struck Enroth's glove and found its way in at 3:31 for his 22nd goal.

Okposo made it 2-0 with 2:36 left when he corralled a pass from Brock Nelson in the slot and whipped a shot past Enroth 1:11 into Henrik Tallinder's holding penalty.

It was Okposo's team-leading 27th goal and 69th point. He also helped set up Nielsen's goal, tying him with injured captain John Tavares with a club-best 42 assists.

New York nearly had a third goal, but Enroth made a fine stop against Josh Bailey at the left post when he tried to follow up on Nelson's wraparound attempt.

Buffalo mustered five shots during its three failed power plays in the first period. The only advantage the Sabres gave to the Islanders in the frame proved costly when Okposo scored on New York's only shot.

The trend reversed in the second when New York had a 14-10 shots edge, but neither team scored.

Nilsson's first scare came when he stopped a shot by Matt D'Agostini 2:13 into the second and then had to reach behind him after the puck slid through him and trickled toward the open net.

"I thought I had it, but then I heard the fans chanting a little, so I figured it was probably laying behind me," Nilsson said. "Those things happen, but luckily it didn't end up in the net."

The Sabres nearly got on the board in the final two seconds of the middle frame when Drew Stafford ripped a shot off a faceoff win in the Islanders' end during a Buffalo power play, but Nilsson was there to block it.

Ennis scored his 18th goal during that advantage.

"You can't expect to win if you score only one goal," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. "We had some good looks, but we couldn't finish."

NOTES: Okposo is one goal shy of 100 in the NHL. ... The Sabres recalled D Rasmus Ristolainen from Rochester (AHL) due to the absence of D Tyler Myers (arm), who will also likely miss Sunday's home game against Montreal. ... New York agreed to terms with 2012 draft pick D Adam Pelech on a three-year, entry-level contract.

Sabres show why they merit last place

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

March 15, 2014

UNIONDALE — The Sabres are halfway to proving they are indeed the worst team in the NHL.

Buffalo, in last place in the 30-team league, dropped a 4-1 decision to the 27th-place New York Islanders on Saturday night. The Sabres also lost to 28th-place Florida nine days ago, and they travel to Edmonton (29th) and Calgary (26th) this week.

A clean sweep would leave no doubt who deserves the best shot at winning the draft lottery next month.

The Sabres, who host Thomas Vanek and the Montreal Canadiens tonight, have lost five straight. They've totaled only five goals during the skid.

“Ninety-nine percent of the teams in this league jam the net, try to create some screens and fight for rebounds,” coach Ted Nolan said. “For whatever reason, we peel away. We review that over and over again. You have to have a certain pedigree to do that, and sometimes our players don't want to do it.”

The latest setback started poorly. Frans Nielsen scored with just 3:31 off the clock, and Kyle Okposo made it 2-0 late in the first.

It remained that way through a scoreless second, but the Sabres came alive just 56 seconds into the final period. Drew Stafford and Tyler Ennis – the only players to reach the goal column in the last five games – combined on Ennis' power-play goal to make it 2-1.

Before the tally was even announced, the Islanders had their two-goal lead back. Ryan Strome scored on a two-shot breakaway just 39 seconds later to draw cheers from the announced crowd of 14,388.

“The big killer was we get the first goal to make it 2-1, and the next shift we make another not very smart play,” Nolan said.

Cal Clutterbuck scored on an empty net with 2:13 remaining, ensuring the win for goaltender Anders Nilsson (33 saves). Buffalo's Jhonas Enroth stopped 34 of 37 shots.

The most intriguing part of the Sabres' night was a lineup tweak. Cody Hodgson, expected to be Buffalo's first- or second-line center for years to come, moved to right wing with Brian Flynn playing in the middle.

Hodgson, in the first season of a six-year, \$25.5 million contract, has just two goals and four assists in the last 15 games.

“He hasn’t been that offensive guy we want, and maybe spring him on the right side he can cheat offensively and take some chances,” Nolan said. “That didn’t work, either.”

Hodgson said he played a little wing with Vancouver and in juniors. “I’ve got to watch the game and see how I can generate more from that position,” he said.

The game featured the return of Rasmus Ristolainen, the Sabres’ top pick in last year’s draft. He was an emergency recall for injured defenseman Tyler Myers. Ristolainen opened the season in Buffalo but was sent to Rochester in mid-November when Nolan and Pat LaFontaine came in and put an end to the youth movement that saw four teenagers in the lineup.

Though Ristolainen was disappointed by the demotion, he’s come to learn it was a wise move.

“There’s been a lot of ice time,” said Ristolainen, who played in all situations during his 30 games with the Amerks and recorded six goals and 18 points. “I think I’m a way better player now. I’ve got more confidence. I’m getting better on the power play, PK, everything.”

That was the whole point of shipping Ristolainen, Nikita Zadorov and Mikhail Grigorenko out of Buffalo.

“As coaches and managers, we’re almost like parents,” Nolan said. “Some kids think they’re 26 when they’re only 16 years old. They need guidance and they need direction.”

Nolan recalls special game as Isles coach

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

March 16, 2014

UNIONDALE — Long Island will always be a special place for Ted Nolan. It's where he returned to the NHL after nearly a decade in exile, where he once again led an upstart team to the playoffs.

But of the 169 games he spent on the New York bench, the one in which he wasn't the coach sticks out.

Nolan always noticed the signage that honored Al Arbour's 1,499 games as Islanders coach. During a meeting with owner Charles Wang, Nolan suggested they improve that number by one.

So on Nov. 3, 2007, Arbour accepted an invitation from Nolan and coached on a one-day contract. He led New York to a 3-2 comeback victory over Pittsburgh.

"Charles had little meetings once in a while on how to get more people in the building, maybe some celebrities coming to town," Nolan said Saturday before the Sabres' game with New York. "I walk by this locker room every day, and I saw 1,499 games coached.

"I just brought it up one meeting, 'I know how to sell out a building. We could sell it out mid-July, Sunday morning, it doesn't matter. People will come, especially for a legend like Al Arbour.'

"That whole night, it was kind of like standing behind the bench with Toe Blake, Vince Lombardi. Al's a legend. To see the way the people reacted and see the game the way it went, to come back and tie up Pittsburgh, 2-2, and all of a sudden beat them, 3-2, it was one of those magical nights I'll always remember."

Nolan also looks back fondly on the final week of the 2006-07 season, when the Islanders used their own victories and losses by other playoff hopefuls to sneak into the postseason. They lost to the Sabres in the first round.

Most of all, Nolan remembers his two-year stint with the Islanders as a second chance to prove he could coach. He and the Sabres bitterly parted ways after he was named Coach of the Year in 1997, and he didn't get another look until Wang hired him in 2006.

Saturday's game was Nolan's first in Nassau Coliseum since 2008.

“I was very thankful for the opportunity with the Islanders, especially at the time,” Nolan said. “I was out of the league about 10 years. I get a call from Charles to come here to coach. It was certainly an honor. I’m always grateful.”

...

The Sabres played without defenseman Tyler Myers, and they may do so again tonight when Montreal visits First Niagara Center. Myers banged his arm hard on the glass Thursday in Carolina, and he stayed off the ice Saturday.

“He went to finish his hit and kind of missed the guy a little bit,” Nolan said. “Hopefully, we’ll get him back by the long trip.”

The Sabres head to western Canada this week, starting with a game Tuesday in Calgary.

Buffalo recalled Rasmus Ristolainen, its top pick in last year’s draft, on an emergency basis to take Myers’ spot.

Alexander Sulzer, who likely suffered a concussion against the Hurricanes, is out for at least a week. Chad Ruhwedel took his place on the blue line.

...

Thomas Vanek will play his first game against the Sabres tonight after spending 598 in a Buffalo uniform. The Sabres dealt their perennial scoring leader to the Islanders in October. New York sent him to Montreal at the trade deadline.

“He was one of the best players to roll through in a while,” Sabres center Tyler Ennis said. “He got traded and we didn’t even get to see him in Long Island. It’ll be good to see him in a Canadiens jersey. We haven’t seen him for a while, and he was a great teammate for a lot of years.”

Sabres aim to end skid against Canadiens

By John Kreiser

NHL.com

March 16, 2014

CANADIENS (36-25-7) at SABRES (19-40-8)

TV: RDS; TSN-HABS, MSG-B, BELL-TV

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

Season series: The Montreal Canadiens are going for their third victory in as many tries against the Buffalo Sabres this season. Montreal won 3-1 in Buffalo on Nov. 27 and 3-2 at home on Dec. 7. The teams play again on March 25 at Bell Centre.

Big story: The Canadiens might not have needed a plane to fly to Buffalo after an emotional 5-4 home victory against the Ottawa Senators on Saturday, a game that saw them score three times in the final 3:22 of regulation.

"It shows the character of our team, they never gave up," coach Michel Therrien said. "That's the No. 1 thing for me, we found a way to win. What I'm hoping for is that can change a season, those big games like that."

The Sabres also played Saturday night; they lost their fifth in a row when they were beaten 4-1 by the New York Islanders.

Team Scope:

Canadiens: The return of starting goaltender Carey Price didn't look like it would help the slumping Canadiens for most of the game against Ottawa, which capitalized on numerous defensive errors and led 4-1 with less than 3 1/2 minutes left in regulation. But goals by Lars Eller and Brian Gionta 78 seconds apart made it a one-goal game, and David Desharnais triggered an eruption when he snapped the puck into the net with :00.3 on the clock to tie the game.

But defenseman Francis Bouillon set off an even louder roar 1:26 into overtime when he picked up a loose puck and fired it into the net during a scramble for his first goal of the season, giving the Canadiens their most improbable win of the season and ending a three-game losing streak.

"It's probably the most important goal of my career," said Bouillon, who pinched in after goaltender Robin Lehner stopped Andrei Markov's shot. "In overtime, you try to create some offence and I saw the puck lying there in front."

Price, who had missed eight games with a lower-body injury, didn't make the trip to Buffalo. Dustin Tokarski was called up from Hamilton of the American Hockey League to back up Peter Budaj.

Sabres: Buffalo has struggled to score since opening night, and Saturday was no different. Despite getting 34 shots against the NHL's worst defensive team, the Sabres managed only one goal. They've scored five goals during their losing streak and are last in the NHL with 126 non-shootout goals.

"Scoring has been our problem all season. Tonight was no different," goaltender Jhonas Enroth said. "The effort was there, but we struggle to finish."

Buffalo had six power plays against the Islanders and scored its lone goal with the extra man, but interim coach Ted Nolan wasn't happy with his team's inability to get to the net.

"Ninety-nine percent of the teams in this League jam the net, try to create some screens and fight for rebounds," he said. "For whatever reason, we peel away."

Who's hot: Montreal center David Desharnais has goals in back-to-back games; he scored the goal that sent the game against the Senators into overtime. ... Sabres forward Tyler Ennis has goals in back-to-back games and points in four straight.

Injury report: The Canadiens are without defenseman Josh Gorges (broken hand) and forward Michael Bournival (concussion). ... The Sabres are missing forwards Chris Stewart (season-ending ankle injury), Zemgus Girgensons (lower body) and Torrey Mitchell (lower body). Defenseman Alexander Sulzer (upper body) is expected to miss at least another week, and Tyler Myers (elbow) didn't play against the Islanders.

Islanders hand Sabres fifth straight loss

NHL.com

March 15, 2014

The NHL's worst defensive team shut down its weakest offensive team Saturday night.

Anders Nilsson made 33 saves to lead the New York Islanders to a 4-1 victory against the Buffalo Sabres at Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum. Frans Nielsen, Kyle Okposo, Ryan Strome and Cal Clutterbuck scored for the Islanders, who came into the game having allowed a League-high 228 non-shootout goals. Lubomir Visnovsky had three assists.

Nilsson said his defensemen did a good job of keeping the Sabres to the outside for most of the night.

"They helped me out a lot," the rookie goaltender said. "They cleared out the guys in front of me so I saw pretty much every shot."

It was the 10th victory at the Coliseum for the Islanders, and their first in regulation since beating the Dallas Stars 7-3 on Jan. 6. New York's 10-17-8 home record is the worst in the NHL.

Tyler Ennis scored a power-play goal for Buffalo early in the third period, but the Islanders killed off five other penalties and did not allow an even-strength goal.

Sabres interim coach Ted Nolan wasn't happy with his team's inability to get to the net, especially on the power play.

"Ninety-nine percent of the teams in this League jam the net, try to create some screens and fight for rebounds," he said. "For whatever reason, we peel away."

The loss was the fifth in a row for the Sabres, who've scored five goals during that span. Jhonas Enroth made 34 saves for Buffalo, which is last in the NHL with 126 non-shootout goals, 32 fewer than anyone else. The Sabres are a League-worst 7-21-3 on the road.

The Islanders wasted little time taking the lead. Nielsen scored his career-best 22nd goal 3:31 into the game when he took a pass from Anders Lee and with Okposo crashing the net, fired a wide-angled slap shot from the left circle that hit Enroth and found its way into the net.

New York killed off a pair of Buffalo power plays, then capitalized on its first chance with the extra man. Okposo found some room between the hash marks, took a right-circle feed from Brock Nelson and zipped a quick low shot past Enroth at 17:24 for his team-high 27th goal of the season. He had four goals in 48 games last season.

Okposo also had the second assist on Nielsen's goal, and his career-best 69 points are fourth in the NHL scoring race.

"A couple years ago, you guys weren't talking about him, the fans were down on him," Islanders coach Jack Capuano said of Okposo, the seventh player taken in the 2006 NHL Draft. "Now they chant, 'USA! USA!'"

Islanders center Casey Cizikas missed a chance to make it a three-goal game three minutes into the second period when he took a passout from Johan Sundstrom but fired high and wide from 10 feet in front of Enroth.

That was one of the few scoring chances for either team in the period. Nilsson made his best save an instant before the buzzer when he stopped Drew Stafford's power-play rocket from the high slot with his mask, preserving New York's 2-0 lead.

Buffalo got on the board 55 seconds into the third period when Ennis took a pass at the right post, spun and banked a power-play shot into the net off Islanders defenseman Travis Hamonic for his 18th goal of the season. But New York, which has lost a League-leading 12 games when leading by two goals, got that one back 40 seconds later when Strome knocked in his own rebound for his fourth of the season after Enroth stopped his breakaway.

"Even when they got that power-play goal to start the third period – and you guys thought 'Here we go again' – we battled back," Capuano said. "We were resilient. It was a good bench here tonight. The guys were positive and willing to work."

Enroth was left to fend for himself after four Sabres were caught up ice, leaving Strome free to take a pass from Matt Martin.

"The big killer was we get the first goal to make it 2-1, and the next shift we make another not-very-smart play," Nolan said.

Nolan pulled Enroth for an extra attacker with three minutes remaining, but Clutterbuck pitched a backhander from center ice into the empty net with 2:13 remaining.

"It was solid work from the whole team," Nielsen said. "I liked our game without the puck. We were solid in front of Anders; he took care of the first shot and we cleaned up after that."

The Islanders announced before the game that they signed defenseman Adam Pelech to a three-year, entry-level contract. A third-round pick (No. 65) at the 2012 NHL Draft, Pelech has nine goals, 45 assists and a plus-45 rating in 59 games this season for the Erie Otters in the Ontario Hockey League.

Sabres' Cory Conacher endured long road to reach NHL dream

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

March 16, 2014

BUFFALO – There was no straight path to the NHL for Cory Conacher. About 10 years ago, after the AAA Burlington Cougars cut him, the diminutive Sabres winger figured his hockey career was over.

“You always run into a certain coach that just doesn’t like your physical stature,” Conacher recalled Friday, “and that’s kind of I think what happened.”

But the 5-foot-8 Conacher had a chip on his shoulder that would help buoy him to the NHL.

“I like proving people wrong,” he said. “It’s a pretty good feeling when you make it this far and you get the chance to prove someone like him wrong.”

Conacher thrived playing down a level in AA – “I had the most fun and the time of my life down there,” he said – eventually moved up and later earned a spot at Canisius College, becoming an NCAA star.

“I don’t think I was ever the best kid on the team,” Conacher said. “I think what got me this far is my work ethic and how hard I worked and how hard I wanted to make the NHL.”

The 24-year-old cracked the NHL last season with the Tampa Bay Lightning, briefly turning heads on a line with Martin St. Louis, his idol, and Steven Stamkos.

Barely a year later, having been let loose by the Ottawa Senators earlier this month, Conacher is already on his third team. He hadn’t scored a goal since Dec. 28 entering Saturday’s game against the New York Islanders.

But Conacher is generating some rare buzz for a waiver addition. Buffalo claims the Burlington, Ont., native as its own. He’s skating on the first line beside Tyler Ennis and Drew Stafford.

“It’s pretty special to be back here in Buffalo and be able to play in a Sabre uniform,” said Conacher, whose new team hosts old friend Thomas Vanek the Montreal Canadiens tonight inside the First Niagara Center. “I used to watch so many games when I went to Canisius.”

Canisius wound up being the perfect spot for Conacher, who wanted to play Division-I hockey badly, to develop into a professional talent.

“It was probably the best decision I could make at the time because I wasn’t even the best player on my junior team,” Conacher said. “I wasn’t an outstanding player yet. I still had to develop a little more.”

Canisius was close to home. Golden Griffins coach Dave Smith made him feel comfortable. Conacher knew he’d receive playing time.

Conacher had been drafted by the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League’s Moncton Wildcats. He also could’ve waited for large schools like Boston College or Boston University to come after him.

“But that might’ve taken another year or two of tier-two juniors,” he said. “I might’ve not played my freshman and sophomore years.”

Conacher “wanted to go somewhere and play and make an impact on the team and play big minutes.” Canisius’ small size didn’t matter.

“It was just the fact I want to keep playing,” Conacher said.

Conacher developed into the most decorated local NCAA hockey player ever, accumulating 62 goals and 148 points in four seasons.

Undrafted, Conacher then bounced around the minors shortly after his senior season ended in 2010-11.

The AHL Rochester Americans, then under an affiliation with the Florida Panthers, signed him for a weekend. He went down to the ECHL’s Cincinnati Cyclones and scored five goals and seven points in three games before earning a promotion to the Milwaukee Admirals, who shared the Cyclones with Florida.

Smith knows former Hartford Whalers star Pat Verbeek, the Lightning’s assistant general manager. Conacher received an AHL contract from Tampa Bay that summer.

Within months, Conacher had morphed into a top NHL prospect with the Norfolk Admirals.

“I ended up being put in a pretty good situation with Norfolk,” he said. “I played a lot of minutes with them. I was able to play with some pretty good players.”

He added: “That’s kind of where I blossomed, I guess. Norfolk was a team that was pretty amazing.”

No kidding.

Conacher enjoyed one of the greatest AHL seasons ever in 2011-12, scoring 39 goals and 80 points while winning league MVP and rookie of the year honors.

The Admirals won the Calder Cup and a record 28 straight games during the regular season.

“That definitely helped me develop into a player as well,” Conacher said. “Being a part of that team was special.”

So was playing beside the 5-foot-8 St. Louis, another undrafted college star, last season.

“That was a dream come true,” Conacher said. “Marty St. Louis was my mentor when I got to Tampa. I think he might’ve saw a bit of himself in me. That’s why he really tried to help me out so much. I still text him to this day. He gives me a lot of pointers.”

xxx

With defensemen Tyler Myers and Alexander Sulzer out, the Sabres recalled rookie Rasmus Ristolainen from Rochester on Saturday. They also have rookie Chad Ruhwedel on emergency recall.

Myers missed his man trying to finish a hit in Thursday’s 4-2 loss in Carolina. He could also sit out tonight’s game, interim Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. Myers could play later this week, Nolan said.

Sulzer (upper body) left Thursday’s game after hitting his head.

The 19-year-old Ristolainen, the eighth overall pick in June, compiled one goal and four penalty minutes in 19 games after making the Sabres out of training camp. He played one game under Nolan before the Sabres sent him to the AHL.

The Finn has six goals, 18 points and 20 penalty minutes in 30 games with the Americans.

HAMILTON: More Trouble With the Offense for the Sabres

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 15, 2014

Uniondale, LI (WGR 550) -- The Sabres had plenty of first period chances on Islanders goalie Anders Nilsson but left down 2-0. Nilsson made 14 saves while Jhonas Enroth had eight.

It would be hard to blame Enroth on either goal. The first one was a slap shot from the left wing by Frans Nielsen. As Kyle Okposo skated in front of Enroth he didn't make body contact but he hooked his stick into Enroth's catching glove and he gave it a tug. That happened as the shot was on its way and Enroth went straight to the ref to plead his case.

"That's one thing I didn't like about that play, is that they were a little bit too close," Enroth said. "But the ref obviously thought it was a good goal."

The second goal was on the power play. Enroth had Anders Lee in his lap. Matt Ellis read the play to Okposo in the slot very well and he tried to chop Okposo's stick, but the Islander winger was just too strong and he ripped home his 27th on the far side.

Enroth made a great save when Henrik Tallinder couldn't handle Brock Nelson coming into the zone. Nelson went behind the net and out the other side. Josh Bailey was camped to the right of Enroth who got over to rob him with Hodgson next to Bailey looking on.

Nilsson stopped Nic Deslauriers from collecting his first NHL goal stopping him coming down the slot.

It was frustrating watching the Sabres conduct a very long 6-on-5 on a delayed penalty. They worked the puck all through the zone, but nobody would shoot it.

Nilsson had another good couple of saves on the Sabres power play when he stopped Chad Ruhwedel followed by Matt D'Agostini on the rebound.

Not many people ask John Scott to fight any more, but Matt Carkner did. The Islanders defenseman tagged Scott with the first punch, but Scott countered to make it an even tilt after that. It was only Scott's third fight since the end of November.

In the second period, Hodgson again was slow getting back which allowed Ryan Strome to come through the slot and collect a rebound.

Ruhwedel did a great job of breaking up a 2-on-1 sliding play towards the puck carrier.

The Sabres had Drew Stafford up ice while killing a penalty and he would've been in clean, but the pass was in his skates and as he spun to collect it, he put himself offside.

With just a few seconds left in the period, and the Sabres on the power play, Zenon Konopka won a faceoff to the left of Nilsson and Drew Stafford put an absolute bullet off his shoulder.

The Islander had 14 shots in the second period with Enroth sharp stopping them all. Both teams had 24 shots through two periods.

Buffalo got on the board early in the third when Stafford and Tyler Ennis hooked up again. Ennis brought the puck in front and slid it under Nilsson for his 18th.

It only took the Isles 39 seconds to get their two goal lead back. Mike Weber stepped up leaving a quick 2-on-1 for New York. Matt Martin quickly relayed it in to Strome. Enroth stopped the first shot, but Strome scored on the rebound. Cal Clutterbuck's empty-net goal sealed the 4-1 win for the Islanders.

The Sabres had a 6-3 power play advantage in the game, but could only score once.

"We haven't been scoring too much lately," said Enroth. "It's tough to win when you don't score. That's how it's been all year, but we just keep trying to get better every day."

This game was better than they've been playing lately, but they made an average to below average goalie look great. They don't get much traffic in front and they turn away from rebounds which tonight there were many.

"When you shoot the puck on a goalie, 99 percent of the teams in this league jam the net, create some screens and fight for rebounds," said Ted Nolan. "For whatever reason, we peel away. We're looking for a pass to shoot the puck into an empty net and it never happens. We review that over and over again. You have to have a certain pedigree to do that and sometimes our players don't want to do it."

Islanders Skate Past Sabres 4-1

By Dan Cave

WGR 550

March 15, 2014

Anders Nilsson stopped 33 shots and Kyle Okposo picked up a goal and an assist in the Islanders' 4-1 win over the Sabres on Saturday. The loss marks Buffalo's fifth in a row.

Goals by Frans Nielsen and Okposo put the Islanders ahead 2-0 after the first period. Nielsen's tally came just 3:31 into the game, a shot that found its way through traffic and into the Buffalo net. Okposo took advantage of a Henrik Tallinder penalty later in the period, sending a shot from the slot past Enroth for the 2-0 lead.

The two sides skated to a scoreless second period, but Ennis cut the New York lead in half early in the third. Ennis took a pass from Stafford and swept the puck past Nilsson and into the Islanders net. The Islanders answered only 39 seconds later on Ryan Strome's breakaway chance to go back up by two. Buffalo pulled Enroth with about three minutes to play and Cal Clutterbuck took advantage, scoring an empty-netter at 17:47, making it 4-1.

The Sabres are right back in action on Sunday evening against the Montreal Canadiens at First Niagara Center at 7 p.m. Hear the call on WGR 550 and the Buffalo Sabres Radio Network.

1st Period

Goals

3:31 - NYI - Frans Nielsen (22) (Anders Lee, Kyle Okposo)

17:24 - NYI - Kyle Okposo (27) (PPG) (Brock Nelson, Lubomir Visnovsky)

Penalties

5:35 - NYI - Matt Carkner (2 min., hooking)

9:15 - NYI - Matt Carkner (5 min., fighting)

9:15 - BUF - John Scott (5 min., fighting)

10:25 - NYI - Thomas Hickey (2 min., high-sticking)

16:13 - BUF - Henrik Tallinder (2 min., holding)

17:54 - NYI - Calvin de Haan (2 min., tripping)

2nd Period

Goals

None

Penalties

14:27 - BUF - Mike Weber (2 min., interference)

19:08 - NYI - Colin McDonald (2 min., cross checking)

19:08 - NYI - Matt Martin (2 min., cross checking)

19:08 - BUF - Henrik Tallinder (2 min., roughing)

3rd Period

Goals

0:56 - BUF - Tyler Ennis (18) (PPG) (Drew Stafford, Christian Ehrhoff)

1:35 - NYI - Ryan Strome (4) (Matt Martin, Lubomir Visnovsky)

17:47 - NYI - Cal Clutterbuck (9) (EN) (Lubomir Visnovsky)

Penalties

4:05 - NYI - Calvin de Haan (2 min., high-sticking)

12:56 - NYI - Cal Clutterbuck (2 min., tripping)

18:16 - BUF - John Scott (2 min., cross checking)

Goaltending

BUF - Jhonas Enroth (34 saves, 37 shots)

NYI - Anders Nilsson (33 saves, 34 shots)

Power Plays

BUF - 1 of 6

NYI - 1 of 3

Sabres Nolan returns to Long Island

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 15, 2014

Uniondale, LI (WGR 550) -- This is Ted Nolan's first game back since coaching the Islanders from 2006 until 2008. He was 74-68-21 and made the playoffs his first season losing to the Sabres in five games. Nolan of course was happy to be back, "It's one of the places where I was very thankful for the opportunity that I had especially at the time. I think I was out of the league for about 10 years and getting the call from Charles to coach here was certainly an honor so I'm always grateful."

Nolan said he had some good memories in the brief time he coached the Isles, "There's a few, but probably the most memorable was when Dubielwicz had the poke check in New Jersey. It was a magical ride because we had to win all four of our remaining games, the other teams had to lose, this team had to beat that team, so all the stars lines up." Nolan added, "I remember sitting in a restaurant watching Toronto play the night before we played and they lost so we had a chance, so that whole couple of days is one of those memories."

The Sabres aren't the only ones fighting the injury bug. The Islanders will be without their two best players tonight in John Tavares and Michael Grabner.

After making 51 saves in Carolina, Michal Neuvirth gives the crease back to Jhonas Enroth. Enroth has faced an average of 31 shots per game, but lately he saw 23 vs Nashville, 31 against Chicago, 44 at Tampa Bay, 39 in Dallas and 38 vs San Jose.

Overall Enroth is 4-15-5 with a 2.80 goals against and .911 save percentage. Some people say anything over .910 is good, for me I like to see it over .920. Neuvirth is .921.

With 46 points Buffalo remains in last place in the NHL, nine in back of Edmonton, 11 behind Florida and 13 in back of the Islanders. If you're thinking the Sabres will get the Thomas Vanek pick this year, then you want a Sabres win in regulation tonight. As of now the Sabres would have two of the top three picks in June if the Islanders give them the pick this year.

Once you get past the two goalies only three players are performing up to their abilities lately and that's the line of Tyler Ennis, Drew Stafford and Cory Conacher. Ennis has six goals and six assists for 12 points in 13 games. He has 20 points in his last 23 games. Stafford has goals in three straight games and has nine goals and six assists for 15 points in 16 games. Conacher has played three games here and has two assists.

The Isles lost here to San Jose last night and have lost three out of four.

Evgeni Nabokov was in net last night and has played three out of four games letting in 11 goals.

Josh Bailey has been a little better lately with four points in three games and nine points in 12.

Since coming back from the minors Ryan Strome has five points in eight games.

Kyle Okposo has six points in three games.

Anders Lee is another one up from the minors and has six goals and three assists for nine points in eight games.

Sabres injuries are piling up

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 15, 2014

Uniondale, LI (WGR 550) -- With the injuries to Tyler Myers and Alex Sulzer, Rasmus Ristolainen will play tonight against the Islanders.

Myers has an elbow injury and Ted Nolan said he'll miss at least tonight and Sunday.

Ristolainen played 30 games with the Amerks scoring six goals and 12 assists. In 19 games in Buffalo he had one goal and no assists playing an average of over 17 minutes per night. Nolan said, "As coaches and managers we're almost like parents. Some kids think they're 26 when they're only 16, so they need guidance, they need direction. I'm quite sure Rasmus thought he was capable of playing at this level at that time and rightfully so, he should, but sometimes you're not."

Ristolainen has played in all situations in Rochester and by all accounts has excelled. The rookie said about his experience on the farm, "Really good, I've played a lot on everything, power play and PK and it's been pretty good, but it's nice to be back here."

Ristolainen was upset when Ted Nolan and Pat LaFontaine showed up and sent him down, but now that he's gone through it, he's changed his mind, "I know the reason, I was a little disappointed when I got sent down, but of course I know the reason. I tried to work harder every day." The rookie added, "I think I'm getting better since I came there and when I'm now here I think I'm a way better player now. I've got more confidence, I'm getting better in power play and PK."

In other injury news, Torrey Mitchell may come back during the first week of the road trip next week while Zemgus Girgensons is likely after the trip.

SABRES UNABLE TO GENERATE OFFENSE ON LONG ISLAND

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

March 16, 2014

UNIONDALE, N.Y. – Those who do not learn from their mistakes are doomed to repeat them.

The Buffalo Sabres fell to the New York Islanders 4-1 on Saturday at Nassau Coliseum and interim coach Ted Nolan is seeing some of the same errors creep up more often than he would like.

Buffalo has now lost five games in a row after a stretch in which they had won four of five games.

Jhonas Enroth made 34 saves for the Sabres. Frans Nielsen and Kyle Okposo scored the first two goals of the game for the Islanders two goals in the first period. Ryan Strome added another early in the third and Cal Clutterbuck tacked on an empty-net goal with 2:33 remaining in regulation.

Anders Nilsson turned aside 33 shots by the Sabres to earn the victory.

Buffalo's Tyler Ennis made it 2-1, scoring 56 seconds into the third period but Strome put New York back in the lead 31 seconds later.

"I thought we had some chances there and I thought Jhonas probably could've [taken] those first couple back and made a better angle on them, but I thought we played OK," Nolan said. "The big killer for us was we get the first goal to make it 2-1 and then the next shift over, we make another not very smart play, stand up at center ice, they go down 2-on-1. It just the same mistakes over and over and over again."

Strome's goal came on a neutral zone rush that resulted in him going in on Enroth alone. Enroth made the initial save, but Strome was able to put home the rebound.

"It's tough. I thought I saved it but I guess the puck just stayed in front of me and he just tapped it in there. It was a bad bounce," Enroth said.

Other than Ennis and Drew Stafford, the Sabres really aren't receiving much offensive production. In the past five games, only Stafford or Ennis have scored. The pair has been consistently putting up points since the start of the new calendar year.

"It's pretty simple. I think we've just got to work hard to get our chances and get it in and get back to our basics," Ennis said.

Nolan would like to see more production from his other lines. Only six Sabres have recorded at least a point during Buffalo's five-game losing streak. Ennis, Stafford and Cory Conacher are the only players with multiple points.

Both Ennis (2+2) and Stafford (3+1) are on four-game point streaks.

"Tyler Ennis, we can't expect him to score all the goals every game and expect to win," Nolan said. "Drew Stafford's the same thing. He's playing well. We need some other people to contribute once in awhile."

Buffalo has scored a total of five goals in their past five games. Sabres alternate captain Christian Ehrhoff said the team needs to generate more traffic in and around the crease.

"We have to get a little more dirty, get more guys in front of the net and try to get an ugly on off the skates or off a rebound," he said. "We're a little too much on the outside and it's tough to score goals when the goalie sees the puck and the opponent has good body position on you."

Nolan also would prefer his team crash the net more to create more opportunities.

"When you shoot the puck on a goalie, 99 percent of the teams in this League jam the net, create some screens and fight for rebounds. For whatever reason, we peel away," Nolan said. "We're looking for a pass to shoot the puck into an empty net and it never happens. We do that over and over again. You have to have a certain pedigree to do that and sometimes our players don't want to do it."

Sabres forward Cody Hodgson moved from center to right wing for the game. Brian Flynn moved to the middle and Marcus Foligno manned the other wing. Hodgson has six points (2+4) in his past 13 games and Nolan hoped the move would jumpstart his offensive game.

"He hasn't been that offensive guy we want and I thought maybe spring him on the right side and he could cheat offensively and take some chances," Nolan said. "But that didn't work tonight."

Rasmus Ristolainen made his return to the Sabres lineup after spending some time in Rochester. With Tyler Myers out with an upper-body injury, Ristolainen, 19, has been recalled from the American Hockey League. He played 19 games with the Sabres to start the year.

"I really liked him. I really do. He's what you like in a hockey player," Nolan said. "He's big. He's smart. He's intelligent. He knows the game. He makes some really good reads out there so we've got a real good one coming there."

Sunday night, Buffalo hosts the Montreal Canadiens at 7 p.m. at First Niagara Center, so there won't be much time to dwell on this loss. Montreal is coming off a 5-4 comeback victory over the Ottawa Senators on Saturday.

"There are some positive things we can take from tonight and obviously we have to regroup pretty fast," Ehrhoff said. "Tomorrow's our next game and we've got to get ready for that."

RISTOLAINEN RECALLED TO PLAY FOR INJURED MYERS

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

March 15, 2014

UNIONDALE, N.Y. – Buffalo Sabres defenseman Tyler Myers will not play Saturday night against the New York Islanders so rookie Rasmus Ristolainen has been recalled on an emergency basis from the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League to take his spot in the lineup.

It's likely that Myers will miss both the game against the Islanders and Buffalo's home game Sunday night against the Montreal Canadiens. Myers sustained the injury during the team's game in Carolina on Thursday.

The Sabres leave Monday for a five-game, coast-to-coast road trip that starts in Calgary and ends on March 27 in Nashville with stops in Edmonton, Vancouver and Montreal.

"Hopefully we get him back by the long trip," Nolan said. "He went to finish his hit and kind of missed the guy a little bit, but we'll go from there."

Ristolainen, Buffalo's top pick in the 2013 NHL Draft (eighth overall), was on the ice for Buffalo's optional morning skate at Nassau Coliseum after taking an early morning flight out from Rochester.

He joins the team for the second time this year after beginning the season in Buffalo for a 19-game stint. He scored his first NHL goal in his ninth game.

He was sent down to Rochester on Nov. 19 and has recorded 18 points (6+12) through 30 games played with the Amerks.

"Of course I was a little bit disappointed at that point when I got sent down but I tried to work harder every day," he said, calling this recall a nice surprise.

The Sabres started the year with four teenagers on the roster – including Ristolainen, who's 19 – but when Nolan took over behind the bench, the organization shifted gears and opted to play with a more experienced lineup in Buffalo. Since then, a few other young players like Mark Pysyk have been sent down to bolster the Amerks lineup and gain valuable experience.

"As coaches and managers, we're almost like parents. Some kids think they're 26 when they're only 16 year old. They need guidance and they need direction," Nolan said. "I'm quite sure Rasmus thought he was capable of playing at this level and at that time and rightfully so, they should. But sometimes, you're not. Nothing like some good tutelage and development to make you a better player so I'm glad it's worked."

Ristolainen was counted upon in many different situations in Rochester and in his first professional season in North America, he also had to adjust to the smaller ice surface. Sabres alternate captain Henrik Tallinder thinks that time in Rochester has served Ristolainen well.

“Rasmus is a great player and I’m really happy to see him up here again. I thought he played pretty good when he was up here last time, too,” Tallinder said. “For him to go down there, play a lot – way more than he played when he was up here – and just in key situations. That helps a young defenseman to develop. I think it’s all positive for him.”

Defenseman Chad Ruhwedel will also play as he fills in for Alexander Sulzer, who sustained an upper-body injury on Thursday. Sulzer will miss at least a week.

Jhonas Enroth will start for Buffalo. He’s started six of Buffalo’s last eight games. He’s 3-3-0 in those games with a .922 save percentage.

“Especially with the void Ryan Miller leaves, I think it’s Jhonas Enroth’s coming out party here. We’ve had two good goalies for a really long time and now Jhonas is getting a shot to see what we can do,” alternate captain Drew Stafford said. “Getting Michal in here as well, they’ve both played out of their minds with some of the shots we’ve given up.”

In his start on Thursday, Neuvirth stopped 51 shots, the most by a Sabres goaltender since Dominik Hasek made 55 saves on March 1, 1996.

In the seven games since the Sabres traded Miller, Sabres goaltenders have faced a combined total of 257 saves in seven games.

“Since the Ryan Miller trade, these two young kids were given an opportunity and it seems like they’re both battling for No. 1, which is great,” Nolan said. “There’s nothing like internal competition to bring the best out of any athlete. Right now they’re both battling hard and so far, knock on wood, it’ll continue.”

Puck drop between the Sabres and Islanders is scheduled for 7 p.m.

Islanders manage to win after taking two-goal lead

By Arthur Staple

Long Island Newsday

March 15, 2014

The Sabres played a big role in this disappointing Islanders season, which turned around the Thomas Vanek-Matt Moulson deal nearly five months ago.

Neither of those players was on the Nassau Coliseum ice Saturday night, having been dealt away at last week's trade deadline. It instead was a matchup of two teams headed for the draft lottery -- and the Islanders managed to hold on to a two-goal lead, taking a 4-1 decision.

Ryan Strome scored off his own rebound 1:35 into the third period to get the Isles' two-goal edge back after Tyler Ennis cut the lead in half only 49 seconds earlier. Anders Nilsson made 33 saves for the win and Kyle Okposo had a goal and an assist.

Cal Clutterbuck scored into an empty net to seal the win, only the Islanders' second win in their last 11 games at home. They also stopped a bad trend of losing games after taking two-goal leads after two periods, having dropped games in Edmonton and Calgary last week after leading by two through 40 minutes.

"They got that power-play goal and I'm sure you were thinking, 'Here we go again,'" Jack Capuano said. "But we got a good shift and a good goal right back."

The last time these two teams interacted, on Oct. 27, was a turning point in the Islanders' season. Garth Snow sent Moulson, a conditional 2014 first-round pick (the Isles can defer it to 2015 if, as expected now, it is within the top 10 picks in June) and a 2015 second-round pick for Vanek.

The Islanders were 4-4-3 at the time and Snow said he expected better. What the Islanders got was worse. Vanek produced some points with John Tavares, but the team's overall defense and goaltending slipped badly. Vanek turned down a seven-year, \$50-million offer from the Islanders in January, when the team was playing better. After his rejection, the Isles went into a 2-8-1 tailspin.

And Snow did not get much of a return for Vanek at the trade deadline, just as the Sabres did not get much for Moulson, shipping him to the Wild for a pair of second-round picks and fourth-line forward Torrey Mitchell. Moulson and his new team visit the Coliseum on Tuesday.

Saturday night, the remnants of both the Islanders and Sabres got together. Buffalo dressed only nine players who were in uniform on opening night this season. The Islanders had 12 players who were in uniform on Oct. 3.

When Strome scored in the third to answer the Sabres' goal, Okposo already was confident the Isles were in a winning position. "That was a good 60 minutes we played tonight," he said. "It was never really in doubt, even when they scored. Strome came back with a big one and we didn't look back. It felt good."

Frans Nielsen took a drop pass from Anders Lee and slapped a shot that caromed off Jhonas Enroth's glove and in just 3:31 into the game for a 1-0 lead.

It became 2-0 when Okposo scored his 27th goal at 17:24 on the power play, a quick shot from the slot after a short pass from Brock Nelson. The two points marked Okposo's 21st multi-point game this season.

Islanders hand Sabres fifth straight loss

By Cory Wright

Islanders.com

March 15, 2014

The Islanders new-look top line had another strong outing Saturday night, powering the home team to a 4-1 win over the Buffalo Sabres at Nassau Coliseum.

Kyle Okposo, Frans Nielsen and Anders Lee combined for four points on two first-period goals, which proved to be an insurmountable lead for their Western New York rivals. Okposo extended his point streak to four games (two goals, six assists), while Nielsen and Lee lengthened theirs to three apiece. Lubomir Visnovksy had a game-high three assists.

“We’ve got some pretty good chemistry,” Okposo said. “Anders has a big body and goes to the net, but he makes plays too. Frans is such a smart, intelligent player, he’s a great centerman and he’s really easy to play with. The three of us have been clicking real well.”

Nielsen opened the scoring with a powerful slap shot through Jhonas Enroth 3:31 into the opening frame. The Sabres goaltender caught the shot high, but could not get all of it, as he watched the puck deflect over his shoulder and into the net. The goal was Nielsen’s 22nd and third in three games.

“He’s a guy who does all the little things and the intangibles in a game,” head coach Jack Capuano said of Nielsen. “He does all the right things. If you want to teach a young centerman how to play the game, tell him to watch 51.”

Fourteen minutes later, Okposo scored the eventual winner – a low snap from the slot – past Enroth on the power play.

After a scoreless second period, Tyler Ennis halved the Islanders lead 56 seconds into the third. The Islanders responded less than a minute later, as Ryan Strome restored the two-goal lead, potting his fourth of the season via breakaway. Strome’s marker gave the Islanders some breathing room, while Cal Clutterbuck iced the game with an empty-netter.

“Even when they got that power-play goal to start the third period – and you guys thought here we go again – we battled back,” head coach Jack Capuano said. “We were resilient. It was a good bench here tonight. The guys were positive and willing to work.”

Anders Nilsson stopped 33-of-34 shots in goal, en route to being named the game’s third star. He was aided by an Islanders penalty kill that went five-for-six. Enroth made 34 saves in the losing effort.

After playing their 15th back-to-back set of the season, the Islanders get two days off before hosting the Minnesota Wild on Tuesday night. Puck drop is at 7 p.m.

NOTES: Prior to the game, the Islanders announced the signing of Adam Pelech, the Islanders 2012 third-round pick, to an entry-level contract... Travis Hamonic led the Islanders with 27:08 TOI... Ryan Strome led the Islanders with six shots... Calvin de Haan and Colin McDonald led the Islanders with six hits... Kyle Okposo is one goal shy of 100 career goals.