



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres owner Pegula optimistic about young team, but not ready to make predictions

Associated Press

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BUFFALO, N.Y. – Buffalo Sabres owner Terry Pegula is choosing optimism over making predictions.

Pegula told The Associated Press on Thursday that he likes the potential he sees in his young, retooled team. But he's not ready yet to make any guesses on how the Sabres will do this season.

Pegula maintains his faith in general manager Darcy Regier and coach Ron Rolston, saying "they're doing a heck of a job." And he addressed the criticism directed at Regier by saying he doesn't believe the GM ever reads what's written about him.

As for the status of Ryan Miller, Pegula reiterated he would "definitely" like to see the goaltender re-sign with the team before his contract expires at the end of this season.

The Sabres open the season at Detroit on Oct. 2.

Armia injury a setback as Sabres assess roster

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

September 26, 2013

Joel Armia had a shot to make the Sabres' opening-night roster. He possesses a skill that's lacking in Buffalo – scoring touch – and it would have been interesting to see if he'd survive the final cuts.

Alas, he didn't make it intact through the exhibitions. Armia, one of several No. 1 picks competing for a job, is out indefinitely after breaking his hand on a slash Wednesday during the Sabres' penultimate preseason game.

"He was doing a good job," coach Ron Rolston said Thursday. "I think each game we saw improvement in how he was performing."

Armia, selected 16th overall in the 2011 NHL draft, totaled one goal and three points in four exhibitions. The Finnish right winger was getting a long look to start his first North American season in Buffalo.

While his door is closed, the window remains open for the Sabres' other roster hopefuls. The team's final preseason game is tonight in Carolina, and the bubble players have one more shot at impressing the decision makers.

"Evaluation is still going on with some spots," Rolston said in First Niagara Center. "From where we're at, there will be some tough choices we have to make. I think that's what we want. We want guys to compete for those spots."

After long-term injuries this week to Armia and forward Corey Tropp (broken jaw), the Sabres are down to 27 players: 16 forwards, nine defensemen and two goaltenders. They must be at the league maximum of 23 on Monday.

"Everyone knows you're fighting for jobs, and that's just part of the business," center Kevin Porter said. "Guys are still friends, and we're still a team here. You go out and you play your best, and the coaches make the final decision."

It's reasonable to assume there are 17 players with jobs locked up. Forwards Thomas Vanek, Steve Ott, Cody Hodgson, Tyler Ennis, Ville Leino, Drew Stafford, Patrick Kaleta, Marcus Foligno, Mikhail Grigorenko and John Scott, defensemen Christian Ehrhoff, Tyler Myers, Mike Weber, Henrik Tallinder and Mark Pysyk, and goalies Ryan Miller and Jhonas Enroth figure to be on the roster Wednesday when the Sabres open the season in Detroit.

The Sabres would need to keep three more to fill out a lineup and six to reach the roster limit. At least four players will be ticketed to Rochester this weekend.

"Every day you come in and you hope your name tag's up and you have a jersey in your stall," center Cody McCormick said.

McCormick is one of six forwards in the mix for two to four openings. He's joined by Porter and fellow center Johan Larsson, and wingers Zemgus Girgensons, Brian Flynn and Luke Adam.

Where the Sabres decide to use Ennis – he's played center and left wing during preseason – impacts what positions are open. If he's in the middle, that essentially leaves room for one center and two wingers. If he goes to the wing, two centers and one winger may make the squad.

Two rookies, Girgensons (three goals, four points) and Larsson (two goals), have had the most productive preseason among the bubble players. Flynn and Porter have the benefit of earning Rolston's admiration last year. McCormick adds punch. Adam is a long shot.

"The competitive level is up," McCormick said. "We're seeing some really good things from a lot of the players here."

There appears to be one starting job and up to three roster spots available on the blue line. Veterans Alexander Sulzer and Jamie McBain are competing with rookie Rasmus Ristolainen for the starting role. Fellow first-round pick Nikita Zadorov is expected to return to his junior team.

Ristolainen, 18, has impressed throughout camp. The Sabres practiced the power play Thursday for the first time this preseason, and Ristolainen was on one of the units. That would seem to give him an inside track to be on the ice in Detroit.

"I think I have played pretty good," Ristolainen said. "Let's see what the coaches think about that when they cut the players."

Sulzer and McBain could be kept around to provide depth or simply to avoid being lost through waivers. Sulzer is hoping to make a successful return from knee surgery, while McBain wants to make the club after arriving in an offseason trade.

"I've been in this situation so many times, it's more like Groundhog Day for me," said Sulzer, who's struggled to cement a role in Nashville, Florida, Vancouver and Buffalo. "I've learned over the years there's a few things I can control, and that's the way I play. Everything else is out of my control. I just want to do my best to play up to my skill set. The coaches and the GM make the rest of the decisions."

Rolston said the final moves will balance immediate success with the long-term betterment of the rebuilding club. Even for players sent to Rochester, the competition isn't over.

"If they're not here," Rolston said. "their job is to get here."

Armia staying in NHL for now -- because of injury

By Kevin Oklobzija
Democrat and Chronicle
September 26, 2013

The Rochester Americans roster for opening night took another hit on Wednesday when rookie winger Joel Armia suffered a broken (left) hand during a preseason game with the Buffalo Sabres.

No timetable for his return was given by the team on Wednesday. John Vogl of The Buffalo News said no decision has been made on surgery (the break could heal on its own).

Armia eventually will be with the Amerks, and his skill will be an asset as the Finnish right winger adjusts to the North American game. For now, however, others will have a chance to play a more significant role. That includes rookie center Eric Locke; another vacancy on the forward lines means he quite likely will be offered a contract.

Locke, a seventh-round draft pick in 2013, came to camp unsigned. He could return to the Ontario Hockey League to play an overage season with Saginaw but it now appears he'll stick with the Amerks.

Corey Tropp's broken jaw (from the fight in Toronto on Sunday) already had cost the Amerks a forward. With Tropp out, someone targeted for reassignment will now stick in Buffalo.

Locke scored the overtime goal in Wednesday's 3-2 preseason victory over the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins, converting a goal-mouth pass from fellow rookie Dan Catenacci.

NHL teams must be cap-compliant and at the 23-man roster by Monday, so final reassignments from the Sabres will likely come on Saturday or Sunday. A guess at which forwards come down: Luke Adam, Brian Flynn and Zemgus Girgensons.

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Last spring the Amerks bonded through the culture they called #Merk\$, going so far as to have caps and T-shirts printed.

When goalie Matt Hackett started a revival of #Merk\$ on Twitter Wednesday, now-departed tough-guy winger Nick Tarnasky replied, "no such a thing."

Tarnasky seemed to be implying that he owns the naming rights.

Not a chance, defenseman Matt MacKenzie said this morning, while wearing his #Merk\$ cap.

"We'll keep it alive," he said.

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Winning a preseason game isn't really that important -- and yet it is.

We all know that there aren't any league standings, the statistics don't count and losing coaches and players don't throw post-game tantrums.

Yet it never hurts to win, which the Amerks did against the Penguins.

"That's a habit, a culture we're trying to have around here," Amerks coach Chadd Cassidy said following the game.

Said captain Matt Ellis: "At this stage of the game you're creating a foundation, you're adding building blocks."

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Johnny McGuire had a first-period fight on Wednesday with Christiaan Minella, the first of what will quite likely be many scraps for the rookie winger.

The Amerks don't have a heavyweight presence and they definitely need one. Tarnasky, now with the Hamilton Bulldogs, was a valuable deterrent last season. Opposing tough-guys rarely did stupid things or played the intimidation game on Amerks skill players because there was a price to pay.

This year? Who knows what will happen. Jamie Devane, the guy who broke Tropp's jaw, will be with the Toronto Marlies. The Syracuse Crunch have Eric Neilson.

While McGuire (6-foot-1, 205 pounds) is just a rookie he's apparently quite willing to scrap.

"I thought he did a good job establishing what he wants to be at this level," Cassidy said after Wednesday's game.

Sabres' Drew Stafford optimistic and refreshed after 'nightmare' season

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

September 27, 2013

BUFFALO – When the worst season of Drew Stafford's career mercifully ended five months ago – he describes the six-goal, 18-point campaign as hitting “rock bottom” – the Sabres winger stopped dwelling on it.

“You got to get over it,” Stafford said Thursday inside the First Niagara Center after the Sabres prepared for tonight's preseason finale in Carolina. “It was an absolute nightmare. It's one of those things where you can't change the past, what's done is done.”

So Stafford enjoyed his summer. He married his girlfriend, Hali, and bought a new home in Minnesota.

“When times are tough, you realize life is pretty good,” Stafford said. “For me, having a good summer, a summer of training, getting hungry to come back to a normal schedule, normal training camp (is good after the lockout).

“With all the changes that are going around in this organization, there's a lot of positivity and a lot of energy and enthusiasm.”

The 27-year-old shares that enthusiasm, saying he feels “refreshed” for his eighth NHL season.

“It's all about embracing the change, embracing the new culture here,” Stafford said. “So far, so good. Everyone's really had a great camp so far. A lot of good things here.”

He added: “The future is definitely bright here in Buffalo.”

Stafford, who has two seasons and \$8 million left on his contract, wants to be at the forefront of the Sabres' rebuild.

“There's a lot of doubters out there, a lot of people aren't expecting much from us,” Stafford said. “But I have a lot of faith in here. The guys in this room, I think we're going to surprise some people.”

When rumors began swirling last season he had requested a trade, Stafford denied them. A deal, in his opinion, would've been taking the easy way out.

He said Thursday he wants to be part of the solution and create something special with the other veterans and coach Ron Rolston for the slew of talented youngsters the Sabres possess.

“I feel as though I’m just getting started as far as providing veteran leadership and really having a say in the way things are going and leading by example with my play and being counted on in a bigger role,” Stafford said. “I’m really trying to embrace that opportunity.”

Rolston has awarded Stafford some nice opportunities this preseason, skating him beside Cody Hodgson and Thomas Vanek on Wednesday and Tyler Ennis and Marcus Foligno on Saturday.

Since so many fresh faces are competing for roster spots – slick teenage prospects Zemgus Girgensons, Mikhail Grigorenko and Rasmus Ristolainen all quickly became the talk of training camp – Stafford’s name hasn’t been mentioned much.

“I don’t care. I love it,” a laughing Stafford said about the lack of attention. “I don’t play to get talked about. I don’t like the spotlight. ... It’s nice to fly under the radar in a sense.”

It’s a far cry from last season, when he was the poster boy for the team’s struggles. With Tim Connolly and Derek Roy out of town, Stafford became the fans’ No. 1 target as the Sabres missed the playoffs again.

A momentum-shifting fight in the Sabres’ opening-day win was Stafford’s season highlight. The American struggled all year. He scored his first goal Feb. 15, the Sabres’ 15th game.

Rolston even scratched Stafford, who was coming off seasons of 31 and 20 goals, twice in March.

Stafford can’t explain what happened in 2012-13.

“This game’s a mystery,” said Stafford, whose team-worst minus-16 rating ranked 830th in the league. “It’s one of those things where you have to focus on what you can control, and that’s your work ethic and your attitude. Everything else is just noise that can drag you down.”

Stafford didn’t spend the summer fretting he would be traded.

“That’s not in my control,” he said. “At the end of the day this is a business, and part of being professional is accepting what happens. That was part of being a healthy scratch as well. You have to accept that when that happens. You have to find a way to work yourself out of it.”

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Rolston said Sabres forward Cody McCormick (hand) will play tonight against the Hurricanes. The Sabres are 4-1-1 this preseason.

Sabres prospect Joel Armia out indefinitely with broken hand

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

September 26, 2013

BUFFALO – Rookie winger Joel Armia broke his hand in Wednesday’s 3-0 exhibition win and is out indefinitely, Sabres coach Ron Rolston said this afternoon.

Rolston said a slash from a Columbus Blue Jackets player injured Armia. He doesn’t think the 20-year-old Finn will need surgery, although that hasn’t been determined yet.

Armia impressed Rolston during his first NHL training camp, compiling a goal and three points in four preseason games.

“He was doing a good job,” Rolston said inside the First Niagara Center. “I think each game we saw improvement in how he was performing. I think (Wednesday) was one of his best games.”

Armia was possibly days away from being sent to Rochester.

The Sabres selected Armia 16th overall in 2011.

Sabres' Armia breaks hand

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

September 26, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Sabres got more bad news from the injury front. Joel Armia was slashed in Wednesday's Columbus game and is now out for a while. Ron Rolston said, "He's got a broken hand so he'll be out indefinitely. He got slashed on the hand."

Armia had two good periods playing with fellow first round picks Mikhail Grigorenko and Zemgus Girgensons. Rolston said, "He was good, he was doing a good job. I think each game we saw improvement in how he was performing and I thought last night was one of his best games."

Mike Weber and Marcus Foligno both missed practice. Foligno skated on his own. As far as Weber goes Rolston said, "He just had a maintenance day. He's had some soreness from the game, but he's fine."

Rolston said Cody McCormick is available to play Friday in Carolina.

Thursday was the first time in preseason that the team worked on special teams. The first power play unit was Vanek, Hodgson, Ott, Myers and Ehrhoff. Unit two was Stafford, Ennis, Leino, Pysyk and Ristolainen with McBain alternating in with the rookie.

Final Push for Young Defensemen

YNN Rochester

September 26, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. - The Sabres hit the ice for practice Thursday in preparation for the preseason finale Friday at Carolina. An injury note, forward Joel Armia is out indefinitely - he was slashed and suffered a broken hand against Columbus.

Still trying to push for a spot on the team in the final days of camp are the Sabres two first round draft picks, defensemen Rasmus Ristolainen and Nikita Zadorov. Zadorov signed his entry level deal Wednesday. The pair of 18-year-olds have made strides in adjusting to the NHL game.

"More up and down, it's different in Finland, we go forward, back and keep the puck, so there's bigger ice so there's more time," Ristolainen said.

"They say just keep working hard and play hard every game, every shift and do your job, play like how you can," Zadorov said. "I think I can play in the NHL and I'm ready for this, I'm going to show how I can do."

Marcus Foligno got in conditioning work at the end of practice, he has a muscle strain but is expected to be ready for the season opener in Detroit.

ARMIA OUT INDEFINITELY WITH BROKEN HAND

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

September 26, 2013

With Corey Tropp out 5-6 weeks with a broken jaw and Marcus Foligno nursing an upper-body strain that will likely keep him out of the lineup until the season opener in Detroit on Oct. 2, the Buffalo Sabres were dealt another blow on Thursday.

Rookie right wing Joel Armia is out indefinitely with a broken hand, Sabres coach Ron Rolston said after the team's practice at First Niagara Center. It's still not clear if surgery will be required, but Rolston predicted he'll be out at least 4-6 weeks.

The injury occurred when Armia, Buffalo's first-round pick in 2011 (16th overall), was slashed in the second period during the Sabres' 3-0 win over Columbus on Wednesday.

"Each game was saw improvement in how he's performing and I thought last night was one of his best games of the exhibition season. He was doing a good job," Rolston said.

Cody McCormick, who injured his hand in the game on Sunday, will be available to play Friday in Carolina for the team's final preseason game. Foligno skated after practice in a red non-contact jersey.

Mike Weber was given a maintenance day and did not skate.

The practice on Thursday was also the first time the Sabres worked on special teams on the ice this training camp. The team scored on a delayed penalty against the Blue Jackets and killed off all seven of Columbus' power plays.

"That's exactly what today was all about was practicing at length on our power play, on our special teams. It needs work. It can always improve," Sabres forward Steve Ott said. "You want to start off strong at the beginning of the season and having the chemistry early and practicing hopefully makes some dividends for the start of the year."

Ott was on the ice during that 6-on-5 delayed penalty goal when the Sabres were able to move the puck confidently and efficiently, waiting for the right shot. Eventually, after about 45 seconds, Ville Leino put home a rebound from Cody Hodgson, giving the Sabres a 1-0 lead.

“It was a really fun sequence to be in. Guys were moving the puck, we had good support. Guys were driving to the lanes, things that instinctively took over for us in last night’s game since it hasn’t been practiced yet,” Ott said. “But we’ve all been in those situations in our careers and in our lives and I think it took over last night. Hopefully when we get those opportunities 6-on-5 we can bury some this year.”

Yellow Power Play Unit

26 Thomas Vanek / 19 Cody Hodgson / 9 Steve Ott

10 Christian Ehrhoff / 57 Tyler Myers

White Power Play Unit

21 Drew Stafford / 63 Tyler Ennis / 25 Mikhail Grigorenko / 23 Ville Leino

3 Mark Pysyk / 55 Rasmus Ristolainen / 4 Jamie McBain

REFLECTIONS ON SABRES VS. BLUE JACKETS

By Brian Duff

Sabres.com

September 26, 2013

Jhonas Enroth, Ville Leino and Thomas Vanek were the three stars in Wednesday's 3-0 win over Columbus but it wouldn't have been hard to find three to five more who were worthy of consideration. And the majority of candidates would come from the blueline.

Mark Pysyk was the Sabres ice-time leader, logging 23:04 of seemingly effortless, if not overlooked, play. On a night when the Blue Jackets had nearly 14 minutes in power play time, Pysyk led the Buffalo defense corps in shorthanded time on ice as well at 4:59.

His superior skating negated many opportunities with ease, allowing him to be in excellent position, and the biggest testament to his game was that you hardly noticed him.

Mike Weber may have been overlooked 15 times during Saturday's marathon shootout, but he led all scorers in this game with three assists.

His cross ice pass to Cody Hodgson helped set up the Leino tally, and like Pysyk, Weber saw about four-and-a-half minutes while down a man. He continues to help mentor Rasmus Ristolainen as well. The Finnish rookie was steady over nearly 17 minutes of play, dressing in four of the Sabres six preseason games to date.

Tyler Myers garnered plenty of positive attention again for his play. See his post-game interview with us on the main page.

Myers was reunited with his old partner Henrik Tallinder for the first time this preseason and it seemed to pay immediate dividends at both ends of the rink.

As for Tallinder, who was partnered in previous games with Pysyk and Ristolainen, it was a night of good pinches, strong outlet passes, and nice instincts in the offensive zone. The best example of the latter was on the first goal of the game.

For nearly 45 seconds the Sabres worked a delayed penalty to perfection, playing keep away from a fatiguing Blue Jackets defensive unit, and moving it around through all six skaters. Tallinder had four touches during the sequence, including a little "sauce" to Steve Ott that even John Scott would have been proud of.

As the play worked towards its conclusion, Tallinder made a burst from the left point position, down to the faceoff dot, and then hard across the middle of the

slot. This distraction helped create space for Weber to send a cross ice feed to Hodgson, whose shot was stopped before Leino pounced on the rebound. No assist for Tallinder on the play, but a lot of heady plays.

Tallinder played just shy of twenty minutes, leaned on bodies and/or absorbed hits when he had to, and, to use a Ron Rolston word from this camp, complimented those around him well.

When the veterans play with poise, there's a greater likelihood the kids can have a positive impact, too. Mikhail Grigorenko, Zemgus Girgensons, Johan Larsson all fell into that category versus Columbus.

One more preseason game remains before we find out which players will have the chance to make an opening when the real season begins on Wednesday