



# **Buffalo Sabres**

**Daily Press Clips**

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## **Girgensons working to force way onto Sabres**

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

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There are some decisions to be made at the bottom rungs of the defense corps, but the most interesting story line developing at Buffalo Sabres training camp is the play of Zemgus Girgensons.

With seemingly few spots available, the 19-year-old Latvian winger is trying to force his way on to the roster.

Girgensons has been a standout in camp and in the first two exhibition games. If he keeps it up, it may be hard for the Sabres to send him back to Rochester.

The Sabres open the First Niagara Center portion of the preseason with two games in three days, tonight at 7 against Carolina (Radio 550 AM) and Saturday against Toronto. Girgensons is getting a long look and will certainly play in at least one of those games. He might play in both.

Girgensons is the only Sabre with three points in the first two games, collecting two goals in Sunday's shootout win in Montreal and an assist in Tuesday's victory in Columbus. The 6-foot-2, 194-pounder played more than 34 minutes and has a plus-3 rating.

His second goal in Montreal was a sensational effort of power down the right-wing boards, finished by a sizzling snap shot past rookie goaltender Zach Fucale.

"Most people talk about if I'm able to put up points. That's one of the things I've been working on," Girgensons said this week. "I've been working on my shooting. It's about me burying chances. I've had some problems with it. I have to put that behind me and be better offensively.

"I was pretty happy with myself. At the start of last season, the second goal would have probably hit in the netting up there, given a souvenir to a fan."

The Sabres drafted Girgensons in 2012 with the No. 14 overall pick – the highest ever for a Latvian – out of Dubuque of the United States Hockey League. He captained the club and even earned the nickname "The Latvian Locomotive" for his hard-charging, physical style.

He started last season as the youngest player in the AHL and the Sabres have eased him into the pro game by putting him at left wing rather than his natural center slot. Coach Ron Rolston reiterated this week if Girgensons makes the big club out of camp, it will be on the wing.

Girgensons started slowly in the AHL, seeing limited ice and no power-play time, until he started to get up to speed with the pro style. He played in 61 games, collecting six goals and 11 assists.

But by the time the playoffs rolled around, Girgensons had become the Amerks' top forward. He scored three of the team's five goals in its three-game sweep at the hands of the Toronto Marlies.

"He had a lot more purpose to his game offensively," recalled Rolston.

Asked about Girgensons showing in Montreal, Rolston said, "I saw more of the playoff games. Can he continue to do that as we move through the preseason and as these teams get better lineups?"

Certainly a fair point. The Canadiens, for instance, didn't have premier defensemen such as P.K. Subban, Andrei Markov or Josh Gorges in their lineup.

"It's a lot about confidence," Girgensons said. "Especially that playoff run gave me a good boost about what I can do."

And can a big preseason translate into a roster spot?

"It depends on how I keep performing," he said. "It's on the coaches to decide. I have no control."

Like many of the Sabres' young players, Girgensons spent time over the summer working on his strides with team skating instructor Dawn Braid, and that's helped him increase his power game. A fitness fanatic, Girgensons has pulled back on some of his weight regimens, opting for more cardio work to improve his agility and speed.

"You don't want to be bulky, just stronger," he said. "It can take everything away if you become a bodybuilder."

"He is big and strong and came in that way," Rolston said. "They do a lot of power work with them and Dawn has done a great job with him in skating to improve his dynamics. He's getting around pretty well with his size."

This could be a huge year for Girgensons. His NHL debut could be at hand, either on opening night or down the road, and he already has an invitation in hand to play for Latvia in the Sochi Olympics.

"That's a long ways to go and I definitely want to be there," Girgensons said. "If they call me, I'll be there. To play in the Olympics is once every four years and not everybody gets to do that."

And not everybody plays in the NHL at 19 either. Girgensons is pushing to get that chance.

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The Sabres were off Wednesday, their first break in camp, and will unveil their lineup for tonight's game at their 10:30 a.m. pregame skate.

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In advance of the first home games, the team issued an advisory Wednesday to remind fans about the impact of HarborCenter construction. Traffic will no longer be able to head southbound toward the arena on Washington Street to access Perry Street and arena parking.

The preferred route toward the arena is now Michigan Avenue, with a right turn on to Perry.

Prior to Saturday night's game against the Leafs, Sabres players will walk the Blue & Gold carpet beginning at 4:30 in Alumni Plaza before heading into the arena. There will be live music and beverages available. Brian Duff and Danny Gare will host the festivities.

## **30 in 15: Sabres to let camp battles determine roster**

By Davis Harper

NHL.com

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The rebuild officially is underway in Buffalo.

Over the past eight or so months, the Sabres fired coach Lindy Ruff and hired Ron Rolston; traded captain Jason Pominville and veteran defensemen Robyn Regehr, Jordan Leopold and Andrej Sekera; and recommitted to a youth movement that has seen the organization select 20 players during the past two NHL drafts.

That youth will define the Sabres for the foreseeable future. With the departures last season, Buffalo's roster became the League's youngest, with an average age of 26.41 years. In all, 37 of the 60 players invited to training camp were born in 1990 or later, making the bulk of Buffalo's potential roster a mix of explosive talent and massive inexperience.

The still-maturing roster is matched only by 46-year-old Rolston, who will start his first full season as an NHL coach in any capacity. Promoted from the team's American Hockey League affiliate, the Rochester Americans, when Ruff was dismissed, Rolston made his NHL debut Feb. 20. Hired on an interim basis, the Sabres went 15-11-5 with Rolston in charge, good enough for general manager Darcy Regier to remove the interim tag May 7.

Rolston's new staff includes former Avalanche coach Joe Sacco. Rolston and Sacco are well-known developers of talent, which is a priority for an organization brimming with some of the League's brightest youngsters.

Even with a list of top prospects and the coaches to develop them, little will come easy in Buffalo this season. The Sabres finished in the League's bottom third in nearly every major statistical category, offensively and defensively, last season, with those departed veterans taking their consistent productivity with them.

Rolston said he sees the overhaul as an opportunity, one that starts in training camp. He said he will use the two weeks of camp as a gantlet for players to prove themselves, and he assured NHL.com that battles would be raging all over the ice.

"We've got a lot of young guys that are pushing to get in there," Rolston said on the eve of camp. "You look at our defense corps, there's 10 defensemen that can be in our lineup opening night.

"Offensively, we've got a lot of good young players that are pushing, that have put the work in and they want a spot. You've got guys like [Zemgus] Girgensons, [Johan] Larsson, [Mikhail] Grigorenko, all those guys who are pushing to be in

our opening lineup, along with a lot of our defensive corps, so in terms of competition at camp, it's going to be open and we intend to do a lot of scrimmaging off the bat."

## Forwards

Buffalo will be looking for a crop of NHL-ready prospects to bolster an offense that struggled in 2012-13.

The Sabres were 22nd in the NHL in goals scored (118) and 22nd in goals per game (2.46) last season, and converted power plays 14.1 percent of the time, 29th in the League. The lone bright spot was the top-line duo of Thomas Vanek and Cody Hodgson, who combined for 35 goals and 40 assists. Those two likely will be paired again, perhaps alongside late-season line addition Tyler Ennis, who had 10 goals and 21 assists in 2012-13.

Things grow murky from there. Ennis' move to the top line opens the second-line center spot, into which the Sabres likely will slot Grigorenko. In 25 games last season, the 12th pick of the 2012 NHL Draft had one goal and four assists playing 10:14 per game. Despite his meager first season, expectations remain lofty for the 19-year-old Russian.

"I know first-hand that he spent a lot of time with his skating coach, improved his skating, improved his strength on the ice, and adding that with his age, he's only going to get better," teammate Steve Ott told NHL.com. "He's grabbing confidence. He's just a kid, that's the thing, and he's going to be a good player. He's going to be a top player in the League one day, but it takes time and you've got to earn it and put the work in."

Larsson is another prospect likely to break into the Buffalo top nine. A highly rated left wing, Larsson came over in the trade that sent Pominville to the Minnesota Wild, and at 21 may be primed for a breakout season after totaling 16 goals and 25 assists between the Wild's and Sabres' AHL affiliates in 2012-13.

A potential X-factor is Ville Leino, who is healthy after playing eight games last season. Leino represents an annual salary-cap charge of \$4.5 million through 2016-17, and thus far has scored 10 goals in 79 games with the Sabres. He represents a dynamic scoring threat on a team in desperate need of one not named Thomas Vanek, and reports of rising confidence and work ethic under Rolston are an encouraging sign.

Remaining is a collection of younger forwards who underachieved last season. With another season of NHL experience, Drew Stafford, Brian Flynn, Patrick Kaleta and Marcus Foligno will aim to produce at a higher clip this season.

Girgensons, taken two picks after Grigorenko in the 2012 draft, is another hard-working forward who could see significant ice time this season. Girgensons

scored twice, one an unassisted shorthanded goal, in Buffalo's first preseason game, Sept. 15 against the Montreal Canadiens.

## Defensemen

If offense is a source of concern for Buffalo, then defense may be cause for panic. The Sabres allowed 33.5 shots per game last season, most in the League, and ranked in the bottom third of the League in goals-against per game (2.90), goals-against (139) and penalty kill (79.2 percent).

What's more, those numbers largely came with veterans Regehr, Leopold and Sekera all on the roster. All three have moved on, and the Sabres are tasked with patching those holes with some veteran additions and a host of raw talent.

Jamie McBain, who at 25 is a veteran in this group, came from the Carolina Hurricanes in a draft-day trade. Despite one goal and seven assists last season, Rolston hopes McBain can aid the Sabres' power play.

Henrik Tallinder is back in Buffalo after three seasons with the New Jersey Devils. At 34, Tallinder is the elder statesmen, and Rolston hopes he can be a positive influence on the prospects.

One youngster Rolston likes is 21-year-old Mark Pysyk, who has been paired with Tallinder in training camp. Pysyk was the best of the defensive prospects called up late in 2012-13 with a goal, four assists and a minus-7 rating in 19 games.

Brayden McNabb and Chad Ruhwedel are two other prospects primed to make an impact, though it will be difficult to break into Buffalo's top six, especially with the additions of 2013 first-round draft picks Rasmus Ristolainen and Nikita Zadorov.

By all accounts Ristolainen has had a great summer, and despite being 18 years old, scouts say he has the confidence to start the season in Buffalo.

Among the holdovers from last season, Tyler Myers has the most to prove. The 2010 Calder Trophy winner has yet to rediscover his rookie-season form, when he had 11 goals and 37 assists. In 39 games last season Myers had three goals, five assists and a minus-8 rating.

## Goalies

With battles raging all over the ice, the Sabres' crease remains relatively quiet. Rolston made it clear Ryan Miller is the unquestioned starter; how much longer that will be is anyone's guess. With Miller's contract expiring after the 2013-14 season and the Olympics beckoning in February, the goalie intends to be at his best for a Sabres team full of youth and inexperience. Miller posted the poorest

stat line of his career behind a revolving door of a blue line last season, but said he is excited to start the season on a more stable note this time around.

"The one thing I will say is that I do like the energy," Miller told the team's website during training camp. "I do like the attention to detail so far and I feel like this is an opportunity to get a group of players to really feel for each other and play for each other. If we do it the right way, it can definitely be a good situation."

Miller will be the No. 1, but expect backup Jhonas Enroth to get more looks than seasons past. Enroth finished last season going 4-1-1 with a .956 save percentage in his final six starts. For an encore, he backstopped Sweden to the gold medal at the 2013 IIHF World Championship, where he was named the tournament's top goaltender.

"Jhonas had a great second half to the season, and I think he's going to be in the same situation where he's going to push, he's going to see more action and more playing time for us this year and continue to build and develop," Rolston told NHL.com prior to training camp. "We think Jhonas is a great goalie and a future No. 1 goalie in the League, but at this point Ryan Miller is obviously someone who's going to be our starter."

## **30 in 15: Pysyk could be future of Sabres' defense**

By Davis Harper

NHL.com

September 18, 2013

There's an overhaul taking place in Buffalo, and youth is the word of the day. With the Sabres parting with so many veterans, the roster threatens to push young players too far too fast.

One prospect coach Ron Rolston and the Sabres aren't worried about, however, is Mark Pysyk. That's because the 21-year-old defenseman has some NHL experience, 19 games at the end of last season.

"I think in terms of our young guys is Mark Pysyk, who came up at the end of last year and showed up," Rolston said when asked about players who excite him heading into training camp. "I know he had a great summer and he's a really mature player and person. I think he's going to be real good for us."

Buffalo's first-round pick (No. 23) at the 2010 NHL Draft, Pysyk won't fill the stat sheet but could be a solid, consistent player the Sabres could build a defensive unit around over the next few seasons. At the time of his call-up last season, Pysyk had a plus-8 rating that led the Rochester Americans, the Sabres' American Hockey League team. The 6-foot-1, 193-pound player transitioned well to the NHL when he entered the lineup March 17, playing the rest of the season with one goal and four assists.

"Last year he was, on a nightly basis, one of our better defensemen down the stretch," Rolston said. "He has a lot of play to his game, plays a real mature game, moves the puck well, and as he gains more confidence he's going to be even more of a threat offensively for us."

His intangibles are impressive. Looking for leadership? From 2010-12, Pysyk captained his junior team, the Edmonton Oil Kings of the Western Hockey League, leading them to the WHL title in 2011-12. How about big-game ability? Pysyk scored in his first professional game, Oct. 12, 2012 with Rochester.

The organization's affection for Pysyk was apparent in the initial training camp pairings, when Rolston put him in the first pairing with veteran Henrik Tallinder. At 34, Tallinder has a pedigree for helping young Sabres defensemen transition to the NHL in big ways. In 2009-10 he was paired with 19-year-old Tyler Myers, and Myers won that season's Calder Trophy.

## **Sabres' Jamie McBain looking for fresh start after career with Hurricanes fizzled**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

September 19, 2013

BUFFALO – Jamie McBain disputes his former general manager's belief he reported to training camp out of shape last season

The new Sabres defenseman acknowledged Tuesday that workouts "kind of slipped away from me a little bit" during the lockout. But McBain had played briefly in Finland and felt ready for an abbreviated season with the Carolina Hurricanes following the work stoppage.

"My on-ice conditioning was just fine," said McBain, who could face the Hurricanes tonight in an exhibition game at the First Niagara Center. "I played over in Europe. I played games. I had been in shape. So I was definitely in game shape."

McBain, however, admitted his off-ice testing wasn't up to the Hurricanes' standards.

The 25-year-old stayed in coach Kirk Muller's doghouse all year. The same slick youngster who had 15 goals and 57 points over the previous two seasons began 2012-13 as a healthy scratch.

"I was never kind of in his good graces it seemed like, and so when that happens, it's tough to get out of," McBain said. "So, I mean, I tried to battle through it. It's one of those things that didn't quite pan out, and here I am."

McBain knew he would likely be traded during the summer. Sure enough, the Hurricanes dished him to the Sabres for defenseman Andrej Sekera on June 30 at the NHL Entry Draft. The Sabres said then McBain's right-handed shot could help balance their defense tandems.

Following the deal, Carolina general manager Jim Rutherford criticized McBain, saying he would turn his game around but "he didn't come to camp last year ready to play."

"He wasn't in good shape and because of that he didn't have a good year," Rutherford told reporters then. "He got himself into the coach's doghouse and I really didn't see that he was going to get himself out of it."

McBain, 6-foot-2 and 200 pounds, called last season "one of those weird years." His production dropped from eight goals and 27 points in 76 games to one goal and eight points in 40 contests.

“Obviously, the lockout didn’t help,” he said. “I kind of got off to a slow start. Things never seemed to build up. I eventually ended up getting moved at the draft. It’s just kind of the way things go. Bad years happen. So I’m looking forward to rebounding this year.”

The Sabres have clearly given McBain a clean slate. Coach Ron Rolston barely let a reporter finish asking a question about McBain’s conditioning Tuesday.

“He’s been really good,” Rolston said. “We’ve been really happy with his game so far.”

That game is offensive.

“He’s (got) really good stick skills,” Rolston said. “In terms of talking puck possession, he can get you out of the zone, he can make a good outlet pass. He’s got a lot of poise with our puck coming out of the zone, really good in the offensive blue line. ... He finds holes, he can finish. He can be a guy that plays on the power play.”

McBain said he loves having the puck on his stick, creating opportunities for forwards and joining the attack. He scored after joining the rush Sunday, when he was partnered with rookie Nikita Zadorov for the preseason opener.

McBain already feels comfortable here. Rolston coached him as a teenager at the world junior championship and new assistant Joe Sacco had him at the world championship this spring. McBain also attended the same Minnesota high school as Drew Stafford and has met Thomas Vanek at home in Minnesota.

“A fresh start was something I was kind of looking forward to,” McBain said.

Still, that fresh start might not lead to more playing time. McBain isn’t guaranteed a spot in the Sabres’ opening-night lineup. Right now, Christian Ehrhoff, Tyler Myers, Mark Pysyk, Rasmus Ristolainen, Henrik Tallinder and Mike Weber probably rank ahead on the depth chart, leaving McBain and Alexander Sulzer as the spare defenders.

“I’m definitely going to come into a new area with an attitude I got to prove myself,” McBain said. “Nothing’s going to be given to me. Nothing’s going to fall into my lap. I got to go out there and earn my spot and earn anything that’s given to me.”

## **SABRES PROSPECTS REPORT: #BLUEPRINT EDITION**

By Kris Baker – SabresProspects.com

Sabres.com

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### **MARK PYSYK**

#### **The Present**

A steady right-handed defender, Pysyk's smooth skating and simple execution made for a seamless transition to the pro game in 2012-13. When a 20-year old goes stretches without being noticed on an NHL blue line, it's never a bad thing. Such was the case in Pysyk's late season recall, as the WHL product just went about business in his 19-game stint to establish himself as one of Ron Rolston's more trusted options.

The hallmarks of Pysyk's game are his smarts and superb footwork. His sound positional approach puts him in the right place at the right time, while his quick decision-making and accurate passing make him valuable in getting the play up ice. There is little panic when the puck comes his way, giving the Sabres a mature, coachable option that will only to continue to improve with each passing block of games.

#### **The Future**

All signs point to Pysyk settling in as an all-situations workhorse who leads by example much how Duncan Keith functions on the back end in Chicago. His poise and discipline will allow him to gobble up big even-strength minutes, while his mobility and two-way reliability should make him a key contributor both with and when defending the man advantage. He'll never be an intimidating physical presence, but he doesn't need to be with his smart stick and attention to detail in all three zones of the ice.

## **Off-ice coverage:**

### **Rochester co. to assume Canalside project**

By James Fink  
Buffalo Business First  
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Pike Co. has been selected to complete work on a series of replica Erie Canal waterways that will be a central component to Buffalo's Canalside District.

Rochester-based Pike was named by Travelers Surety, the bonding agent for DiPizio Construction, which was removed from the \$23 million project earlier this year. Pike was selected from a pool of general contractors that Travelers has in its portfolio.

With Pike on board, work on the stalled project is expected to resume within the week. The canal work could be completed by late spring or early next summer.

"Pike is a solid firm," said Tom Dee, Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp. president.

No stranger to the Buffalo Niagara region, Pike has worked on a number of local projects including the development of several Wal-Mart and PetSmart stores. The firm has constructed a number of signature buildings on the campuses of the Rochester Institute of Technology and University at Rochester.

Dee said he hopes the canals, which are slightly more than 50 percent completed, will be up and running before the Buffalo Sabres' HarborCenter project makes its debut next September.

The canals were originally slated to open last November. Dee said a spring opening would work in sequence with other major Canalside projects, including this fall's debut of the One Canalside Building and the East Canal urban park in front of the building and next year's HarborCenter opening.

Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp. on May 8 decided to remove DiPizio from the project, citing a number of factors. DiPizio challenged the action but lost a State Supreme Court decision on July 12 that sought a preliminary injunction blocking its removal.

DiPizio has a series of lawsuits underway, all related to its removal from the canal's project.

## **Changes downtown will greet Sabres' fans**

By James Fink

Buffalo Business First

September 18, 2013

Ted Black is the first to admit that hockey fans may be in for a surprise when they approach First Niagara Center Thursday night.

For many, it may be the first time they see the HarborCenter project in all its construction glory. While some work had started on the \$172.2 million complex last spring, when the Buffalo Sabres played their last home game at First Niagara Center, the Webster Block - now home to the HarborCenter - was still, relatively untouched.

Not so anymore.

In the five months since then, construction has been going at a rapid pace. Steel girders have outlined the first three floors of what will be an 18-story complex, anchored by a pair of hockey rinks and a 200-room Marriott hotel. The HarborCenter will be directly connected to the First Niagara Center.

“It will be interesting to watch,” Black, Sabres’ president, said. “I think for many, it will be a major shock.”

Given its strong suburban fan base, not to mention some 18 percent of its season ticket holders who hail from Southern Ontario, Thursday’s pre-season game will be the first time many will see the HarborCenter construction up close and personal. The Sabres have three pre-season games at First Niagara Center before the regular season opener on Oct. 4.

“It is changing the landscape of downtown Buffalo, literally and figuratively,” Black said.

The first phase of the HarborCenter is slated to open next September. That’s when the two rinks will be operating, the 850-car parking garage completed and the sports-themed restaurant/bar is open. The hotel won’t be completed until May 2015.

Black noted this is the final season where the First Niagara Center will be operating as a sole entity. Next fall, the HarborCenter will serve as its downtown companion.

The HarborCenter, which is being privately financed by Sabres’ owner Terry Pegula, is viewed as a major anchor of the fast-emerging Canalside District in downtown’s lower Main Street neighborhood. Sabres officials estimate it will see 500,000 people pass through its doors annually.

HarborCenter's main, 1,800-seat arena will be the home base for Canisius College's men's hockey squad and Buffalo Jr. Sabres.

Sabres officials say they expect the rinks to host major national and regional youth, amateur and recreational league tournaments at least twice a month between the peak September to April period.

With the construction, new traffic patterns leading to the arena have been established as vehicles only have limited access on such thoroughfares as Washington Street. The Sabres have made arrangements with the Buffalo Police Department to help direct traffic.

Black, for his part, said he is very interested to hear what fans think about the HarborCenter construction.

"Buffalo is very much a 'seeing is believing' community," Black said. "All they have to do is look at the Webster Block to see that HarborCenter is very real."