



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Pominville, Wild hold off winless Sabres 2-1

By Jonah Bronstein

Associated Press

October 15, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) -- Jason Pominville received a warm welcome in his return to Buffalo and left his former team still searching for its first win of the season.

Pominville, a former Sabres captain, scored the winning goal in the Minnesota Wild's 2-1 victory over the winless Sabres on Monday night.

"It tops off a pretty emotional day in a great way," said Pominville, who played his first game in Buffalo since he was traded to Minnesota last April for center Johan Larsson, Rochester goalie Matt Hackett, a first-round pick that was used on defenseman Nikita Zadorov and a second-round selection. "So many good memories in this building. It's nice to get another one."

Pominville scored on the power play with 9.7 seconds left in the second period to give Minnesota a 2-1 lead. Mikko Koivu and Jared Spurgeon assisted on the goal.

Kyle Brodziak also scored for Minnesota (3-1-2). Josh Harding made 22 saves.

Buffalo (0-6-1) tied a franchise record for its longest winless streak to start a season. The Sabres were 0-5-2 in 1999 and 0-4-3 in 1990.

The Sabres came into the game allowing an average of 37 shots on goal, but held Minnesota to just 16. Buffalo failed to take advantage, however, and went 0-4 on the power play.

"There were many moments in the game where I don't feel that our execution was at its best, but the bottom line is we did enough good things to win this hockey game," Minnesota coach Mike Yeo said. "I thought special teams was critical."

Brian Flynn lifted Buffalo into a 1-1 tie with 4:56 to go in the second period, scoring his first of the season off an assist from Zemgus Girgensons.

The Sabres are a young team that is having trouble scoring. They have just seven goals through seven games, another franchise record for futility.

"You're not going to win many games scoring one goal," Sabres coach Ron Rolston said. "We need our top six to step up."

Pominville empathized with his former teammates.

"It's tough for the group of guys that have been here a while," he said. "The team is going through a little bit of a rebuild, trusting a lot of younger players. It's going to be a process for them."

"I definitely feel for the guys that have been here a long time. They are competitors, they want to win, and right now it's not going their way. But I'm sure they'll stick with it and find a way to turn it around."

Pominville, who spent 12 years in the Sabres organization, ranks 12th on the team's career list in goals (185) and points (456). He received a warm ovation from the fans when his name was announced in the starting lineup. He then drew boos after he scored the go-ahead goal.

"We're very happy for him," Yeo said. "He's a guy that brings so much to our team, so much to our locker room. He's a guy that you just want to go out and help him."

Brodziak gave the Wild an early lead with his first of the season, scoring from the right circle on a delayed penalty five minutes in. Matt Cooke and Jonas Brodin assisted on the goal, Brodziak's first of the season.

Jonas Enroth started in place of No. 1 Sabres goalie Ryan Miller and made 18 saves.

"It's going to be hard to win with only one goal scorer," Enroth said. "At the same time, I think we played pretty well. We were in charge pretty much the whole game. So it's a good sign, I think."

NOTES: Buffalo D Henrik Tallinder returned to the lineup after missing four games with an upper body injury. The Sabres sent Alexander Sulzer to Rochester of the AHL to make room on the roster. . Minnesota D Nate Prosser was a healthy scratch for the sixth straight game. . Pominville has now scored against all 30 NHL teams. . The start of the second period was delayed 16 minutes because of a lighting malfunction.

Vanek keeps an eye on team's progress

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

October 15, 2013

Thomas Vanek entered this season with a clear plan. He wanted to watch the Sabres' young players perform and gauge their talent level before deciding if he would re-sign with Buffalo.

Not surprisingly, the opening few weeks haven't made him rush out to grab a pen.

"Right now I'm not ready, but I like where we're heading," the free agent-to-be said Monday. "I think there's a lot of talent in this group. Only time and games will tell how good we can really be."

Vanek will remain a trade candidate and longed-for talent until he re-signs or is dealt. He faced the team that makes the most sense for his future Monday night.

The Minnesota resident took on the Wild in First Niagara Center. Folks back in the State of Hockey no doubt kept an eye on the former University of Minnesota Golden Gophers star.

Those fans no doubt will continue to do so while hoping he signs with the Wild next summer.

"The media and the outside people always have an opinion, just like I have my own opinion," Vanek said. "That's fine."

Minnesota forward and ex-Buffalo teammate Jason Pominville said he's asked daily about the prospects of Vanek rejoining him.

Vanek understands the interest but didn't get asked about it much while he was home.

"I shelter myself pretty good," he said. "I've got three boys at home, so I don't leave the house too much besides going to skate and work out."

The Wild was remade into a contender before last season by signing stars Zach Parise and Ryan Suter. They locked up Pominville for five more years this month.

"It changed the culture of their team," Vanek said. "You add two players like that, it just obviously elevates your team right away."

Vanek will do his best to improve the Sabres' future while he's in Buffalo, though he knows it won't be easy based on the early season struggles.

“We saw it obviously coming,” he said. “We realize the situation. It’s still hard not to win games. Overall, we’re young. That’s not an excuse. It’s just a fact.

“The only way to get better is by playing games and learning through the games. It’s a lot to ask for these guys to pick it up after six games. A lot of them have done a great job. I just remember myself as a young guy. Guys and coaches can only tell you so much. Until you’ve been through an 82-game season or more than that actually, two or three seasons, that’s when you start picking up things.”

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Henrik Tallinder returned to the Sabres’ lineup after missing four games with a shoulder injury.

In order to make room for him on the roster, Buffalo sent fellow defenseman Alexander Sulzer back to Rochester. Sulzer played one game and didn’t record a stat during Tallinder’s absence. Rookie Rasmus Ristolainen took a seat in Tallinder’s place against the Wild.

The eighth overall draft choice played the opening six games and averaged 16:47 of ice time while putting up a minus-3.

“He’s had his ups and downs a little bit, but that’s with a young player,” coach Ron Rolston said of the 18-year-old. “He’s done a good job for us so far, and he’s still learning.”

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Right wing Patrick Kaleta will make a trip through the tunnel from Long Island to Manhattan to meet with NHL disciplinarian Brendan Shanahan. Kaleta has an in-person hearing for the head shot he delivered to Columbus’ Jack Johnson on Thursday. Kaleta has already been suspended for two games because of the hit and is looking at a ban of at least five, though it could be much longer given his status as a repeat offender.

...

Vanek on why he didn’t think it was an awkward situation to face Pominville, a longtime friend and former teammate: “We’re used to it here. I’ve been here for a while, and I’ve seen a lot of teammates leave.”

No Pominville tribute is Sabres dark moment

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

October 15, 2013

Allow me to go for the cheap joke here, the one about how the lights already seem out on the Sabres' season when we're still more than two weeks from Halloween. Or how it should be lights-out for Darcy Regier. Of course, we all know that.

There was something appropriate about the struggles to get First Niagara Center's house bulbs up to snuff just so we could start the second period of Monday night's snoozer against Minnesota.

There's just so much this organization is in the dark about.

While teams like Calgary and Colorado are rebuilding but actually winning games and getting production from young players, the Sabres are slipping into the abyss. They're the worst team in the league. They're hideous to watch. When are they actually going to win a game? Tonight on Long Island? Any of the three after that (Vancouver, Colorado, Boston)? Yikes.

You really think Thomas Vanek is going to stay around with this group? Especially when he can go home to join the Wild and old friend Jason Pominville?

Pominville was the center of attention from start to finish on a day that ended with him scoring the winning goal on a power play in the Wild's 2-1 win.

"It was a good day, a good way to finish it for sure," Pominville said. "A special day that I'll remember for a while."

There was strong applause and some appreciative hoots from the crowd when Pominville was announced in the starting lineup. And lots of cheers when he was named as the No. 1 star. But it's a shame the fans never really got a chance to really salute him.

When the first commercial break took place, the Sabres chose to use the Jumbotron to honor Kevin Porter for playing in his 200th NHL game, of which exactly 37 have been played for Buffalo.

Not a word was said to acknowledge the return of Pominville, a guy who gave a dozen years to the organization. A former captain. A guy who scored one of the most famous overtime playoff goals in franchise history.

The Sabres had a perfect opportunity to be classy. Instead, they were clueless.

Media in town covering the Wild tweeted their surprise. It's not what a first-class organization does. You think Tampa Bay will ignore Vinny Lecavalier? You think Calgary will ignore Jarome Iginla? You haven't seen baseball teams acknowledge former stars?

Yes, I realize Pominville isn't a superstar in the Iginla-Lecavalier class. And that the Sabres didn't acknowledge the return of Ted Nolan. Or Daniel Briere and Chris Drury. Or Brian Campbell. Nor should they have because of the way things ended in each case.

Pominville was different. His trade was a good deal for both sides. He didn't ask out at all. Fans understood. It would have taken a quick PA announcement welcoming him back to Buffalo and thanking him for his years of service, a quick Jumbotron clip of his famous overtime goal in Ottawa. Let the fans applaud. Thirty seconds. Done.

Of course, it's a problem when that might rate as the loudest applause of the night. And we can't have that in Dysfunction Junction, where the sponsored dancing recycle bins take precedence.

Memo to the Sabres: You don't just announce you're Hockey Heaven. You act like it too.

Pominville's goal actually foiled what had been a pretty decent middle period by his former team. It was a great passing play, seven tape-to-tape moves while alleged No. 1 center Cody Hodgson futilely trailed trying to stick check.

It ended with Pominville bouncing in a shot off Jhonas Enroth and celebrating with his classic arms-over-the-head pose. In that freeze frame, he looked just as he did after his great short-handed goal two years ago in Washington where he outworked Alexander Ovechkin.

"It was a good passing play, good entry," Pominville said. "I think we all came up with speed. ... I missed a couple early. I gotta say I was pretty happy about that one."

Pominville never really thought he was getting traded until just about deadline day last April 3. He recounted Monday how he was shocked to turn on NHL Network and see his name listed as "No. 1 trade bait" on deadline morning, and realizing only then something might be going down.

He said he held nothing against the organization, that he understood they were just exploring all their options. As it's turned out, it's been a great move. The Wild have already signed him to a five-year, \$28 million extension.

"When I took a step back and really took a hold of the whole thing, I said for my career it might be the best thing to go somewhere where the teams are headed in

completely different directions,” Pominville said. “Obviously with the signings this team has made the past couple seasons, they want to win and they want to win now.

“Here is going through a little bit more of a rebuild process. There might be other moves coming where you see other guys leaving, so when you take a big look at the big picture, I’m pretty happy where I’m at now.”

Sabres beaten to the punch, again

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

October 14, 2013

The Sabres could have avoided the history books. The Minnesota Wild were on cruise control for the majority of the night Monday, and most clubs would have sent them on their way with a well-earned loss.

Buffalo isn't most clubs. It's almost in a class by itself.

The Sabres matched the franchise record for longest winless streak to start a season, sustaining a 2-1 loss in First Niagara Center. Former captain Jason Pominville scored the game-winning goal to drop his old friends to 0-6-1.

Buffalo began the 1990-91 season 0-4-3 and opened 0-5-2 in 1999-2000. The Sabres can set the record tonight when they complete back-to-back games. Goaltender Ryan Miller is expected to get the start on the road against the New York Islanders in Nassau Coliseum.

"I'd be lying to say your pride doesn't hurt when you don't have a win yet in this league, especially what our record is right now," co-captain Steve Ott said.

The Sabres can't expect to beat anyone, even teams giving a half-hearted effort, if they don't score. They've totaled seven goals in seven games, finishing Monday's game with one goal for the fifth time.

"Everyone in the locker room knows you're not going to win games scoring one goal," said right wing Brian Flynn, who pulled the Sabres into a 1-1 tie in the second period. "Our goalies have been playing great this year, but we have to find ways to create more offense. That's on us. There's not much the coaching staff can do."

Flynn's first of the season pulled him into a five-way tie for second place on the team's goal list. Thomas Vanek has two goals, while Flynn, Jamie McBain, Cody Hodgson, Drew Stafford and Zemgus Girgensons have one.

"We certainly need our top six to step up," said coach Ron Rolston.

Said Ott: "It's everybody – myself, everybody – with lack of production right now."

The Sabres had bright spots. They outshot an opponent for the first time, 23-20, with Minnesota taking 12 shots fewer than its average. Buffalo controlled pockets of play.

It didn't matter.

“We were in charge pretty much the whole game, so it’s a good sign, I think,” goaltender Jhonas Enroth said. “We’ve got to put the puck in the net to get a couple more wins here.”

The Sabres against started slow as Minnesota became the sixth team to open the scoring against Buffalo. With the refs signaling a delayed penalty to Buffalo with five minutes gone, Kyle Brodziak’s shot along the ice slid under defenseman Mike Weber and Enroth.

Girgensons and Flynn jolted the crowd of 18,111 out of its seats with five minutes left in the second, tying the game. Girgensons carried the puck deep and waited for the open Flynn to get near the net.

“He saw me right when I got over the blue line, and if he gave it to me, their D might have stepped up and would have just gotten an outside shot there,” Flynn said.

Prosperity hasn’t been sticking around for Buffalo, and the trend continued as Minnesota exited the period with the lead despite getting outshot and often outplayed.

Pominville did the honors, working a give-and-go to perfection with Mikko Koivu, giving the Wild a power-play goal with just 9.7 seconds remaining.

Two goals once again proved insurmountable for the Sabres.

“I just think it’s in the guys’ heads,” Enroth said. “It’s just been kind of a snowball effect here. We’ve just got to get out of it and keep working hard.”

Sabres send Sulzer back to Amerks

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

October 14, 2013

The Sabres have sent Alexander Sulzer back to Rochester.

The defenseman went down this afternoon so the team could activate fellow blue-liner Henrik Tallinder from injured reserve. Tallinder will play alongside Tyler Myers tonight against Minnesota in First Niagara Center.

Sulzer was sent to Rochester prior to the season opener and recalled when Tallinder suffered a shoulder injury Oct. 4. Sulzer played one game, logging 19:20 against Chicago on Saturday and didn't record a stat.

Let the Vanek-to-Wild rumors resume and four other NHL thoughts

By Mike Brehm

USA Today

October 14, 2013

Happy Canadian Thanksgiving and Columbus Day in the USA.

Here are five thoughts with a three-game schedule that starts at 1 p.m. ET (get those fantasy lineups in early):

Wild vs. Sabres

Former Sabres captain Jason Pominville returns to Buffalo with the Minnesota Wild.

But the bigger story is that Buffalo's Thomas Vanek is facing the Wild.

That's because the whole hockey world is convinced that the pending free agent will sign with the Wild next summer. After all, he played college hockey in Minnesota.

Also, Pominville is his friend and he re-upped for \$28 million over five years after the Sabres traded him to Minnesota last spring.

Let's hope that Vanek doesn't get confused and accidentally go to the Wild's bench after the second intermission.

Oilers vs. Capitals

There's no denying the offensive potential of these teams, but where's the defense?

The Capitals have been outscored by 1.6 goals a game and the Oilers by 1.8.

Partly to blame: the goaltending. Edmonton's Devan Dubnyk is the lowest-ranked starting goalie with a 5.43 goals-against average and Washington's Braden Holtby (who went to Team Canada's orientation camp) is right above him at 4.04. Dubnyk's save percentage is .829, down from .920 last season.

The Capitals don't have a single plus player and the Oilers have some ugly minuses. Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Ales Hemesky are a combined minus 13.

Also, Oilers coach Dallas Eakins has announced that sophomore Nail Yakupov will be a healthy scratch for a second consecutive game.

Red Wings vs. Bruins

Detroit meets its new conference and division mates for the second time this season. Boston won that earlier game 4-1 as the Red Wings gave up two power-play goals with 6-9 defenseman Zdeno Chara stationed in front of Jimmy Howard.

Our prediction: We predicted that Detroit would win the Atlantic Division, but today, we think the Bruins win 3-2 .

Retro Senators

The Anaheim Ducks wore their 1993-94 jerseys last night, and it appeared that the 1993-94 Senators also showed up.

Ottawa has given up 106 shots over the past two games. The 56 shots last night were a Ducks record and a Senators record for most yielded.

This from a team that won with defense last season to compensate for a slew of injuries.

Thank goodness for backup goalie Robin Lehner, who has a .948 save percentage over the past two games. Catch this doozy of a save on Anaheim's Corey Perry last night.

First power rankings of the season

Our 12-person panel is voting as we speak, ranking the 30 teams and the top MVP candidates, goalies, defensemen and rookies. Should be interesting with three unbeaten teams in the league.

Check back at nhl.usatoday.com late tonight for the results.

While you're waiting, here's a good article by Kevin Allen on how new coach Craig Berube is trying to change the culture on the Philadelphia Flyers.

Your games tonight

Detroit at Boston, 1

Edmonton at Washington, 7

Minnesota at Buffalo, 7:30

Pominville lifts Wild in return to Buffalo

By Mark Ludwiczak
The Sports Xchange
October 14, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- Jason Pominville has plenty of fond memories from his playing days in Buffalo.

He created another one Monday night, this time as a member of the visiting Minnesota Wild.

Pominville, the former Sabres captain, scored the game-winning goal with 9.7 seconds left in the second period to lead the Wild to a 2-1 victory over Buffalo at the First Niagara Center.

"Just so many good memories in this building and this city, so it was nice to get one and win it on top of that," Pominville said. "I think it just tops off a pretty emotional day in a great way."

The goal was a familiar sight to Sabres fans. Pominville ended a pretty tic-tac-toe passing sequence with one of his signature shots. After dishing the puck to Minnesota captain Mikko Koivu, Pominville quickly received the puck back and put a one-timer past Jhonas Enroth high to the goalie's glove side.

"That was fun to watch," Wild coach Mike Yeo said. "That was some precise passing and a great finish."

Pominville did that often as a member of the Sabres, where he spent the first eight years of his career. The fan-favorite scored 185 times for Buffalo before being traded to Minnesota in a deadline deal last season.

"We're very happy for him," Yeo said. "He's a guy that brings so much to our team, so much to our locker room, and he's a guy that you just want to go out and help him. And so we're real happy."

Kyle Brodziak also scored for the Wild (3-1-2). Josh Harding made 22 saves.

Things continue to go from bad to worse for the Sabres, who are off to one of the worst starts in franchise history. Buffalo (0-6-1) is winless through seven games, matching its two worst efforts to begin a season. Buffalo also began with a seven-game winless stretch in the 1990-91 and 1999-2000 seasons.

The Sabres and the New Jersey Devils (0-3-3) are the only winless teams in the league.

"Everyone's a little frustrated," said Sabres center Brian Flynn, who scored Buffalo's lone goal. "We've just got to stay the course and trust the way we're playing and the things we're doing. If we just keep getting better every game, the results will come."

Enroth made 18 saves but received little support from his offense. The Sabres managed just 23 shots on net and continued to struggle on their power play. Buffalo went 0-for-4 with the man-advantage against the Wild.

"You're not going to win many games scoring one goal," Sabres coach Ron Rolston said. "We need our top six to step up."

Both teams started the game slowly, combining for just 11 shots on goal in the first period. There was a 15-minute delay before the start of the second period due to a lighting malfunction. The teams waited on the ice in the dimmed arena, standing by the bench and skating in their own ends of the ice to keep loose.

The Wild got on the board first on Brodziak's first goal of the season. Brodziak slid a wrist shot through Enroth's legs 5:23 into the game from just inside the right circle.

Flynn tied the game at 1-1 with just under five minutes remaining in the second period. After receiving a pass from Zemgus Girgensons near the top of the crease, Flynn's first attempt was stopped by Harding before the Buffalo right wing roofed his second attempt into the top of the net.

Minnesota appears to be finding its footing after beginning the year with three consecutive losses. The Wild earned its third win in a row and, it hopes to carry momentum into a Tuesday night clash against the Maple Leafs in Toronto.

"When that (slump) was going on, we didn't want to get too low, and right now we don't want to get too excited about ourselves, too," Yeo said. "We're going in to play a team tomorrow that's obviously very hot, and we can get a big dose of reality if we don't make sure that we're ready to play the game. I think that we recognize that this was a good win and we did a lot of things, but we feel that we have another level and we'll have to bring it tomorrow."

NOTES: Sabres D Henrik Tallinder returned from an upper-body injury after missing four games. With Tallinder back from injured reserve, the Sabres sent D Alexander Sulzer to AHL Rochester. ... D Rasmus Ristolainen, the Sabres' first-round draft pick in June, was a healthy scratch for the first time this season. In his first six games, Ristolainen had no points and a minus-3 rating. He averaged 16:47 of ice time. ... The Sabres also scratched RW Patrick Kaleta and LW John Scott. Pending a hearing Tuesday, Kaleta is suspended for a hit to the head of Columbus Blue Jackets D Jack Johnson on Thursday. ... G Niklas Backstrom (knee strain), D Marco Scandella and D Nate Prosser were scratched for the Wild. ... Minnesota D Keith Ballard was drafted 11th overall by the Sabres in 2002

Wild's Jason Pominville burns old teammates, helps keep Sabres winless

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 15, 2013

BUFFALO – In their seventh consecutive loss to open the season, a 2-1 setback to the Minnesota Wild on Monday, the hapless Sabres showcased some improvement before the 18,111 fans inside the First Niagara Center.

Yes, the defeat tied the franchise mark for worst-ever start. Yes, their feeble offense mustered only one goal again, raising their NHL-low total to seven.

But, hey, the Sabres, who began the night allowing a stunning 37 shots a contest, finally clamped down defensively, holding the Wild to 20 while outshooting an opponent for the first time this season.

Find some slivers of hope wherever you can.

“It stings because ... it’s another loss,” Sabres co-captain Steve Ott said. “We’re in the business of winning and production. There are some bright spots. We finally outshot a team 23-20 and held them to 20 shots, which is outstanding. We come out on the losing end, lack of production from all of us, including myself. At the end of the day, losing’s just not the option.”

So far, losing’s been the only option. The Sabres (0-6-1) have started this poorly only twice before in 43 years: 0-4-3 in 1990-91 and 0-5-2 in 1999-00.

A loss tonight in New York against the Islanders would set a dubious new record.

“Obviously, it’s going to be hard to win with only one goal scorer,” said Sabres goalie Jhonas Enroth, who made 18 saves in his third start. “At the same time, I think we played pretty well. We were in charge pretty much the whole game. So it’s a good sign, I think.”

Despite limited work, Enroth looked sharp again. The Swede stymied popular former Sabres captain Jason Pominville point-blank early in his return to Buffalo, and then again late in the second period with the game tied at 1.

But seconds later, Pominville beat Enroth from the right circle for the power-play winner at 19:50, his 191st NHL goal.

“It was a good day; I think a good way to finish it, for sure,” Pominville said. “(I have) just so many good memories in this building and this city. So it was nice to get one and win it on top of that.”

The Sabres, meanwhile, haven’t received any clutch scoring all season.

“We need our top six to step up,” Sabres coach Ron Rolston said.

Other than some fine goaltending Enroth and Ryan Miller, little has gone right.

“It’s everybody, and it’s tough right now,” Ott said. “The mindset has to be you have to keep going at it. You have to continue to push. You got to continue to show effort, compete and battle.”

Ott said both goalies “have been at the top of their game” and their teammates “owe them.”

“They’re playing their hearts out and giving us a chance every single night, even the nights we are getting blown out,” Ott said. “We need to start pulling it together for those guys, at least.”

Minnesota’s Kyle Brodziak opened the scoring 5:23 into the game, converting Matt Cooke’s pass on a delayed penalty.

After a lighting malfunction delayed the start of the second period 16 minutes, Brian Flynn tied it 15:04, roofing his own rebound after Zemgus Girgensons’ hard work down the left wing created the opportunity.

Incredibly, the Sabres have scored two goals in a game once this season.

“Everyone’s a little frustrated,” Flynn said. “We just got to stay the course and trust the way we’re playing and the things we’re doing. If we just keep getting better every game, the results will come.”

Ott insisted “there’s no give-up.”

“It stings, it hurts the record we are right now,” Ott said. “I mean, the blessing is West is killing the East right now (in head-to-head action) and keeping us in it somehow and we haven’t even won a game. We need wins. We need to start getting points here. We need a lot more production from all our guys in here, including myself. We have to dig ourselves out of this.”

Former Sabres captain Jason Pominville happy about new chapter with Wild

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

October 15, 2013

BUFFALO – Once the initial shock of getting traded to the Minnesota Wild in April began wearing off, former Sabres captain Jason Pominville said he “really took a step back” and began examining his new gig.

Pominville was leaving a team beginning a rebuilding process for the upstart Wild, a club constructed to win the Stanley Cup immediately.

The Wild had just signed stars Zach Parise and Ryan Suter to huge twin contracts. Many believed Pominville’s surprising acquisition could help transform the team into a Western Conference power.

“For my career, it might be the best thing to go to somewhere where the teams are heading in completely different directions,” Pominville said Monday before scoring the winner in the Wild’s 2-1 win, his first-ever game as an opponent inside the First Niagara Center. “Obviously ... they want to win and they want to win now.”

Pominville has settled in nicely with the Wild after 11 seasons in Buffalo’s organization. The winger recently signed a five-year, \$28 million extension.

“I think I was able to turn the page pretty quick, to be honest with you,” Pominville said. “The hardest part for me was the family, just having to move everyone there. That was the toughest part. But the playing hockey was just different guys, different people around me. But that was the easy part.”

Still, Monday was an emotional day for the 30-year-old. The Sabres selected Pominville 55th overall in 2001, and he grew up with them, developing into arguably their best all-around player and a franchise cornerstone.

His series-clinching overtime goal as a rookie in the 2006 Eastern Conference semifinal is one of the top moments in franchise history.

“Just walking in, there’s so many, so many good memories,” Pominville said. “The back-to-back conference finals (in 2006 and 2007) is just something I’ll never, never forget. Whatever it was, 10, 15,000 people outside. It was just phenomenal. Just great memories, for sure.”

He added: “I don’t hold anything against the organization or anything like that. I’m just happy to be where I’m at.”

The Sabres never acknowledged Pominville’s presence, although they mentioned journeyman Kevin Porter’s 200th NHL game on the scoreboard. But when

Pominville's name was announced in the starting lineup, fans gave him a warm ovation.

Pominville never expected to leave. Sabres general manager Darcy Regier told him two days before the April 3 trade deadline he had no offers and wasn't shopping him.

"I was a little bit shocked," Pominville said. "With the conversation I had with him, I didn't really think it would lead up to this."

Pominville was later asked to submit his no-trade list.

Then, on deadline day, he turned on the NHL Network and saw "Pominville trade bait No. 1."

"So I was like, 'Oh, there might really be something going on today,'" he said.

Pominville departed in a hurry, never saying goodbye to a lot of friends.

"I didn't really have a chance to see anyone," Pominville said. "So it was good to be back and talk to a few guys today."

Sabres co-captain Thomas Vanek said it wouldn't be a huge deal facing his friend.

"I've been here for a while," Vanek said. "I've seen a lot of teammates leave."

Sabres defenseman Henrik Tallinder said he "almost kept walking the corridor to this locker room" when he played here with New Jersey in 2010.

"But you definitely have an extra push in yourself playing in your old building you played in for so many years," he said.

Pominville skated on line with Mikael Granlund and Dany Heatley, an old rival from Ottawa.

"Sitting on the bench this morning, (Heatley) said, 'We had quite a few battles in this arena,'" Pominville said.

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With Tallinder (upper body) back from a four-game absence, the Sabres sent Alexander Sulzer to Rochester to create room on the 23-man roster.

Sulzer played one game, Saturday's 2-1 loss in Chicago.

Meanwhile, defenseman Mike Weber, a healthy scratch Saturday, returned. Rookie Rasmus Ristolainen sat for the first time.

Kevin Porter replaced tough guy John Scott up front.

Weber skated beside Jamie McBain. Tallinder was back beside Tyler Myers.

xxx

Sabres winger Patrick Kaleta has hearing in-person hearing today in New York for his illegal check to Columbus' Jack Johnson's head Thursday. The NHL suspended Kaleta on Friday.

Sabres must make roster move with Henrik Tallinder back; Jason Pominville returns to Buffalo with Wild

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

October 14, 2013

BUFFALO – Defenseman Henrik Tallinder will return tonight against popular former Sabres captain Jason Pominville and the Minnesota Wild following a four-game absence.

With Tallinder (upper body) back from injured reserve, either rookie Rasmus Ristolainen or Alexander Sulzer, the spare defenders this morning, will be sent to Rochester, Sabres coach Ron Rolston said.

Update: Sulzer has been assigned to the AHL.

Meanwhile, backup goalie Jhonas Enroth will make his third start for the winless Sabres (0-5-1).

In other lineup news, defenseman Mike Weber, a healthy scratch for Saturday's 2-1 loss in Chicago, will return. He skated beside Jamie McBain inside the First Niagara Center. Tallinder was back beside Tyler Myers. Kevin Porter will replace tough guy John Scott up front.

Tonight, of course, is all about Pominville's return. The 30-year-old was arguably the Sabres' best player for years before they dished him for draft picks and prospects on April 3.

Naturally, playing against their old teammate will be an odd experience for some Sabres.

"Who?" Sabres winger Thomas Vanek joked when asked about playing his close friend. "I think we're used to it. I've been here for a while. I've seen a lot of teammates leave. Obviously, I think for him it'll be more weird."

Tallinder said he "almost kept walking the corridor to this locker room" when he played here with New Jersey in 2010.

"But you definitely have an extra push in yourself playing in your old building you played in for so many years," he said.

Drew Stafford said Sabres have already said hello to Pominville.

"It's already back to business," the winger said. "He was such a huge part of this organization."

HAMILTON: Pominville scores against his old team

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 14, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Jason Pominville had spent most of two periods playing like he was a little bit nervous, but Drew Stafford took a hooking penalty late in the second. The former Sabres captain, playing in Buffalo for the first time since being traded, took advantage. Minnesota put together a brilliant passing play that froze Jamie McBain. Pominville came down the right slot, took a perfect feed from Mikko Koivu and put the Wild ahead of his former team.

"Good passing play, good entry," Pominville said about the goal. "I think we all came up with speed and I think caught one of their forwards kind of flat-footed trying to jump us, and we were able to make a play through him. That opened up a few lanes and we were able to find a hole."

Right before that, #29 was set up in the slot and he took his famous one-timer from one knee, but Jhonas Enroth made a great save. Pominville made a nice pass that almost turned into a goal that sent Mikael Granlund in on Enroth.

Pominville said this morning that he thought he'd be nervous to start the game, but he did get a shot early down the slot that Enroth stopped.

The game was pretty uneventful all the way around in the first two periods which is why the score was tied at one. After two periods Pominville had 13 shifts for 10:46 of work. He did have four of Minnesota's 14 shots. He finished with 15:51 of playing time on 20 shifts and one faceoff victory. Pominville's game-winning goal also earned him first star of the game.

"Good day, good way to finish it for sure," he said. "Just so many good memories in this building and this city, so it was nice to be able to get one and win it on top of it, so it was good."

Overall, Pominville has to be pleased about his role on his new team and his role in this game. Too bad the Sabres organization didn't have enough class to let the fans honor the long-time player and former captain.

Pominville Scores in Return, Wild Beat Sabres 2-1

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 14, 2013

Playing in Buffalo for the first time since being dealt, former Sabres captain Jason Pominville netted the game-winning goal in a 2-1 Minnesota win on Monday. The loss drops Buffalo to 0-6-1 on the season.

Minnesota jumped out to the 1-0 lead on a Kyle Brodziak goal. Mike Weber, who sat during Saturday's loss in Chicago, appeared to screen Enroth and the puck slipped between the goaltender's pads.

After a lighting issue at First Niagara Center delayed the start of the second period, Brian Flynn made it a 1-1 game at 15:04, slamming his own rebound past Josh Harding. Flynn was set up with a pretty pass by Zemgus Girgensons. The goal capped a rush of activity in front of the Minnesota net, part of a period that saw Buffalo rack up 12 shots. Despite that, the Wild headed to the final period up 2-1 thanks to Pominville's power play tally with 9.7 seconds remaining in the second.

Buffalo (0-6-1) struggled yet again on the power play, going 0 for 4. Overall, the team has scored only seven goals in seven games. The Sabres hit the road on Tuesday evening against the New York Islanders. Hear the call on WGR 550 at 7 p.m.

1st Period

Goals

5:23 - MIN - Kyle Brodziak (1) (Matt Cooke, Jonas Brodin)

Penalties

5:40 - MIN - Mathew Dumba (2 min., interference)

11:27 - BUF - Cody McCormick (5 min., fighting)

11:27 - MIN - Clayton Stoner (5 min., fighting)

12:13 - MIN - Dany Heatley (2 min., tripping)

2nd Period

Goals

15:04 - BUF - Brian Flynn (1) (Zemgus Girgensons)

19:50 - MIN - Jason Pominville (2) (PPG) (Mikko Koivu, Jared Spurgeon)

Penalties

11:31 - MIN - Zach Parise (2 min., holding the stick)

17:51 - BUF - Drew Stafford (2 min., hooking)

3rd Period

Goals

None

Penalties

6:10 - MIN - Clayton Stoner (2 min., roughing)

9:58 - BUF - Drew Stafford (2 min., hooking)

12:56 - BUF - (2 min., too many men on the ice served by Thomas Vanek)

Goaltending

MIN - Josh Harding (22 saves, 23 shots)

BUF - Jhonas Enroth (18 saves, 20 shots)

Power Plays

MIN - 1 of 3

BUF 0 of 4

Three Stars

1.) MIN - Jason Pominville (1 G, 0 A)

2.) BUF - Brian Flynn (1 G, 0 A)

3.) MIN - Jonas Brodin (0 G, 1 A)

The Sabres greet their former captain

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 14, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Tonight will likely be an emotional night as Jason Pominville returns to Buffalo for the first time since being traded to Minnesota. Pominville played 578 games as a Sabre. Now he's signed a brand new contract extension that will keep him in Minnesota.

Pominville was the captain of the Sabres when he was traded. It was a position Lindy Ruff wanted him to have and a position I never felt he was comfortable with. He doesn't have to worry about all that with the Wild as Mikko Koivu is the captain. Zach Parise and Ryan Suter wear the A's.

In 15 games with the Wild Pominville has five goals and five assists for 10 points. The former Sabre said it was different coming to the arena this morning, "Just walking in there's so many good memories. The back to back Conference Finals is just something I'll never, never forget. The 10 to 15 thousand people outside was just phenomenal." Pominville added, "It was weird, having to go left into the lockerroom instead of right was a little different, but it's good to be back."

Pominville had a team meal with the Wild so the only person he saw on Sunday was Ryan Miller.

Pominville knew he could be traded, but it wasn't until the final day that it became a reality. The former captain said, "It was a shock a little bit. Darcy hadn't come to me for my list, but then he came up to me about two days before the deadline, but at that time said he wasn't actively shopping me." The winger added "On deadline day I open the TV and see, 'Pominville trade bait number one' so I thought, 'Whoa, there might really be something going on'." Pominville also said, "I don't hold anything against the organization, I'm just happy to be where I'm at now."

I remember after what turned out to be his last game in Buffalo I asked him if he thought about it being his last game and I could tell he didn't think it was. Pominville said, "I was a little bit shocked. With the conversation I had with him I didn't really think it would lead up to this, but once I got there and really took a step back and really took a hold of the whole thing, for my career it might be the best thing to go to somewhere where the teams are headed in completely different directions. This team wants to win and they want to win now and here's it's going through more of a rebuild process. There might be other moves coming where you see other guys leaving so when you take a big look at the big picture, I'm pretty happy where I'm at now."

Sabres Tallinder returns

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 14, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Sabres will get Henrik Tallinder back in the lineup after missing four games with an upper body injury. Mike Weber is also returning after being benched for one game. That means Alex Sulzer and Rasmus Ristolainen and scratches. Sulzer has been sent to Rochester.

Tallinder will be paired with Tyler Myers, Weber is with Jamie McBain while Mark Pysyk stays with Christian Ehrhoff.

Up front Kevin Porter is back in for John Scott. He'll play the wing with Johan Larsson and Cody McCormick.

With three games in four nights, Jhonas Enroth gets the call in goal. He's 0-1-1 with a 2.96 goals against and .912 save percentage. He's played one game vs Minnesota and won it giving up two goals.

Jason Pominville makes his return to Buffalo for the first time after being traded at last season's trade deadline. In 15 games with the Wild the former Sabres captain has scored five goals and five assists. Pominville is seven games from hitting 600 in his NHL career. He's 10 goals from 200. This season he just has one goal and no assists.

Larsson was part of that trade and he gets his first game against his former organization. Larsson only played one game with the Wild.

The Sabres are worst in the NHL at scoring goals, but Cody Hodgson does have five points in six games. That works out to 68 points for the season. On the other side Tyler Ennis has no points in six games. Ron Rolston said, "Tyler is playing hard, but he's not getting enough chances. So he's got to put himself into areas to get more opportunities and I think when he does get the opportunities, he's got to finish on some of them."

We all know the Sabres haven't won a game, but Minnesota coach Mike Yeo says they won't take Buffalo lightly, "It would be foolish to come into tonight's game with our guard down against a winless team."

Minnesota was winless in its first three games, but have now won two in a row beating Winnipeg and Dallas at home.

Matt Cooke left Pittsburgh to sign with the Wild and believe it or not, he's their leading scorer. Cooke has five points in five games.

Zach Parise has four goals in five games.

SABRES STILL SEARCHING FOR OFFENSE IN LOSS TO WILD

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

October 15, 2013

BUFFALO – The quest for more offense continues for the Buffalo Sabres.

Brian Flynn scored the team's only goal in their 2-1 loss to the Minnesota Wild on Monday at First Niagara Center.

Former Sabres captain Jason Pominville scored the game-winner on the power play with 9.7 seconds left in the second period. Kyle Brodziak also scored for Minnesota and goaltender Josh Harding stopped 21 shots.

Jhonas Enroth started the game in net for Buffalo and stopped 18 of 20 shots.

With the loss, the Sabres fall to 0-6-1 on the season. Through seven games this season, Buffalo has averaged just one goal per game

"It stings because obviously it's another loss and we're in the business of winning and production," co-captain Steve Ott said. "There are some bright spots. We finally outshot a team [22-20] and held them to 20 shots, which is outstanding, but we come out on the losing end. [It's a] lack of production from all of us, including myself and at the end of the day, losing's just not an option."

Sabres coach Ron Rolston liked what he saw out of the team's third line, especially Flynn and winger Zemgus Girgensons in terms of the offensive chances they generated. However, he wasn't satisfied with his top two lines.

"We certainly need our top six to step up at the end of the day," Rolston said.

The Sabres surrendered their lower number of shots against this season. But while the defensive effort is a positive they can look to, the consistent lack of production on offense is something the coaching staff will continue to work on with the players.

"You're not going to win many games scoring one goal at the end of the day," Rolston said. "They have to finish, finish some plays. Get to the net, finish plays."

The Sabres didn't receive much help from their power play units. Buffalo went 0-for-4 with three shots while up a man.

Enroth said he thinks the scoring woes are mostly mental in nature and that hard work will help pull them out of their current slump.

"We have a lot of good players that can put the puck in the net and right now I just think it's in the guy's heads," he said. "Obviously the first couple games, we

didn't score and then it's just been kind of a snowball effect here. We just have to try to get out it and keep working hard."

The Wild got off to an early lead when Brodziak scored 5:23 into the game. On the rush during a delayed penalty, Cooke passed the puck to his right to Brodziak, who muscled through Cody Hodgson to put it in past Enroth.

With 4:56 remaining, Flynn scored to tie the game. He collected his own rebound off Girgensons' rush down the left wing boards and roofed it over Harding. The goal was Flynn's first of the season and the seventh of his career.

"I think we got a little bit of a lucky bounce there. [Wild forward Zach] Parise tried to dump it in and I think it off the ref and went back on a 3-on-2 the other way," Flynn said. "[Girgensons] hung on to it, let me get in the slot and made a nice pass. I was just able to bang home the rebound."

Pominville scored with 9.7 seconds left in the second period on the power play. Minnesota went 1-for-3 with the man advantage. On a give-and-go with Mikko Koivu, Pominville lifted the puck over Enroth's left shoulder on the short side to give the Wild a 2-1 lead.

The game was Pominville's first against the Sabres since the team dealt him to the Wild at the 2013 NHL Trade Deadline.

Buffalo next plays the New York Islanders at Nassau Coliseum on Tuesday at 7 p.m. Ott pointed out the sense of urgency that must be prevalent when it comes to earning points if they want a chance to play in the postseason.

"We need wins. We need to start getting points here," Ott said. "We need a lot more production from all of our guys here, like I said, including myself and we have to dig ourselves out of this."

TALLINDER RETURNS PENDING ROSTER MOVE

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

October 14, 2013

Henrik Tallinder will make his return to the lineup after missing the past four games with an upper-body injury. He'll be paired with Tyler Myers when the Buffalo Sabres take on the Minnesota Wild on Monday at First Niagara Center at 7:30 p.m.

The game can be seen on NBCSN and TSN2. It can be heard live on WGR 550.

The Sabres will have to make a roster move in order to activate Tallinder from injured reserve. Rookie defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen and six-year pro Alexander Sulzer will be healthy scratches against Minnesota and are candidates to be sent down to the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League.

Sabres coach Ron Rolston said after the morning skate that a decision hasn't yet been made, but will be prior to the game.

Ristolainen, 18, was Buffalo's top pick (eighth overall) in the 2013 NHL Draft. In six games this season, he's averaged 16:47 of ice time and registered seven shots on goal.

"He plays with a lot of poise. He's good positionally. He moves the puck well, heavy shot," Rolston said. "But he's learning the game and the speed and the tempo and playing against some of these top forwards in the League, so it's a big learning curve."

Ristolainen's played both on the power play and penalty kill, but Rolston said would he like to see the 6-foot-4, 219-pound Finnish defenseman improve his stick work and play in front of the net.

"He puts himself in good position a lot and he's a big body. But again, the speed in the League, he's still adjusting to and the traffic in the offensive zone, he's still adjusting to," Rolston said. "Again, he's a young, young player and he's done a good job for his experience in the League so far."

Sulzer started the season with the Amerks and made his season debut with Buffalo against Chicago on Saturday. He logged 19:20 of ice time with three blocked shots.

Johnas Enroth was the first goaltender off the ice and is expected to start.

Former Sabres captain Jason Pominville will play his first game against Buffalo since the team traded him and a 2014 fourth-round pick to Minnesota at the trade deadline last season for center Johan Larsson, goaltender Matt Hackett, a 2013 first-round pick (defenseman Nikita Zadorov) and a 2014 second-round pick.

Sabres co-captain Thomas Vanek played with Pominville for parts of nine seasons, including one in Rochester. He said it will probably be strange at first to see Pominville lined up against him. However, his team's focus will have to be on playing a good game. The Sabres are still looking for their first victory of the season. Through six games, they're 0-5-1.

"Obviously it's going to be weird, but at the same time, that's part of the business, part of the game," Vanek said. "For us right now, we need to focus on what we did well in the past few games and continue to do those more throughout the game."

26 Thomas Vanek – 19 Cody Hodgson – 9 Steve Ott
82 Marcus Foligno – 63 Tyler Ennis – 21 Drew Stafford
28 Zemgus Girgensons – 25 Mikhail Grigorenko – 65 Brian Flynn
12 Kevin Porter – 22 Johan Larsson – 8 Cody McCormick

10 Christian Ehrhoff – 3 Mark Pysyk
20 Henrik Tallinder – 57 Tyler Myers
6 Mike Weber – 4 Jamie McBain

1 Jhonas Enroth
30 Ryan Miller

Scratched: 32 John Scott, 52 Alexander Sulzer, 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
Suspended: 36 Patrick Kaleta

SABRES PROSPECTS REPORT

By Kris Baker – SabresProspects.com

Sabres.com

October 14, 2013

Saginaw captain ERIC LOCKE (2013, seventh round) scored twice Saturday, including the game-tying tally with just 19 seconds left in regulation, as the Spirit fell 6-5 in a shootout to Erie. Locke, who the night before notched a pair of assists in Saginaw's 5-3 win over Mississauga, enters the week with eight points (3+5) in four games on the heels of an extended stay in training camp with the AHL's Rochester Americans.

Locke's teammate, JUSTIN KEA (2012, third round), provided a shorthanded goal and an assist in the loss to the Otters to give him back-to-back multi-point outings, following a two-helper performance on Friday. The fourth-year center is currently tied for the team lead with nine points (2+7) in 10 games.

OHL

NICK BAPTISTE (2013, third round) snapped a two-game drought Sunday with a regulation goal and a shootout marker in Sudbury's 5-4 loss at Ottawa. The 19-year old winger has collected nine goals and 13 points through the Wolves' first nine games.

On Saturday, JUSTIN BAILEY (2013, second round) crashed the crease for a power play assist as Kitchener was handed a 4-2 loss at Plymouth. Bailey has recorded points in four of seven games for a total of six (3+3) on the year.

Defenseman BRADY AUSTIN made his London Knights debut Thursday, recording an assist and a plus-three rating in a 4-1 triumph over Sarnia. Austin landed in London following a trade with Belleville that sent Dallas prospect Remi Elie back the other way.

WHL

LOGAN NELSON (2012, fifth round) extended his goal streak to four games Saturday when he sniped the game winner from a sharp angle with just over a minute left in regulation to guide Victoria to a 4-3 win over Lethbridge. Nelson has amassed seven points (3+4) through the four-game run, after starting the season with just one goal in his first six games.

VIDEO: WATCH NELSON'S GWG VS. LETHBRIDGE

NCAA

Junior defenseman JAKE McCABE (2012, second round) stepped up with a shorthanded goal and an assist Friday as third-ranked Wisconsin opened the year with a 5-2 victory over Northern Michigan. The multi-point effort was the seventh of McCabe's 66-game career as a Badger.

McCabe's Badger teammate, BRAD NAVIN (2011, seventh round), netted an even rating while performing in a checking line role in the weekend sweep of the Wildcats. Wisconsin heads east next weekend for tilts with Boston College and Boston University.

J.T. COMPHER (2013, second round) made his collegiate debut Thursday with a two-assist effort as No. 11 Michigan downed Boston College 3-1. Compher, who is also seeing time at the point on first power play unit, followed up on Saturday with two shots on goal as the Wolverines rode a career-best 42-save performance by Buffalo-native Steve Racine to a 7-4 win at RIT.

VIDEO: WATCH COMPHER'S SLICK PASS TO MOFFATT

Freshman defender ANTHONY FLORENTINO (2013, fifth round) corralled a clearing attempt and scored off a slapshot Saturday as Providence completed the sweep of Minnesota State with a 3-0 triumph. The second-period strike came in the defender's first-ever collegiate game.

VIDEO: WATCH FLORENTINO'S FIRST COLLEGE GOAL

CHRISTIAN ISACKSON (2011, seventh round) played left wing on the second offensive unit Friday as Minnesota kicked off their 2013-14 campaign with a 6-0 clobbering of Mercyhurst. The junior was a healthy scratch the following night as the Gophers downed New Hampshire to capture the title at the 2013 Ice Breaker Tournament.

USHL

CONNOR HURLEY (2013, second round) scored his third goal of the year but was stopped in the shootout as Muskegon came up short 4-3 at Green Bay. The Notre Dame commit has recorded a team-best seven points (3+4) through the Lumberjacks first seven games. Earlier in the week, Hurley was selected to represent Team USA at the World Junior A Challenge being held November 4-10 in Yarmouth, Nova Scotia.

CAL PETERSEN (2013, fifth round) stopped 26 of 27 shots and was named the game's number one star Friday as Waterloo skated to a 5-1 win at Lincoln. Petersen has won three of his four starts thus far while compiling a 2.26 GAA and .925 save%.

Cedar Rapids forward JUDD PETERSON (2012, seventh round) sat out Saturday's contest with Dubuque after receiving a one-game suspension for a slashing major back on October 4 versus Youngstown. The game itself was suspended when Dubuque defenseman Dylan Chanter was severely injured when he fell to the ice and hit his head during a fight.

Swedish Hockey League (SHL)

GUSTAV POSSLER (2013, fifth round) buried a rebound on Thursday to give him eight goals in his last nine games as MODO earned a 4-3 victory over Linkopings HC. Possler was blanked in Saturday's win at Farjestads BK, but remains MODO's leading scorer with 10 points (8+2) and 32 shots on goal.

LINUS ULLMARK (2012, sixth round) went 1-1 for the week. He made 27 saves Tuesday in MODO's 1-0 loss to Skelleftea and then stopped 24 of 27 shots in Thursday's victory over Linkopings. Through five starts, Ullmark places in the top-five among league goaltenders with a 2.15 GAA (fifth) and .933 save% (third).

Minnesota-area coverage of Sabres-Wild:

Pominville's happy homecoming lifts Wild to win over Buffalo

By Michael Russo

Minneapolis Star-Tribune

BUFFALO, N.Y. – There was a 16-minute delay to start the second period Monday night as arena workers at First Niagara Center scurried about trying to figure out a way to turn the lights on again.

It was perfect symbolism for the Buffalo Sabres' power outage to start this season.

The Sabres were winless, had scored six goals ... and it scared the heck out of Mike Yeo. It's why the Wild coach did everything he could Monday to guard against his team walking into a trap.

Well, former Sabres captain Jason Pominville made sure that didn't happen. In his first game back in the barn where he played for eight seasons, Pominville fittingly scored a gorgeous winning goal to lead the Wild to a 2-1 victory in the first of four consecutive games away from St. Paul.

"It tops off a pretty emotional day in a good way," Pominville said. "It was a special day, a day I'll remember for a while."

Pominville's power-play goal with 9.7 seconds left in the second period helped the Wild to its third consecutive victory and dropped the Sabres to 0-6-1. Kyle Brodziak also scored for the Wild, and Josh Harding, who has given up four goals in four games in relief of the injured Niklas Backstrom, won for the third consecutive game with 22 saves.

But the day belonged to Pominville, who felt weird walking into such a familiar arena as a visitor. He held a classy news conference Monday morning, talked about his excitement about signing long-term with a franchise in win-now mode and received several warm ovations during the game, especially when he was announced as a starter and after being named first star.

"He's a guy that brings so much to our team, so much to the locker room," Yeo said. "He's a guy you just want to go out and help him."

It was an aggravating game at times for the Wild. The Sabres, because of their offensive deficiencies, sat back much of the game and made the neutral zone tough to penetrate. The Wild had to chip in a lot of pucks and even when it generated long spells in the offensive zone, it couldn't get many pucks to backup goalie Jhonas Enroth.

But after Brian Flynn tied the score in the second period, the Wild earned its first power play of the game.

Pominville scored with a second left in the advantage and waning seconds of the middle frame. He finished off a pretty, flawless display of passing by the Wild, which went end to end with seven passes. Pominville executed a give-and-go with Mikko Koivu and roofed his second goal of the season.

“The power play’s been good all year, and it turned out to be the winner and it turned out to be Pommer,” Zach Parise said. “It feels so good to come here and get a win for him.”

It was Pominville’s 22nd career winning goal and second with the Wild.

“Good passing play, good entry. We came all the way up with speed,” he said.

The Wild jumped out to a 1-0 lead 5:23 into the game when Brodziak was the beneficiary of some tremendous skating and stickhandling by the one-man breakout, Jonas Brodin.

The 20-year-old mobile defenseman flew around his net to trigger the breakout. When Cody Hodgson forechecked, Brodin casually passed to Brodziak in his zone, skated ahead of the forward and got the puck right back during a neutral-zone give-and-go.

And go Brodin did. He fed Matt Cooke to his left inside the blue line and drove to the net to get Enroth’s attention almost like a decoy. Cooke fed Brodziak in the high slot on a delayed penalty and fired by the distracted goalie.

For Brodziak, it was his first goal of the season. For Cooke, it was his fifth point in three games and team-leading sixth on the season. And for Brodin, who scored 11 points in 45 games last season, it was his fifth point in six games.

Minnesota Wild's Jason Pominville comes home a winner

By Chad Graff

St. Paul Pioneer Press

October 15, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- The script was obvious an one. The game-winning goal in the building where he grew up as a player, in the city where he began to raise a family, in front of the fans who overflowed by the thousands outside the arena to watch him in the playoffs.

But it needed the star to complete the drama. Great scripts are written that don't get fulfilled.

But Monday, Jason Pominville was the star of his own script.

A few minutes after the 18,111 fans here booed what their team has become in the post-Pominville rebuilding era, his arms were extended high above his head. With 10 seconds remaining in the second period, Pominville buried the game-winner, a quick shot after a remarkable rush up the ice that propelled the Wild to a 2-1 win, their third straight.

"It was a special day and one I'll remember for awhile," Pominville said.

The goal was as memorable for the skill displayed as it was for what it meant to Pominville in his return to Buffalo, the only team he played for before being traded to the Wild in April.

Jared Spurgeon started the coast-to-coast play with Ryan Suter. The seventh pass of the quick trip up the ice resulted in the puck resting briefly on Pominville's stick. He put away Mikko Koivu's feed, the last of three give-and-gos, top shelf.

It was the type of rush that coaches draw up, but that rarely go so smoothly.

"It's been awhile since I've seen a play like that," Kyle Brodziak, who scored the game's first goal said. "That was a thing of beauty."

It was a strange day for Pominville, he admitted. It started when he took a left into the arena rather than a right, only to end up in a visitor's locker room he hadn't seen in his eight seasons with the Sabres.

He looked up into the rafters at the morning skate, "at all we accomplished here," and the day never felt normal. Coach Mike Yeo started Pominville and the second line because, as Yeo said, "It's a big day for him, which means it's a big day for us."

The Wild entered Monday night with the fifth-best power-play percentage in the league. Their 30.4 conversion clip improved Monday night. Pominville's goal with one second remaining on the power play improved their numbers.

It was Pominville's second power-play goal.

"The main thing is that we stay on the gas with it," Yeo said. "This is a big road trip for us and we have another big test tomorrow so I think when we're at our best we come into games desperate and hungry and it's no different for the power play."

But there was no hiding the one to whom the day belonged, even with Jonas Brodin playing one of his best games and Josh Harding once again allowing just one goal.

Monday night was Pominville's night and there was no more appropriate way for it to end.

"We're very happy for him," Yeo said. "He's a guy that brings so much to our team, so much to the locker room, and he's a guy that you just want to go out and help him."

Pominville never spent much time downtown during his long tenure with Buffalo. So the magnitude of his homecoming didn't hit until he arrived at the arena. There was little time for chit-chat with former teammates.

He was introduced to a nice ovation from the Buffalo faithful and had a couple of early chances that he couldn't put away.

None of that mattered, though, when Pominville scored the game-winner with 10 seconds to go in the second period.

"I was pretty happy," he said. "I think I missed a couple early. Jhonas (Enroth) made a couple nice saves, but I've got to say I was pretty happy about that one."

Wild: For Thomas Vanek, return to Minnesota next year could be good move
By Chad Graff
St. Paul Pioneer Press
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BUFFALO, N.Y. -- Thomas Vanek remembers driving his good friend and former neighbor Jason Pominville to the airport the morning after Pominville was traded to the Minnesota Wild in April.

Pominville was "kind of in shock," Vanek said. But Vanek wasn't. Not much surprises the former Gophers star anymore.

Vanek becomes an unrestricted free agent at the end of the season, and already he is being linked to the Wild and his offseason home in Minnesota. He loved his time at the University of Minnesota, where he met his wife, and certainly he has heard talk of his chances of returning to the Twin Cities.

But as he plays what could be his final season with the Sabres, a team in rebuilding mode, Vanek remembers the advice he got from former teammates Chris Drury and Mike Grier, who told him, "Enjoy your time wherever you are because you don't know when it's going to end."

He said that's exactly what he told Pominville on their trip to the airport in April.

But unlike Pominville, Vanek's choice of where he ends up will be his own. He told the Buffalo media before the season that he would be interested in re-signing with the Sabres if their well-documented rebuilding phase was going to result in a quick turnaround. If not, he planned to keep his options open.

The Sabres entered Monday night's game against the Wild with an 0-5-1 record -- and just six goals in six games.

"We saw this was obviously coming," Vanek said of the rebuilding. "It's still frustrating to lose. I think we're all competitive here. In this situation, it's still hard not to win games. Overall, we're young. That's not an excuse; that's just a fact."

Vanek is the natural goal scorer the Wild currently lacks. He has scored at least 32 goals in four of his eight NHL seasons and would seem an obvious fit to replace Dany Heatley, whose contract expires at the end of the season.

But the Wild also must leave themselves the cap space to re-sign young players such as Jonas Brodin, Charlie Coyle and Mikael Granlund. All three players' contracts expire at the end of the 2014-15 season.

"I think the media and outside people always have an opinion, just like I have my own opinion," Vanek said. "That's fine. I've said it all along: Right now, I'm not ready (to make a decision.)"

Pominville was Buffalo's captain before he was traded. Vanek, who spends his summers in Stillwater, and Steve Ott serve as co-captains this season.

Because of that, Vanek's role has expanded beyond that of first-line goal-scorer.

"I think everybody in our organization and in that room looks up to him," Sabres coach Ron Rolston said. "And I think this year he's been more vocal with the younger guys and more of a presence in the room, helping and leading those guys. So I think that's been important from his side of things and also that those young guys are looking up to that."

Mike Doyle's Five Takeaways at Buffalo

By Mike Doyle

Wild.com

October 14, 2013

Following Wild games, Managing Editor Mike Doyle will give the Five Takeaways that he'll remember from the contest. Tonight, he looks back at a 2-1 win over the Buffalo Sabres:

In the business, tonight was what they call a greasy road win.

The Wild held on to beat a desperate Buffalo Sabres team and extend its win streak to three games. For the first time this season, the Wild was outshot, but another strong performance from goaltender Josh Harding allowed the Wild enough of a cushion to leave town with two points. Harding stopped 22 shots and allowed only one goal for the fourth-straight game. Minnesota's penalty kill also came up big, stopping all four of Buffalo's power play chances.

The team did the little things like getting the puck out and deep at the blue lines, playing strong oppositionally and grinded out a road win. With a one-goal lead in the final frame, the Wild buckled down and played a stingy third period for the victory.

It was an emotional game for Jason Pominville, returning site of the start of his National Hockey League career. In the first minute of the game, it looked like the 30-year-old was going to get on the board. Dany Heatley feathered a pass out front, and Pominville tracked it down, firing a shot low to goaltender Jhonas Enroth's glove side, but he turned it away. He wouldn't be turned away in the second period as the Wild was on the PP. Pominville was on the receiving end of a play so pretty, it deserves its own Takeaway, so we'll get that in a moment.

As the team was getting onto the bus for the arena before morning skate, there were a number of fans getting autographs outside the hotel with Pominville jerseys. At the game there were a ton of No. 29 jerseys in the stands, too.

When Pominville was introduced as a part of the starting lineup, the Sabres' faithful gave the former captain a warm cheer. Unfortunately, he was still in the locker room with the rest of the team before the game and didn't get a chance to hear the applause. Hopefully he heard the cheers ring out from the stands as he was named the games No. 1 star with the game-winning goal. It's always hard when your favorite player gets traded, but Buffalo's loss is our gain and we're happy to see him in a Wild sweater.

The Wild's power play has been deadly early this season and tonight was no different, as Pominville capped one of the slickest passing plays you'll ever see on the team's first man advantage of the night.

The team has found success by setting up the offensive zone and passing the puck on the perimeter until it finds a quality shot. However, Pominville's goal showed how well the top unit can pass on the rush and into the zone. Rushing up the ice, the Wild's top unit made seven-straight tape-to-tape passes, five of which were from the red line-in and one-touch passes. After Jared Spurgeon and Pominville made a quick give-and-go play to enter the zone, Pominville and Mikko Koivu made their own give-and-go with Pominville finishing off the play by releasing a quick wrister over Enroth's shoulder. The Dairy Queen Plays of the Week came out today, and you can bet your mortgage the goal will be amongst the finalists next week.

The Wild's 'third line' continues to put points on the board, as Kyle Brodziak got into the act with his first of the season in the opening period. Jonas Brodin started the play as a one-man breakout. He picked up the puck behind the net, beat an attacking Sabre, rushed up the ice and made a give-and-go play with Brodziak in the D-zone. He then breezed through the neutral zone, crossed the blue line and dished the puck to Matt Cooke, creating space by going to the net. Cooke found a trailing Brodziak, who held off Cody Hodgson and beat Buffalo goalie Jhonas Enroth through the 5-hole.

The most impressive thing about the Brodziak's line is that they are constantly matched up with the opponent's scoring lines. Tonight, they often drew the assignment against Buffalo's dangerous line made up of Thomas Vanek, Cody Hodgson and Steve Ott, and kept them in check.

Jared Spurgeon is one of the smartest hockey players in the National Hockey League. To not only play, but also excel at his size, he has to be. Tonight he made a veteran move that I've never seen before.

In the third period, Buffalo was breaking out of its zone and Kevin Porter was at the top of the circles and was receiving a pass. The puck was behind the Sabres forward and Spurgeon faked like he was going to pinch and slammed his stick on the ice, making a loud 'SLAP' heard way up in the press box. Porter appeared to get cold feet, picked his head up and the puck slid right past his stick, right to the awaiting Spurgeon who kept the puck in the zone. Veteran savvy from a guy who still doesn't have to shave regularly.

Off-ice coverage:

Penn State Opens Ice Arena Fit for a Division I Team

By Gary Santaniello

New York Times

October 12, 2013

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. — Penn State christened its \$90 million Pegula Ice Arena with a 4-1 victory over Army on Friday night before an overflow crowd announced at 6,370. And Coach Guy Gadowsky's first words were a salute to the fans who had ushered in a new era for the hockey program.

"The student section was definitely the first star of the night, but it was a tremendous night for so many people," he said. "What this building does for you is special. It's so motivating to play here."

Penn State's previous hockey home was Greenberg Ice Pavilion, where capacity was 1,350 bleacher seats, all along one side of the ice. It resembled a one-story warehouse.

Pegula Ice Arena draws other comparisons.

"It feels like an N.H.L. arena, but it's more intimate," said Dan Rost, a senior from Waynesboro, Pa., who waited in line for three hours to buy his season tickets in the student section.

Army Coach Brian Riley praised the atmosphere of the building, saying, "This is what college hockey should be about."

Penn State dropped varsity hockey in 1947, but it returned as a club sport in 1971. The club team won seven national championships and had only two losing seasons. During that time, more than a dozen proposals were made to upgrade the sport to Division I.

"There was always some roadblock, the most obvious one being the cost," said the associate athletic director Joe Battista, who played club hockey at Penn State and later coached the team, the Icers, for 19 years. "Without the Pegula gift, this wouldn't be happening."

Terry Pegula, a 1973 graduate, sold East Resources, his oil and gas company, for \$4.7 billion in May 2010. Four months later, he and his wife, Kim, donated \$88 million to build a hockey arena and start a Division I program here. The Pegulas also allocated \$14 million to establish 18 scholarships.

Penn State hired Gadowsky, the former coach at Princeton and Alaska-Fairbanks, before the 2011-12 season, the Nittany Lions' last in the American Club Hockey

Association. Last season, Penn State moved up to Division I, competed as an independent and finished 13-14-0, posting road victories over Michigan State, Ohio State and Wisconsin.

“Last year exceeded even the coaching staff’s expectations,” Gadowsky said. “That told me we were heading in the right direction in how we were building a foundation for this program on and off the ice.”

The 5,782-seat Pegula Ice Arena, which has 14 luxury suites and 525 club seats, was designed to maximize Penn State’s home-ice advantage. During the planning stage, Pegula told Battista that one of his goals was to build “the most rocking arena in college hockey.” The low, flat ceiling lined with sheet metal magnifies the crowd noise.

“I want it to be so loud in there, it sounds like a little child inside a tin can with a hammer,” said Pegula, who also owns the N.H.L.’s Buffalo Sabres.

A sharply angled 1,000-seat student section is behind the west goal. Its 22 rows of bleachers stretch from ice level to the top of the building; the band sits in the middle.

Pegula addressed the players in the locker room before the game, after which, Gadowsky said, “they were ready to tear through metal.”

The freshman forward David Goodwin said: “That speech was incredible. He’s such a humble man, but he has incredible passion for hockey and passion for Penn State.” Three minutes 12 seconds into the game, Penn State defenseman Nate Jensen, one of four players on the roster from the last club team, scored the first goal, a shot from the blue line past Army goaltender Rob Tadazak.

The score remained 1-0 through two periods, as Penn State spent most of its time killing penalties. For the game, it took 11 penalties to Army’s three.

A short-handed goal by Curtis Loik 3:24 into the third period gave Penn State breathing room, and Goodwin’s goal at 12:27 started the celebration in full.

The Nittany Lions begin their 20-game schedule in the new Big Ten hockey conference Dec. 6 at Wisconsin. They will host their first conference games Jan. 12 and 13 against Minnesota. The winner of the first Big Ten tournament in March will earn an automatic bid to the N.C.A.A. tournament.

Although Penn State’s top six scorers from last season returned, none of them have more than two years of varsity experience. Forward Michael McDonagh is the only senior on the team. The Nittany Lions will face formidable Big Ten competition, including Wisconsin and Minnesota, who are ranked in the top five in the U.S. College Hockey Online preseason poll.

Those challenges await. For now, the team can revel in its new building and the success of opening night.

Jensen said the expectation of the arena's opening and the resulting emotions made playing difficult at times.

"I'm kind of relieved to get the first game out of the way," he said.

Goodwin, who also acknowledged having some jitters early in the game, had a different thought.

"I wish we could do it again," he said.

Penn State hockey: Nittany Lions electrify crowd with win over Army in debut of Pegula Ice Arena

By Gordon Brunskill

Centre Daily Times

October 12, 2013

UNIVERSITY PARK — The new building was beautiful, loud and packed to the rafters.

And nearly all of those fans left with smiles on their faces.

Aside from a few too many penalties, it was hard to ask for anything more of the Penn State ice hockey team in their new home, erupting for three third-period goals to put away Army 4-1 Friday night in the first game in Pegula Ice Arena.

“When there’s a packed barn like that, and those fans are yelling,” said defenseman Nate Jensen, who scored the first goal in the new rink, “you get jitters, you get nervous for those kind of games and it was fun.”

With 6,370 fans filling every corner of the brand new \$90 million ice palace, the building was electrified long before the opening faceoff, with a huge roar when the team skated onto the ice for the first time.

Following team captains Tommy Olczyk of Penn State and Brian Schultz taking a ceremonial drop of the puck from Terry Pegula, whose donation made the moment possible, the energy in the arena grew even more. There also was a big roar of applause for Pegula when he was introduced.

Curtis Loik, David Goodwin and Eric Scheid netted the other goals for the Nittany Lions, Mac Lalor found the net for the Cadets and goalie Matthew Skoff made 25 saves to lock up the win.

After the final horn, players stood around center circle, tapped their sticks on the ice, waved them in the air, skated over to the student section to salute them, then linked arm-in-arm and sang along with the Blue Band to the Alma Mater.

“It’s cool to be a part of Penn State,” Skoff said. “It was good to have that special moment with the fans that hopefully are going to be there for the rest of the season for us. It was something special between us and the fans.”

Then, as the team left the ice, Jonathan Milley greeted each of his teammates with a high-five.

“I’m pretty bummed it’s out of the way,” Goodwin said. “I wish we could do it again.”

“I think it’s going to be this crazy throughout the whole year,” Jensen said. “When we score a goal it gets loud in there. I might black out every time I score.”

It took only 3 minutes and 2 seconds to get that first goal, raising the decibel level in the arena even more — if that was even possible.

Jensen took the puck from Holstrom at the point, took a stride toward the goal and fired it through a maze of players.

“Taylor passed it out to me and Max (Gardiner) was in front — he’s a big body,” Jensen said. “He pretty much just screened the goalie and I shot upper left. I kind of blacked out after. I didn’t know who scored. Taylor went down and did some (celebrating) on the ground so I was like, ‘Did he get the goal?’ It was just a good team effort. It’s an honor to get it.”

The goal came in front of that student section, which was harassing Cadets goalie Rob Tadazak all night — just like the place was designed.

“We don’t get that kind of student section at West Point,” Tadazak said. “It’s nice to have people screaming. It’s all fun and games. I was going to shake their hands after the game. It keeps it interesting.”

“The star of the show tonight was definitely the student section,” coach Guy Gadowsky said. “The atmosphere was tremendous. Walking out on the bench was a pretty phenomenal feeling.”

For Army, which had to deal with being in limbo with the shutdown of the U.S. government and questions of whether they were allowed to hold athletic events, it also was a thrill for the team to be a part of Penn State’s historic moment.

“It didn’t affect us in a negative way,” Army coach Brian Riley said. “I think all of our guys would tell you that they loved it. The fans were great, the student section — fantastic. This was what college hockey should be about.”

Being a part of the Nittany Lions’ history wasn’t affecting the Cadets as much as just being able to open the season.

“It was more like first-game-of-the-year jitters,” Tadazak said. “It’s kind of like Christmas morning to hockey players. I think we were more anxious to get going.”

Following the first goal, the Nittany Lions turned into their own worst enemy, picking up 11 penalties totaling 33 minutes, including a pair of 5-on-3 opportunities for Army. The Cadets, however, could only convert on one of those chances when the game was all but decided.

Gadowsky blamed associate athletic director Joe Battista, with whom the coach had a conversation a few hours before the game.

“The last thing he said to me as I walked out of his office was, ‘We just can’t take a lot of penalties because the guys are so jacked up,’” Gadowsky said. “That’s I think what happened. Some of that is poor technique too. We’ve had a week of practice.”

It didn’t hurt too much.

While killing one of Army’s many power plays, David Goodwin poked the puck away out of the zone, and the puck bounced off a linesman back to Goodwin, who sent the puck across to Loik to start a 2-on-1 break. Loik kept the puck the rest of the way, ripping a wrist shot low past Tadazak’s glove side just inside the post.

Goodwin then tore down the ice on a 3-on-none break, with Dylan Richard and Zach Saar, and beat Tadazak on a low wrist shot to essentially wrap up the win. Saar was given the assist.

“All I remember was Richard yelling at me, ‘Shoot! Shoot! Don’t try to hold up and wait for me,’” Goodwin said. “I was like, ‘All right, I’ll go shoot.’ It went in. Pretty sweet.”

All those penalties finally caught up with the Nittany Lions with 4:21 left, during another 5-on-3 advantage, when Lalor fired a wrist shot wide open from the slot to spoil the shutout.

The team also got a pep talk from Pegula about 90 minutes before the game, and Gadowsky’s hopes of keeping his team calm were dashed.

“The guys were ready to chew nails after he left,” Gadowsky said.

No matter what, the Nittany Lions know it will be a night they will remember a long time.

“The first time when we went out there for warm-ups and we look up, it was just – I forget. I blacked out,” Goodwin said. “It was insane.”

Notes: During the second intermission, professional figure skater Michael Weiss gave a brief exhibition, doing a backflip over his son who was lying on the ice. Weiss is part of Musselman’s Family Skating Tribute Show, along with a number of other former Olympic figure skaters, scheduled for the arena Nov. 3. ... Penn State hits the road next weekend for two games at Air Force – those games will definitely happen – beginning Friday. ... The team returns to its new home Oct. 25 against RIT. ... The three stars of the game were Skoff (1), Goodwin (2) and Holstrom (3). ... The team resumed handing out the hardhat award for hard work in wins, and it was given to defenseman Patrick Koudys, who blocked five shots.

FAN PROFILE: TOM GEIGER

By Rob Poling

Sabres.com

October 14, 2013

Name: Tom Geiger

Age: 21

Location: Mt. Brydges, Ont.

Tom Geiger is a massive Sabres fan who lives in Mt. Brydges, Ont., just west of London. He has been a fan ever since his first trip to HSBC Arena 11 years ago where he was consumed by the passion for the team. Tom is a huge supporter of Sabres owner Terry Pegula and team president Ted Black, and says he respects their commitment to winning and has faith in these individuals to steer the team in the right direction. Tom describes the struggles he has being a Sabres fan in Southern Ontario, especially since he is surrounded by Red Wings and Maple Leafs fans, and doesn't always have people to analyze and discuss Sabres games with. Even on a student budget, Tom still finds a way to purchase the NHL Centre Ice package so that he never misses a game. It's also not uncommon for Geiger and his friends to make the drive down the QEW a few times a year, and fuel up at a local watering hole before the games. His favorite Sabres moment of all-time was Jason Pominville's overtime winner against the Senators in the 2006 Eastern Conference semifinals. The significance of that goal, combined with broadcaster Rick Jeanneret's call made it an unforgettable experience for Tom. Other special Sabres moments include being in attendance last season for Mikhail Grigorenko's first NHL goal, and attending a playoff game in 2011. Tom owns three Sabres jerseys and numerous t-shirts, ticket stubs and game programs he has saved throughout the years.