



# **Buffalo Sabres**

**Daily Press Clips**

*October 17, 2013*

## **Canucks-Sabres Preview**

By Kevin Chroust

Associated Press

October 17, 2013

The Vancouver Canucks have as many short-handed goals as they do power-play goals.

The sum of those two categories is four through seven games, which means Canucks coach John Tortorella's next round of line shuffling could be to spark their man-advantage in Thursday's game at Buffalo.

The Canucks (4-3-0) went a fifth straight game without a power-play goal in Tuesday's 3-2 win at Philadelphia. They're 2 for 20 on the year and haven't scored in their last 10 opportunities.

They'd scored three goals in their last nine periods heading into the third Tuesday, so Tortorella made some even-strength moves, splitting Henrik and Daniel Sedin. His team answered with third-period goals from Chris Higgins and Ryan Kesler, who were playing on the line centered by Henrik Sedin.

It was their second win after trailing entering the third period.

"I think it's good that he does that," Henrik Sedin said of Tortorella's changes. "We had a lot of time in their end, but didn't really create any scoring chances. So just mixing up a few lines seems to get everyone going."

Sedin assisted on both goals. He has a goal and a league high-tying eight assists with at least a point in six of seven games.

The win got the Canucks back above .500 and kicked off their seven-game road trip with a win after they'd scored one goal in each of their last two games.

The Sabres (1-6-1) haven't been strangers to offensive struggles this year, but things improved Tuesday on Long Island as they rallied for a 4-3 shootout win over the Islanders.

Buffalo avoided setting a dubious franchise record by going winless in eight straight to start a season, scoring more than two goals for the first time.

"It's good to finally get a win," goaltender Ryan Miller told the team's official website. "It's part of the process but it's good that guys finally get rewarded for some effort and sticking with it. We have been in some games. We have given it the effort and come up short. After awhile, it really starts to wear on you and it's good that they get rewarded. It gives us a chance to feel good for a little while and see if we can build. The key now is to build."

Miller made 41 saves to get the game to a shootout, where he stopped 2013 Hart Trophy finalist John Tavares to finally get his team into the win column in its sixth one-goal game.

Miller has faced at least 40 shots in three of his last four games.

Tyler Ennis scored his first goal of the year for Buffalo, Thomas Vanek added one on the power play, and Marcus Foligno scored the game-tying goal at 17:59 in the third.

Vanek is the only Sabres player with more than one goal. His third of the year was his team's third of the season on the power play. Their 26th-ranked unit is now 3 for 29 (10.3 percent) with the man advantage, just ahead of the Canucks (10.0).

The Canucks' penalty kill is second in the league at 91.3 percent (21 of 23). The Sabres' is eighth at 84.6 (22 of 26).

Miller is 3-0-0 with a 2.54 goals-against average in his career at home against Vancouver, while Roberto Luongo is 2-3-0 with a tie in Buffalo despite a 1.66 GAA. He hasn't played at the First Niagara Center since February 2006.

The teams haven't played since March 3, 2012, a 5-3 Sabres win in Vancouver. Buffalo scored three goals in the game's first five minutes, 10 seconds to chase Luongo.

## **Reunited Sabres trio of Ennis, Foligno, Stafford play like it's 2012**

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

October 16, 2013

Tuesday's desperately-needed first win of the season was a turn-back-the-clock night of sorts for the Buffalo Sabres. All the way back to, well, 2012.

With Marcus Foligno shifted to center between Tyler Ennis and Drew Stafford, the trio willed the Sabres to their 4-3 shootout win over the New York Islanders by providing the kind of jam up front the team has sorely lacked.

The line scored two goals, including Foligno's game-tying tally with 2:01 to play, and stuffed the stat sheet by combining for 20 shot attempts, nine shots on goal, eight hits and a 12-10 record on faceoffs. Ennis also had the game-winning goal in the shootout.

The trio attacked the Islanders' zone all night, with strong work along the boards and lots of traffic in front of the net creating plenty of opportunities. It was reminiscent of March 2012, when they took the NHL by storm with 21 goals and 49 points in 13 games after Foligno was promoted from the minors, and nearly helped the Sabres squeeze into the playoffs.

"It was kind of like two years ago where we were playing like that every game, getting it in, moving our feet and making plays," Ennis said. "It just built confidence with our line. Those good shifts here reminded us how we played a couple of years ago. We have to do that every game."

After ending their 0-6-1 winless skid to start the season, the Sabres were off Wednesday but coach Ron Rolston said after Tuesday's win that the line will stay intact for tonight's visit to First Niagara Center by Vancouver.

Rolston was pleased by the look of the line with Foligno at center and Ennis on left wing. The Sabres have shifted Ennis between wing and the middle a lot the last two seasons, with some case to be made he gets the puck more at center. But he can use his speed along the boards and a healthy Foligno in the middle can create lots of space for Ennis, too.

"It gives you some depth and it's something we haven't had this first stretch of games," Rolston said of the line's output. "Our second or third line hadn't produced or generated anything and that line carried us through the game."

Ennis, who opened the scoring Tuesday with a tap-in from the crease after the puck squirted between the legs of goaltender Evgeni Nabakov, and Foligno both posted their first goals of the season. Stafford, who got his first of the year Saturday in Chicago, added his first assist Tuesday on the Ennis goal. He had a strong game, particularly in the offensive zone, as he screened Nabakov on

Foligno's goal and joined his center in giving the Islanders fits down low and along the wall.

"That's when they're at their best," Ennis said. "They're so big, they're tough to handle."

"It's just miserable when you're losing," Stafford said. "It's not much fun and it's hard to stay positive. It's a battle but that's what makes it even sweeter when you push through finally. When you're working like that, you're trying to juke and jive out there and get a couple pucks on net and fortunately we got a couple breaks."

Foligno said he quickly found a comfort zone at center and said he had been watching some of Ennis' tendencies at the position for a while in case he was asked to make the switch back. He said the Sabres started to feel a corner was turned with the team's strong finish in Saturday's 2-1 loss at Chicago and that the late comeback on Long Island could be a real springboard.

"Ever since Chicago, you build and keep building," Foligno said. "We know we have to keep working hard and it paid off. Earlier it might have been hard to come back and get that last goal but now we got it and it's something that hopefully can change our confidence."

"We knew it was coming. Our line was coming," Ennis said. "We had a lot of chances. It felt good but we're hungry for more."

## **Sabres' Kaleta to appeal his suspension to Bettman**

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

October 16, 2013

Buffalo Sabres winger Patrick Kaleta is going to take advantage of provisions in the new collective bargaining agreement players signed with the NHL in January and appeal his 10-game suspension, according to multiple reports.

Kaleta will appeal the ban, of which he has served three games, to NHL commissioner Gary Bettman. Once Bettman hears Kaleta's case and makes a ruling, Kaleta can appeal further to a neutral arbitrator. The arbitrator can uphold the suspension, shorten it or even lengthen it. The process was added to the CBA for all suspensions of six games or more.

Kaleta got his 10 games for a check to the head of Columbus' Jack Johnson on Oct. 10 but the length of his suspension was based on his status as a multiple offender (five previous fines/suspensions).

The appeal is undoubtedly based on the fact that Johnson was not injured on the play and went on to play a team-high 23 minutes in spite of the hit, which came less than four minutes into the first period.

Neither the Sabres nor Kaleta have commented on the suspension. Kaleta's agent, Toronto-based Anton Thun, was traveling Wednesday and could not be reached for comment.

He continues to be suspended pending the outcome of his appeal, which has not been set.

...

It will be long time-no see tonight for the Sabres and Vancouver Canucks, who have not played in First Niagara Center since a 4-3 Sabres win on Nov. 15, 2010. Buffalo defenseman Tyler Myers decided the game with an overtime goal.

The Canucks, in their first year under former New York Rangers coach and long-ago Buffalo assistant John Tortorella, improved to 4-3 with a 3-2 win Tuesday in Philadelphia.

Tortorella broke up twins and longtime linemates Henrik and Daniel Sedin in that game for the second time this season and the new top line of Henrik Sedin, Chris Higgins and Ryan Kesler accounted for two third-period goals, including Kesler's game-winner with 2:25 to play.

The lines remained the same in Vancouver's practice Wednesday in Philadelphia, although Tortorella said afterward he didn't know what he would do tonight.

Tonight's game is the second of a seven-game road trip that will also take the Canucks to Pittsburgh, Columbus, Long Island, New Jersey and St. Louis. The 12-day odyssey is Vancouver's longest trip of the season.

The game will be the first trip back for former Buffalo first-round pick Zack Kassian, swapped to the Canucks for Cody Hodgson at the trade deadline in 2012. The teams met in Vancouver less than a week later, with the Sabres earning a 5-3 win.

...

Updating Ryan Miller's numbers: The Sabres' goaltender earned his first points of the season in Tuesday's shootout win over the New York Islanders, stopping 41 of 44 shots. He has a goals-against average of 2.39 and a glossy save percentage of .939 despite a 1-4 record.

Miller leads the NHL in shots against (197) and saves (185) even though he's just 11th in minutes played (301). He's the only goalie in the league to face three games of 40-plus shots.

Miller has a .958 save percentage in the third period and overtime of his five starts.

## **Word is getting around on Darcy, Sabres making deal**

By Bucky Gleason

Buffalo News

October 16, 2013

Nick Kypreos has been around the NHL for a quarter century between his playing and broadcasting careers, so you can safely assume he's made a few connections along the way. He's well spoken, has friends across the league and knows how to use a telephone.

Rest assured he has better things to do with his idle time than dreaming up bogus rumors about the Sabres just for kicks. He's not going to waste precious television air time because he's trying to make life difficult for the worst team in the league.

It doesn't work that way.

Kypreos spoke to people who told him that Darcy Regier could be in trouble. He didn't say it was imminent. He shared what he heard with his coworkers at Sportsnet. They determined the information was solid enough before Kypreos passed it along to viewers. It was a planned segment, not some unexpected knee-jerk reaction.

"In a perfect world, the ownership group in Buffalo would have rather have waited up until Christmas, but I'm hearing that the decision could come a lot sooner, and they ultimately will make the change," Kypreos said. "They're feeling the heat from the fans, that's for sure."

Could the information be wrong? It's possible, but bet your life savings that the information came from someone who A) Kypreos trusts and B) would know. Otherwise, the people around him, if not his own conscience, would steer him toward one of the other 29 teams that are far more newsworthy.

And just so you know, there was talk Wednesday afternoon that the Sabres were working on a deal with Edmonton that would send Ryan Miller or Thomas Vanek and possibly both to the Oilers in a package that would bring Nail Yakupov and more to Buffalo. Whether it actually happens is another story. But as it stood Wednesday, the two sides had considered, or were considering, a major swap.

People talk. The word gets around. Once it became clear to me Wednesday that the information wasn't drummed up on some fan website or at the bar or heaven knows where else this stuff originates, I decided to share it with you. And it makes sense.

Regier has an affinity for players taken high in the draft for reasons that aren't entirely clear. It goes back to J.P. Dumont and Tim Connolly and Taylor Pyatt. Yakupov, 20, selected with the first pick overall in 2012, is an easy sell to a guy like Regier.



Regier also has a very good relationship with Oilers assistant GM Scott Howson. I've been told numerous times over the years that they consider each other among their best friends. Maury Gare, Danny's brother and the Oilers' top scout, lives in Western New York and is quite familiar with the Sabres.

The Oilers are desperate for goaltending and view Yakupov as an expendable young player. They already have a collection of young forwards, and progress with him has been slow. Losing him is worth the risk. The Sabres are rebuilding with youth and need forwards.

Miller is in the final year of his contract. The Oilers wouldn't make the deal unless they could convince him to sign a contract extension. Edmonton is a great hockey town. The Oilers are on the rise. They could be a goaltender away from getting back into contention.

The Oilers are a team in the West, perhaps the only one, looking for a goalie. It would allow Miller to be closer to his wife. He would be in Southern California more often. It would make travel easier for her during the season than it has been in Buffalo.

Vanek would bring them less in return based on the possibility he would not play in Edmonton beyond this season. Buffalo has less leverage with signs pointing to him signing with Minnesota after this season. His family and friends in Minnesota have made his arrival next season sound like a formality.

How do I know? People talk. Word gets around.

The point is that people have been talking about Regier for some time. You know my opinion on him. It comes from watching the Sabres for years. It's also based on information from various people in the league. Many are astonished that he's lasted this long.

It's not much different inside the organization, where for years there has been a growing sentiment that he should be given the heave-ho. Are the same people who speak to me also speaking to Kypreos? It's very unlikely. There's a greater chance he's getting his information from sources who are independent from mine.

Frankly, I don't know if Regier is in trouble. The timing doesn't make sense to me. If they were going to fire him, they should have made the move in May after seeing him spend more money on a team in reverse. Or they would have fired him when Terry Pegula bought the team, when people in his inner circle suggested he make a change.

The Sabres wasted little time hitting the radio and shooting down Kypreos' report, of course. The natural reaction for many was to brush it aside as another

vicious rumor among thousands about the NHL. It certainly wouldn't be the first inaccuracy.

But you should know several Sabres employees, who still work there, insisted in 2009 that reports of Pegula purchasing the team were bogus. One member of management had the audacity to tell me to stop getting my information from popcorn vendors. A few months later, Pegula bought the franchise.

Regardless, I learned a few years ago to stop listening to what the Sabres say and watch what they do. I've made the mistake of listening to the hierarchy in the past and been burned. I've come to ignore their message, allowing the results to speak for them.

Pegula insisted that Lindy Ruff "ain't going nowhere" and ended up firing him last year. Top adviser Ken Sawyer referred to Regier as "a genius." They blamed injuries for missing the playoffs one season not realizing other teams had more and finished higher. After a while, their nonsense becomes noise.

And then there's Regier.

Did you know that at least one member of the previous coaching staff was in stitches upon hearing Regier say he started planning the rebuilding process when Paul Gaustad was traded? Now, I'm not at liberty to say which coach because then the Sabres would know where it came from. I'll give you three guesses.

People talk. Word gets around.

For a good decade, Regier talked about the importance of having young players earn their way into the league and making sure they rode the AHL's buses. They would be more prepared for, and more appreciative of, the NHL.

It's one reason players like Jason Pominville and Brian Campbell developed into good two-way players. They were allowed to make mistakes in the minors, and they continued to improve after adjusting to playing with the big boys.

Regier has since made a terrible U-turn or become a hypocrite. His roster is loaded with kids who are either rookies who jumped straight to the NHL or young players who didn't spend enough time in the minors. Looking at their record and seeing players regress, it shows.

I'll give Regier credit for this much: He was honest, forthright and accurate when he warned fans they would suffer. Now, it's a matter of their pain threshold and whether the Sabres come to their senses.

It can't get much worse.

Fans are calling for Regier's job and chanting during home games. Television ratings are falling. Interest is waning. People with credibility are talking, and word is getting around. It's how Kypreos and others concluded that Regier was on the hot seat.

It made sense.

## **Canucks aim for third straight road win vs. Sabres**

By Eric Goodman

NHL.com

October 16, 2013

CANUCKS (4-3-0) at SABRES (1-6-1)

TV: SNET-P, MSG-B, BELL TV

Season series: This is the first of two meetings this season. The Buffalo Sabres are 4-1-0 in their last five games against the Vancouver Canucks and will try to make it three wins in a row over the Western Conference club.

Big story: Buffalo finally got its first win of the season Tuesday at the New York Islanders and seeks to keep its recent dominance over the Canucks going Thursday. Vancouver can establish a three-game road winning streak with a victory at the Sabres.

Team Scope:

Canucks: Vancouver has experienced a bit of a cold streak recently with losses in two of its last three games while averaging just 1.66 goals-for over that span. A 3-2 road win Tuesday against the Philadelphia Flyers has the potential to provide a much-needed spark as the Canucks continue a seven-game road trip, their longest of the season.

Coach John Tortorella executed an unconventional move in Philadelphia by placing twin forwards Henrik Sedin and Daniel Sedin on separate lines midway through the third period in an attempt to jump start the struggling offense. Henrik centered for Chris Higgins and Ryan Kesler, and those two scored the game-tying and game-winning goals, respectively.

"Listen, [the twins] play really well together, and it's very tough to split them up, but I think at times that's going to happen," Tortorella told NHL.com. "I think as you go through the game, those are calls we'll make, but it's awful tough to keep them away from one another because they play so very well together."

Sabres: Buffalo might not have many points in the standings, but it's been involved in six one-goal decisions out of its first nine games. The team's ability to stay close can be attributed to the stellar play of goaltender Ryan Miller, who has faced 40 or more shots three times already. Miller was solid again Tuesday with 41 saves against the Islanders through regulation and overtime. He stopped two of three attempts in the shootout to earn his first win of the season.

"It gives us a chance to feel good for a little while and see if we can build. The key now is to build," Miller said.

Who's hot: Henrik Sedin has been held scoreless just once this season. He's registered a goal and eight assists over seven games. ... For Buffalo, center Cody Hodgson has at least a point in six of his last seven games, totaling one goal and five assists over that span.

Injury report: Forward Alexandre Burrows is out with a lower-body injury for Vancouver, while defenseman Alexander Edler will serve the last of his three-game suspension Thursday for an elbowing incident Oct. 10 against the San Jose Sharks. ... For the Sabres, forward Zemgus Girgensons left Tuesday's game after taking a puck in the face in the first period; he didn't return and is questionable. Forward Patrick Kaleta was assessed a 10-game suspension by the NHL on Tuesday for a hit against the Columbus Blue Jackets on Oct. 10 and is eligible to return Nov. 7, having already served two games while awaiting the disciplinary hearing. Defenseman Nikita Zadorov has not played a game this season and is questionable with a hand injury. Forwards Ville Leino (ribs) and Corey Tropp (jaw) remain out indefinitely.

## **Ramblings: Sharks get revenge; can Kaleta change?**

By Scott Burnside

ESPN.com

October 16, 2013

It didn't take long for the week's high-profile tilt between the unbeaten San Jose Sharks and unbeaten St. Louis Blues to turn ugly Tuesday. Early in the first period, Blues forward Max Lapierre sent veteran Sharks defenseman Dan Boyle head-first into the boards with a hit from behind. The hit left Boyle unconscious, and he was removed from the ice in St. Louis on a stretcher. Lapierre was ejected for the hit and will almost certainly be suspended for the dangerous play. Early reports indicate that Boyle's injuries aren't too severe, which, needless to say, represents the best outcome.

"I'm doing OK, thank you for your concern and support," Boyle said in a message directed at fans via ESPN.com's Pierre LeBrun from the St. Louis hospital where he spent the night. "Means a lot to me. I've never once taken this game or any of my fans for granted. Hope to be back soon."

We didn't like the hit by Sharks forward Brent Burns on Brenden Morrow later in the game that also could have produced a serious injury, and it was a bit of a disappointment to see Burns assessed only a minor penalty (Morrow did return to the game). In the end, the greatest statement was made by the Sharks, who used their skill to avenge Boyle's injury as they humbled the Blues 6-2, scoring three times with the man advantage. The Sharks also chased Blues goaltender Jaroslav Halak, who has been a key factor in the Blues' hot start, out after the second period. The game marked the first in a stretch that will see the Sharks play seven of eight on the road.

Kaleta's at it again: The Lapierre hit on Boyle came just a few hours after the NHL suspended serial cheap-shot artist Patrick Kaleta of the Buffalo Sabres 10 games for his latest transgression: A dirty, head-high hit on Columbus Blue Jackets defenseman Jack Johnson. By almost any measuring stick, 10 games is a heavy sentence -- almost any measuring stick except for a guy such as Kaleta, a player who is either too stupid to learn from his mistakes or too reckless to care. Given Kaleta's history, one wonders what number would have been appropriate. At some point, with players such as Kaleta, who has been fined or suspended six times in the last four seasons -- the most recent being last season when he drove Brad Richards head-first into the boards -- it would seem the threat of actually being unable to play the game anymore is the only real deterrent. We saw this happen with Matt Cooke when he was in Pittsburgh; the Penguins publicly said that unless Cooke changed his ways, he wouldn't be able to play with them. This happened after Cooke's last suspension, in the spring of 2011, after a hit on New York Rangers defenseman Ryan McDonagh. Cooke worked with the Pens' coaching staff during his suspension, which lasted through the first round of the 2011 playoffs, watched video and dedicated himself to changing his style of play. To date, he remains a shining example of players who can learn from their

mistakes. It would be nice if we heard something similar from the Sabres, although we aren't holding our breath, given that ownership/management of NHL teams historically only worry about dangerous play when it's some other team's player who's playing outside the lines. We often criticize league disciplinarian Brendan Shanahan for what we've felt has been consistently lenient discipline for plays that have no place in the game. Yet the stakeholders, owners, general managers and players themselves remain, for the most part, mute on issues such as those created by guys such as Kaleta. Where is Buffalo owner Terry Pegula on Kaleta? Where is Buffalo GM Darcy Regier, a smart, thoughtful hockey man, on how his employee behaves? The Buffalo News reported that, even though the Sabres were playing Tuesday, neither Regier nor Kaleta would comment. Way to take responsibility. Shanahan could have, indeed, should have, given Kaleta 20 games and left his return open-ended, pending an end-of-suspension interview. But it would mean a lot more if the Sabres would come out and announce they will no longer employ a player such as Kaleta until he learns from his mistakes. Sadly, that's not likely to happen, so we remain skeptical this latest brush with the NHL law will change how Kaleta plays the game.

Not so fast, Avs: An interesting experiment in fan reaction occurring in Denver where the Colorado Avalanche are the story of this young NHL season. With their 3-2 win over Dallas on Tuesday night, the Avs moved to a remarkable 6-0-0. The win marked their first home game after three impressive road wins, and yet the announced attendance at the Pepsi Center was 15,208, well below the capacity of 18,007. It reminded us of a conversation with Carolina GM Jim Rutherford during the 'Canes superlative 2005-06 season. The Hurricanes would go on to win their first Stanley Cup in June 2006, but during that regular season, the 'Canes' crowds remained soft in spite of the fact the team was one of the most entertaining in the league. Rutherford explained that on-ice success does not translate instantly into fan support. A kind of elasticity is at play; a team has to prove they have turned a corner before fans will consistently return to support them. In short, you don't repair a badly damaged fan base in the first month of a season even if the Avs appear to be on the track to redemption.

Giroux's Olympic goal is toast: It's never too early for players to make a case for their respective Olympic teams. Likewise, it's never too early to start playing yourself right off the map. One has to wonder about the early-season struggles of the Philadelphia Flyers and how it might affect captain Claude Giroux and his bid to be named to the Canadian Olympic squad for the Sochi Games in February. A lock to make the team heading into the season, even though he missed the Canadian orientation camp with a golf-related hand injury, Giroux and the Flyers have been stuck in neutral since the season started. OK, that's being charitable. After blowing a third-period lead and losing 3-2 to Vancouver on Tuesday, the Flyers dropped to a woeful 1-6-0. Even the firing of head coach Peter Laviolette three games into the season hasn't helped, as the Flyers have managed only 10 goals. Giroux has yet to score and has just two assists, and with Canadian executive director Steve Yzerman and the Canadian selection committee already

facing the onerous task of narrowing the talented Canadian forward contingent down, Giroux's tepid play further muddies the waters. Not to put too fine a point on it, but it's hard to believe there is any way Giroux makes this squad unless he mounts a significant renaissance in the next two months.

Reimer ain't backing down: Nice statement game for netminder James Reimer, who appeared to have been frozen out of the Maple Leafs' goaltending equation after an early bad game combined with the strong play by newcomer Jonathan Bernier. Not so fast. Reimer was outstanding in stopping 36 of 37 shots as the red-hot Leafs moved to 6-1-0 with a 4-1 win over Minnesota on Tuesday. Those are exactly the kind of goaltending "issues" Toronto head coach Randy Carlyle likes to have.

Bruins are looking mediocre: It's been interesting to watch the Boston Bruins through the first couple of weeks. There's something solid and reliable about the team GM Peter Chiarelli has built, and which for a number of years now has stolidly reflected the personality of head coach Claude Julien. That doesn't mean there haven't been hiccups early on, and maybe we didn't appreciate the transition that would be required after the Bruins lost Jaromir Jagr, Nathan Horton and Tyler Seguin through trades and free agency. Although the team continues to play well defensively, allowing just eight goals through their first five games, they've managed just 12 going the other way. The struggles continued Monday when the Bruins could not solve Detroit backup goalie Jonas Gustavsson during the matinee, losing 3-2 in spite of a long 5-on-3 and the fact the Red Wings did not have a single power play. Specifically, winger Jarome Iginla is struggling to find his place with the B's and has just one assist. If he hadn't struggled during the playoffs for Pittsburgh last spring, there wouldn't be much cause for concern, but in spite of prime ice time and a ton of power-play time, he's not hitting the mark, which has to be worrying for Julien et al. Not that Iginla is alone. Patrice Bergeron (one goal, one assist) and Brad Marchand (one goal) are also off to slow starts.



## **Zack Kassian has point to prove to the Canucks, not Sabres**

By Brad Ziemer

Vancouver Sun

October 16, 2013

BUFFALO – Zack Kassian picked a fight with the wrong guy.

Kassian confessed Wednesday he was guilty of mistaken identity when he fought Flyers' defenceman Luke Schenn in the first period of Tuesday night's 3-2 Vancouver Canucks' win in Philadelphia.

A smiling Kassian said he was certain it was Schenn who seconds earlier had slammed defenceman Yannick Weber into the side boards. He didn't learn until after the scrap that it was actually Zac Rinaldo.

It should have been a Zac vs. Zack tilt.

"Should have gone after Rinaldo," Kassian said. "Would have been an easier fight for me, I think."

Kassian did just fine in his fight with Schenn and who knows, he might drop the gloves again Thursday night when he returns to play in his former hockey home.

Kassian isn't expecting any Welcome Back Zack tributes from the Buffalo Sabres when the Canucks meet them in Game 2 of their seven-game road trip. Heck, the Sabres didn't even pay tribute to their former captain Jason Pominville when he visited the other night with the Minnesota Wild.

Kassian wasn't in Buffalo quite as long as Pominville. He spent a grand total of 27 games with the Sabres before Buffalo sent him to the Canucks in exchange for centre Cody Hodgson in February of 2012.

Kassian does not have a case of the warm and fuzzies about his time in Buffalo, but also insists he harbours no ill will toward the Sabres and general manager Darcy Regier. He knows his job is now to impress the Canucks, not the Sabres.

"It's a part of the business. people get traded," Kassian said after the Canucks' noon-hour practice in Philadelphia. "There are very few players in this league who play for one team their whole career. It just happened to me early in my career.

"They gave me a chance to play in the NHL. They drafted me, they made my dream come true and really, that's it."

Kassian was selected 13th overall by the Sabres in the 2009 draft. They fell in love with his size and skill set, but the romance ended early.

The Kassian-Hodgson trade appeared to shock everyone. Kassian didn't see it coming and Hodgson insisted he didn't either.

Kassian said the only thing that has him excited about Thursday night's game is the fact a large number of his family members will make the trip from his Windsor home to watch him play.

"It's going to be pretty cool to have them all there," he said. "It's tough to get all my family out to Vancouver, with their work schedules and what-not, so it is going to be great to have them all there. I don't know how many are coming. I am still getting texts right now. Probably 20 or so."

Kassian, still only 22, has not yet developed into the player the Canucks advertised when they made a deal that to this day remains controversial. He has shown flashes of being the skilled power forward Canuck management think he can be, but has yet to deliver it on a consistent basis.

It didn't help that he was nailed with a suspension for his careless hit that shattered the jaw of Oiler centre Sam Gagner in a pre-season game and missed eight games, including the first five of the regular season.

Tuesday night's game was just his second of the season and he played on the third line with David Booth and Jordan Schroeder.

Kassian knows his bottom line must improve. He scored some points with his coach for his fight Tuesday, but the team is also expecting him to contribute offensively.

"You obviously need to do things out there to get recognized," Kassian said. "For me I think I am kind of lucky in a sense that if I am not scoring goals I have other attributes in my game that I can bring. Obviously, you want to put up numbers but at the same time you need to look where you are playing and what-not and my goal right now is to create energy, move my feet, get in on the forecheck. When I am doing that and being hard to play against, the goals will come eventually."

Those words seem to come right out of the John Tortorella handbook. The Canucks new coach said Wednesday it is much too early to pass judgment on Kassian. But he, too, has high expectations.

"It aggravated me with the suspension because I thought he had a really good camp and that threw a little bit of a wrench into it," Tortorella said. "So we'll try and get him some minutes. I like what he did in the game (on Tuesday night), trying to be aggressive, fights a guy. I think that has to be a big part of his game, that physicality and that type of attitude. But it's unfair to really comment or judge him either way, good or bad, because he hasn't played enough."

It may also be unfair to compare Kassian and Hodgson statistically. They are different players and Hodgson clearly is more gifted offensively. In 76 games with the Sabres since the trade, Hodgson has 18 goals and 47 points. In 58 games with the Canucks, Kassian has eight goals, 14 points and 87 penalty minutes.

“We are two different players,” Kassian said. “I wish him the best and I need to worry about my business in Vancouver.”

Kassian clearly thinks he can thrive in Vancouver under Tortorella. While the two haven’t really had a one-on-one conversation, other than a how-do-you-do phone call during the summer, Kassian likes the energy Tortorella brings to the team.

“You can tell he has a passion for coaching and that’s good,” he said. “As players you want to return the favour and do the same thing for him when you are out there playing for him.”

## **Regier is the right man for Sabres, for now**

By Eric Duhatschek  
Toronto Globe and Mail  
October 16, 2013

The calls for Darcy Regier's head, as the general manager of the Buffalo Sabres, have been coming fast and furious these days.

The Sabres are off to 1-6-1 start and look as if they will battle the Florida Panthers and Philadelphia Flyers in the NHL's Eastern Conference basement. Buffalo has been in a free fall since the 2009-10 season, when the Sabres finished first in the old Northeast Division and put up their last 100-point season.

Those were heady days, as billionaire Terry Pegula was about to buy the team and inject some cash into a budget operation. If the Sabres could be competitive on a shoestring, then how good could they be when the GM suddenly received permission to start spending?

That was the theory anyway. The reality is, they've missed the playoffs in each of the past two seasons and, when things really started to go sour last season, terminated Lindy Ruff, the longest-serving head coach in the NHL. The money they put into signing the likes of Ville Leino and Christian Ehrhoff, the sort of second-tier free agents they had to overpay to get, didn't materially improve the team.

In some quarters, the thinking was if the Sabres committed to a regime change, it should be full and complete, and include the GM that made most of the spending/trading decisions that have left the Sabres near the bottom of the standings. But realistically, it doesn't seem like a prudent course of action for Pegula, who has to weigh public sentiment against what's best for the long-term future of his team.

The smart move right now is to permit Regier to weather the storm for one logical reason: Ultimately, the two most important bits of business the Sabres will transact this season involve the potential trades of goaltender Ryan Miller and star forward Thomas Vanek.

Both are on expiring contracts; both are at the stages of their careers when they'll likely want to be on winning teams – or at least, a team with a chance at winning – and so likely have no future in Buffalo.

If you're Pegula, who do you want handling those negotiations? A new and inexperienced GM, trying to learn on the job? Or someone who has been at it since 1997; and has a lot of good relationships with his peers and a pretty good track record when it comes to maximizing the value of his assets?

Whatever you may think of the Sabres current state, you have to give Regier credit for his horse-trading abilities.

When the Vancouver Canucks deemed Cody Hodgson was no longer a fit for their organization, Regier pried him loose for Zack Kassian. Hodgson is just 23, and evolving nicely into a top-six forward; Kassian remains a decided work in progress.

Last year, at the trading deadline, the Sabres made Jason Pominville available. For a quality NHL player, who has only surpassed the 70-point mark twice in his career, Regier was able to extract a phenomenal package from the Minnesota Wild: two top prospects (Johan Larsson and Matt Hackett), along with a first- and a second-round draft choice.

In a year when the returns for players from Jarome Iginla to Derek Roy to Ryane Clowe to Jaromir Jagr were middling at best, the Sabres hit an absolute home run.

After the 2014 Winter Olympics, when NHL teams assess where they're at for the stretch run, both Miller and Vanek will likely be in play – and command a significant return, which would then be the starting place for the rebuild.

Most people envision Vanek ultimately landing with the Wild, too – but that will be a challenge for GM Chuck Fletcher to make the contract numbers work, what with close to \$200-million (U.S.) on the books for Zach Parise and Ryan Suter.

Miller would be an interesting catch.

No team needs help in goal more than the Edmonton Oilers do now. But Miller, an American with personal ties to Southern California, would have to decide playing in a traditional Canadian market once his current contract expires is a challenge he'd embrace. Otherwise, Edmonton likely wouldn't surrender meaningful assets to land a rental.

It'll be a delicious, cat-and-mouse game between now and March – but the only certainty being Regier is the best-equipped to handle the negotiations, no matter how loud the chorus becomes to punt him to the street.

## **Will real Zack Kassian stand up?**

By Ben Kuzma

Vancouver Province

October 17, 2013

Zack Kassian doesn't have a history with Luke Schenn. There's not that significant difference of opinion or disdain that would lead to the dropping of gloves.

However, the Vancouver Canucks winger did just that in the first period Tuesday and the combatants slugged it out to a draw during a 3-2 comeback victory over the Philadelphia Flyers to open a seven-game road trip.

The bout was sparked when the Flyers' Zac Rinaldo levelled Canucks defenceman Yannick Weber with a heavy sideboards check. Kassian had a case of mistaken identity and thought it was Schenn who had done the damage.

Right idea. Wrong guy. "Yeah, I saw that after," Kassian said following a brief practice in Philadelphia Wednesday.

"I should have grabbed Rinaldo - it would have been an easier fight for me."

The symbolism of the strange skirmish wasn't lost on anybody trying to get a real read on Kassian - especially curious coach John Tortorella - because the enigma is still trying to make the right impression.

To transition from fun-loving kid to consummate professional, the rare fight was just another means to contribute because Kassian's potential remains untapped. And knowing the trade comparison to Cody Hodgson will surface yet again Thursday in Buffalo when Kassian faces his former club, he's banking on better perspective and performance potential to silence his critics.

It will be easier if he doesn't listen to sports talk radio.

"That's hockey," shrugged Kassian. "People need to talk about something. So be it. I just care about what the team thinks of me. We're two different players, and I wish him the best. I need to worry about my business in Vancouver. The only thing I like about it (going back to Buffalo) is it's in the same time zone as my family, and it's going to be pretty cool to have them there. There will be at least 20 - I'm still getting texts."

Aside from five goals in seven games while aligned with Henrik and Daniel Sedin to start the lockout-shortened season, Kassian has scored just twice in his last 37 games. His 14 points (8-6) in 58 games with the Canucks since that Feb. 27, 2012 trade are dwarfed by Hodgson's 48 points (19-29) in 76 games with the Sabres. In Hodgson, the Sabres have a reliable centre with 20-goal potential. In Kassian, the Canucks have - well, they're not sure what they have.

Is Kassian a budding Milan Lucic or a bust? It's too early to pass judgment on a 22-year-old first-round draft pick because he shows flashes of form that any team would covet. He skates well, passes better than given credit for and can get to the net. He hits and will fight - he's had nine career NHL bouts - but putting all that together on a consistent basis has been the ongoing challenge.

"You need to do things out there to be recognized," said Kassian, who played 9:47 against the Flyers and had no points and no shots but delivered three hits.

"I'm kind of lucky if I'm not scoring goals that I can bring other attributes to the team. You want to put up goals, but at the same time, you need to look where you're playing. My goal is to create energy and be hard to play against. It will come eventually."

It didn't help that Kassian received an eight-game suspension for his errant stick that broke the jaw of Edmonton centre Sam Gagner on Sept. 21. It led to Oilers rookie head coach Dallas Eakins calling it "a disturbing play by a disturbing player." How did Kassian respond? "He can think what he wants - good for him."

That's Kassian. A little playful, a little edgy. However, the suspension put him a step behind to come to grips with Tortorella's system, one that should suit a player who needs to play aggressively on a pressure forecheck.

"No one is behind the eight-ball," said Tortorella. "It aggravated me with the suspension because he had a really good camp and that put a bit of a wrench into it. We've just got to get him some minutes. What he did in that game (Tuesday) needs to be a big part of his game. The physicality and that type of attitude. It's unfair to judge him, good or bad, because he just hasn't played enough."

A projected top-six player, being on the third line with Jordan Schroeder and David Booth says something about where Kassian is at in his development curve. He came to camp in the best shape of his career and vowed to be leaner, meaner and smarter. His head appears to be on straight, too. Kassian's eyes were opened last season when he learned first-hand everybody knows your name and your game - especially in Vancouver's social scene. You're always been watched and one seemingly innocent smartphone camera click away from being Twitter fodder. He's learning.

And instead of taking a shot at Sabres general manager Darcy Regier for trading him, Kassian was thankful for his 27 games with Buffalo in the 2011-12 season.

"They drafted me and gave me a chance to play in the NHL and made my dream come true," said Kassian. "It's part of the business and there are very few players on one team their whole career. I love Vancouver and it's not a bad place to be traded to."

And to stay.

## **Inside the Flyers: Flyers should pursue Sabres' Vanek**

By Sam Carchidi

Philadelphia Inquirer

October 17, 2013

The offensive-challenged Flyers need to add a sniper.

Badly.

Paging Thomas Vanek. Paging Thomas Vanek.

The Buffalo Sabres winger and the Flyers seem like a perfect match.

The Flyers have scored a total of 10 goals - their lowest seven-game total to begin a season in franchise history - and they are off to an unsightly 1-6 start.

Their general manager's fate may be hanging in the balance. Make a move that triggers a turnaround and Paul Holmgren's job could be secure. Miss the playoffs for the second straight year and . . .

Assistant GM Ron Hextall is waiting in the wings.

Which brings us back to Vanek, a 29-year-old right winger who scored 20 goals in 38 games last season and has 253 goals in 593 career games. He can become an unrestricted free agent after this season, and he has dropped broad hints that he does not want to remain with the Sabres if they have a long rebuilding plan.

And that's exactly what seems to be taking place.

The Sabres, like the Flyers, are off to an awful start and are having problems scoring.

So why would they deal Vanek?

Because if he's not going to re-sign with them after the season, they risk losing him and not getting anything in return.

Vanek, a rugged 6-foot-2, 207-pounder who is one of Buffalo's cornerstones, could bring the Sabres several prospects (Scott Laughton? Nick Cousins? Oliver Lauridsen?) and/or draft picks.

He would feel right at home with the Flyers because he was winger Michael Raffl's linemate with Austria at the 2013 IIHF World Championships.

"I've never seen anybody play like he does in front of the net," Raffl said after the Flyers practice Wednesday in Voorhees. "He's unbelievable."



It is worth noting that Buffalo general manager Darcy Regier is reportedly on the hot seat, so if Vanek isn't traded and he ends up signing elsewhere, the seat could get even hotter.

The Flyers didn't score much under Peter Laviolette in the first three games, and they haven't scored much since Craig Berube took over.

"I think we have to be patient and let [Berube] implement his system," said Peter Luukko, president of the Flyers' parent company, Comcast-Spectacor. "It makes no sense to panic. We still believe in our players."

The big guns aren't producing. Claude Giroux, Wayne Simmonds, Matt Read, Jake Voracek, Sean Couturier, and Scott Hartnell have yet to hit the back of the net. Hartnell and Vinny Lecavalier are sidelined with injuries.

The Flyers are counting on most of those players to score at least 20 goals. No one is saying that won't happen, just that they need to add a proven scorer. The sooner the better.

"Making a deal for the sake of making a deal is dangerous," Luukko said.

Yes, it would be risky to acquire Vanek - whose \$7.1 million cap hit would cause the Flyers to make some auxiliary moves, like including Andrej Meszaros in the deal, to free cap space - because he could sign elsewhere after the season. The Flyers need to take that risk. Roll the dice and make re-signing him a priority. The cap is going up after the season, and the Flyers will have Kimmo Timonen (\$6 million) and Meszaros (\$4 million) coming off the books.

This team has dealt away lots of offense in recent years (Jeff Carter, James van Riemsdyk, Joffrey Lupul, Mike Richards) and now needs to add a proven scorer and a great leader.

Holmgren said he was talking with other general managers, and not just because his team is off to a horrid start.

"Whether we're 1-6 or 6-1, I wouldn't be doing due diligence if I wasn't looking around to try to improve the team," he said Wednesday.

He added that the Flyers already "did the drastic thing by making a coaching change."

Another drastic move is needed.

The general manager's job may depend on it.

## **Former Sabres prospect Zack Kassian still trying to establish himself with Canucks**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

October 17, 2013

BUFFALO – Twenty months later, there's no decisive winner in the Cody Hodgson-Zack Kassian deal, the shocker the Sabres and Vancouver Canucks pulled off before the 2012 NHL trade deadline.

Teams rarely swap high first-round picks during their rookie seasons. So the debate might go on for years in the two hockey-mad cities.

"That's hockey," Kassian, who will play his first game back in Buffalo tonight at the First Niagara Center, told the Vancouver Province. "People need to talk about something. So be it. I just care about what the team thinks of me. We're two different players and I wish him the best. I need to worry about my business in Vancouver.

"The only thing I like about it (returning to Buffalo) is it's in the same time zone as my family, and it's going to be pretty cool to have them there. There will be at least 20 – I'm still getting texts."

In Hodgson, the Sabres possess, at least on paper, a No. 1 center. The team recently awarded the 23-year-old a six-year, \$25.5 million extension, betting that his drive, maturity and natural talent might make him a star. He has 19 goals and 48 points in 76 games with the Sabres.

Right now, the Sabres have received more from the deal.

But what's transpired since the Sabres dished the 22-year-old Kassian 27 games into his NHL career? The Sabres hadn't dealt a first-round pick so early since sending Keith Ballard to Colorado in 2003.

Having been suspended eight games for high-sticking and breaking Sam Gagner's jaw during the preseason, tonight will only be the hard-hitting winger's third appearance this season.

Kassian, the 13th overall pick in 2009, has eight goals and 14 points in 58 games with the Canucks. Following a torrid start last season – five goals during a seven-game stretch on the No. 1 line beside Daniel and Henrik Sedin – Kassian has just two scores in his last 37 contests.

"You need to do things out there to be recognized," said Kassian, who fought Tuesday. "I'm kind of lucky if I'm not scoring goals that I can bring other attributes to the team. You want to put up goals, but at the same time, you need to look where you're playing. My goal is to create energy and be hard to play against. It will come eventually."

Kassian, who had several junior suspensions for illegal hits, lost some of that grit and tenacity with Rochester and the Sabres in 2011-12.

Ultimately, that might've been why the Sabres dealt one of their prized prospects so quickly.

“They drafted me and gave me a chance to play in the NHL and made my dream come true,” Kassian said about the Sabres. “It’s part of the business and there are very few players on one team their whole career. I love Vancouver and it’s not a bad place to be traded to and to stay.”

xxx

Sabres winger Patrick Kaleta will be appealing his 10-game suspension, according to TSN’s Bob McKenzie.

Kaleta consulted with his agent and the NHL Players’ Association following Tuesday’s ban, McKenzie said.

The 27-year-old agitator has already served three games for his illegal check to Jack Johnson’s head in Thursday’s 4-1 loss to Columbus.

Kaleta has been suspended four times since 2009-10 and twice in his last 21 games.

The appeal goes to NHL commissioner Gary Bettman first. Kaleta is still suspended through the appeal process.

Johnson, Kaleta might argue, wasn’t injured from the hit.

xxx

Following Monday’s 2-1 home loss to Minnesota, co-captain Steve Ott said Sabres teammates “owe” their goalies, who had “been at the top of their game” with the team winless.

They finally rewarded another strong effort Tuesday, giving Ryan Miller, who made 41 saves, a 4-3 shootout win over the Islanders.

Despite some terrific numbers – a 2.39 goals-against average and .939 save percentage – Miller’s four losses are tied for the NHL lead with Winnipeg’s Ondrej Pavelec. Miller has faced more shots (197) and made more saves (185) than any other netminder.

xxx

The Sabres had Wednesday off.

## **Pominville and His Triumphant Buffalo Return**

By Andrew Kulyk & Peter Farrell

Artvoice

October 17, 2013

As if suffering Buffalo Sabres fans needed yet another reminder of just how awful things have become around these parts.

This past Monday the Minnesota Wild came to town, a team which normally doesn't garner all that much attention when they play here. But this time things were different. Jason Pominville, who played his entire career in Buffalo and was the team captain before his trade last March, made his return to Buffalo. And he scored the game-winning goal in a 2-1 win for Minnesota over his old teammates. "It was a storybook for Jason tonight," said Wild head coach Mike Yeo, whose team kept the Sabres winless for the 2013-14 season.

Pominville's presence here became an immediate media sensation, so much so that following the morning skate this past Monday morning at the First Niagara Center, Wild PR officials took the extraordinary step of setting up Pominville's interview in the media conference room, when normally such exchanges take place surrounding said player at his locker room cubicle. The room was packed. Everybody wanted to hear what Pominville had to say.

Pominville admitted that he had this date, and his return to Buffalo, circled on the calendar from the minute the schedule came out. "It's one of the games that jumps out and one you're looking forward to. I don't hold anything against the organization or anything like that. I'm just looking forward to getting out and getting this game played."

As for being used to the chaos and shock that comes with being traded and having to move quickly, Pominville had a similar experience just a few months ago while playing in Germany during the NHL lockout. Pominville had signed with the Adler Mannheim team of the DEL, and he and his entire family moved to Mannheim and adjusted to life there. The lockout ended very suddenly on a Sunday night, while he and his team were playing in Munich against the EHC Red Bull Muenchen team. He flew straight back to North America and his family followed a day later. "I never even got the chance to say goodbye, and the franchise there and the fans were so good to me," Pominville stated at the time.

With the trade from Buffalo to Minnesota, Pominville was really never given a proper sendoff. "When it happened everything happened so quick. We had a day off and the next day I was flying to meet the team out in LA. So I didn't have a chance to see anyone." Pominville actually learned of his trade to Minnesota via national media outlets. "Darcy called me later and formally informed me that the trade had taken place."

Pominville clearly laid out the difference between Buffalo's fortunes and those of his new team. "I'm with a team that wants to win and wants to win now, while Buffalo is more in a rebuilding process. So I am happy the way things turned out and this might have been the best thing for my career. Why would you not want to be with this team that is heading in this direction?"

As he stepped out on to the ice for his morning warm up, observers noticed that Pominville was taking his time and staring at the rafters of the building as his teammates flew by him. "Just walking in there are so many good memories. The back to back conference finals is something I will never forget. 15,000 people outside. It is all something I will always remember for sure."

Following last Monday's game, Pominville was the happiest guy in the Wild locker room. "This is a night I will cherish and remember for a long, long time," said Pominville, as his fellow players called out cheers over the heads of yet another crowded media scrum. "Yeah I know what those guys are going through I've been there," he said in reference to his former team. "They'll figure it out in due course there's a lot of talent and guys who care in that locker room."

Although it may be just a wee bit early to speculate, the buzz everywhere at First Niagara Center on Monday night was this: Thomas Vanek is a goner as a Buffalo Sabre, and will be joining his friend and former teammate Jason Pominville on the Minnesota Wild come next season.

The Wild? Building a contender now. The Sabres? Suffering.

Taro Sez...

- Jeers to the Sabres front office and game ops crew for not giving their former Sabres captain any love on the HD board. The script was simple: first TV timeout you run the highlight reel of the overtime series clinching goal against Ottawa in 2006 ("Now do you believe! These guys are good! Scary good!"), then show Pommers on the bench and let the fans do the rest. A goose bump moment stolen from the fans. But hey! The kiss cam and dancing recycling bins sequences were epic.

- Ted Nolan was given the same organizational bile on his return to Buffalo as Islanders coach a few years back. Expect the same shameful lack of class when Lindy Ruff shows up here in less than two weeks with his Dallas Stars.

## **Update On Regier: "Zero Truth"**

WGR 550

October 16, 2013

According to a report on Sportsnet in Canada, it appears Darcy Regier's tenure as General Manager is about to come to an end.

WGR reached out to the Buffalo Sabres for comment, and a spokesman for the team said, "Zero truth to the report."

Nick Kypreos said Regier is on the hot seat yet again but this time its more legitimate. Kypreos said ownership wanted to wait until Christmas but the move could come a lot sooner.

He went on to say the Sabres are feeling the heat from the fans and "ultimately they will make a change" at GM.

Kypreos said the name's that he is hearing in connection with the job, should it be open, are former Sabre Jason Botterill who is currently the Pittsburgh Penguins Assistant General Manager and Tom Fitzgerald who is an assistant to Botterill.

Sportsnet also reported the possibility that former Sabre Rick Dudley would be a candidate. Dudley is the Montreal Canadiens Assistant G-M.

## **Sabres: Maybe you can figure it out**

By Mike Schopp

WGR 550

October 16, 2013

Hey, the Sabres won Tuesday night! It's not a real win because it was in a shootout but we'll take it.

Winning is good. I think.

I'm not sure.

Because I remember they said something about suffering and made references to how Pittsburgh and Chicago bottomed out so I think maybe their goal is to bottom out which would make winning bad.

Is winning bad?

On some level this year's Sabres team was designed to be worse than others of recent years that finished out of the playoffs. So far, so good.

Right?

Should I have been rooting for Thomas Vanek and Tyler Ennis to miss in the shootout instead of score?

Come to think of it, am I supposed to be rooting for Vanek at all? I think I am because he's on the Sabres, but maybe I'm not because I think they want to be losing, but I think I am because I want him to be good enough for other teams to want him and thus make the Sabres a big-bang trade offer.

I think the Sabres want to keep Vanek, to re-sign him. To do that they need to establish a good, budding team around him, and thus persuade him into thinking that staying here is best for him. So if the Sabres want to keep Vanek they need to win games. But I thought they didn't want to win games.

Which is it?

Last night there was a report that the Sabres -- whoever specifically that meant -- are running out of patience with general manager Darcy Regier. That makes sense because they went into last night's game 0-6-1 and had scored only seven goals. Sports teams that lose all the time tend to make changes.

But they're trying to lose. So maybe seven losses in seven games is really like seven wins. Losing is the goal. Isn't it? So why are they upset with Regier? If you're rebuilding that means losing, and it seems Regier is "performing" as well

to the goal as he almost ever has here. Back in the spring owner Terry Pegula said, "What has Darcy done wrong?" That was eight games ago.

So they might fire him? Now?

Well that would be strange, kickoff off your rebuilding effort and then firing your leadership.

But wait, was there actually a rebuilding effort? They talked about one, but then instead of dealing good veterans on expiring contracts they held onto them -- Vanek, Ryan Miller, Steve Ott -- and acquired Henrik Tallinder who is older than all of them. What kind of rebuilding is that?

The Sabres have played some strong teams, and six of their eight games have been decided by one goal, so are we sure that we know what we've got? After all, what did Pegula said the day he bought the team.

"Panic doesn't seem to work."

(I don't have the nerve for "reason for existence" right now.)

Firing Regier, as unpopular as he is with fans, would look like a panic move, wouldn't it? The fans are angry so let's scrap our plan eight games into a season. Pegula wouldn't make a panic move.

Although.....

They did make one last year. Seventeen games into a lockout-shortened season, one that threw a lot of teams off their routines, the Sabres fired Lindy Ruff. They did so having lost two games in a row and after practice, not exactly the typical recipe for a move that was deliberately considered. Pegula gushed about Ruff upon buying the team just two years prior. They made the 2011 playoffs from there, in a surprise. Now Ruff was out.

They might have made another one three weeks ago with Cody Hodgson. Hodgson, who had almost no leverage, somehow parlayed a 0.70 points-per-game mark and some of the NHL's worst defensive metrics for a forward in 2012-13 into a robust six-year contract. What was Hodgson asking for, 10 years? Twenty? Fifty?

Now Ron Rolston is their coach, and he makes sense because he's a teacher and the idea is rebuilding, which means playing your young players even if that means putting up with losses. The player that I think matters the most in this respect is Mikhail Grigorenko, who, naturally in this tempest of confusion, regularly plays on the fourth line and twice in these eight games didn't play at all.



When he does play he sometimes plays with John Scott on a line of misfits. Scott is a powerhouse fighter that no one fights. Grigorenko is a scorer that never scores. It works.

The contradictions are so rampant within the Buffalo Sabres that they extend to what they wear. ("Is it really the third jersey?" "Was having Steve Ott unveil it on Twitter their idea?" "What kind of prehistoric promotional tactic is Black using when on the day they're the talk of the town he refuses to comment?")

The Sabres' offices right now sit at 1 Wit's End. Replacing Regier is a move that might have been justified several other times along the way. Heck, I bet I was fielding questions from Sabres fans about Darcy's future in my first days at WGR, perhaps centered on the surrender of Dominik Hasek. That was in the summer of 2002, before Drew Bledsoe played even his first game for the Bills.

Firing Regier would be weird now, which is why they might just do it.