



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Youthful Sabres open in Detroit Wednesday

Associated Press

October 1, 2013

Sabres coach Ron Rolston is reminded of the changes taking place in downtown Buffalo every day he heads into work.

There's a construction site across the street from the team's arena, where Sabres owner Terry Pegula's HarborCenter hotel and entertainment complex is being erected. Then there's the major overhaul the Sabres themselves have been undergoing over the past eight months.

They're both works in progress, and also reflect the potential of a brighter future in Buffalo.

"I would say it's a good correlation and analogy," Rolston said. "It's both out front and in the arena."

Rolston is part of the Sabres' transformation in replacing longtime coach Lindy Ruff, who was fired in February.

The changes didn't end there during what became a tumultuous, lockout-shortened season that ended with Buffalo missing the playoffs for the fourth time in six years.

Before the season was over, the Sabres purged much of their old guard — including captain Jason Pominville — as part of a youth movement to shake up what had been an aging, high-priced and under-achieving core.

And more changes could still be store, with goalie Ryan Miller and forward Thomas Vanek's futures uncertain beyond this season. Both are entering the final years of their contracts, and the Sabres haven't ruled out trading one or both.

That's left Rolston tempering his early expectations of an opening-day roster that could feature as many as seven rookies, including 18-year-old defenceman Rasmus Ristolainen.

"You're probably not going to see the potential of our team unfold for a couple of months," Rolston said. "But everyone is excited about it. And everyone has expectations that we've got what we need here now."

Here's five things to watch out for as the Sabres prepare to open the season at Detroit Wednesday (8 p.m., TSN2, NBCSN):

MILLER'S TIME UP?

Uncertain about his future after 10 seasons in Buffalo, Miller is renting after selling his home this past summer.

Miller called it a pre-emptive business decision, figuring he could attract better offers while he's still in Buffalo rather than try to sell the home if he's traded.

Miller hasn't closed the door on re-signing with Buffalo, where he holds franchise records for wins (269) and games played by a goalie (500).

"I have to be professional enough just to do the job. I'm able to do a job in a city I'm familiar with, a city I'm very much at home. I like to be in Buffalo. I like the people," Miller said. "So this isn't a bad situation."

VANEK'S VALUE

The Sabres' top scoring threat has made it clear he'd prefer to be traded rather than endure a lengthy overhaul in Buffalo. Vanek's gone as far as to say it makes more sense for the Sabres to make a trade and get some value in return.

The Sabres' 2003 first-round draft pick has the potential to be a valuable commodity once the NHL trading deadline approaches.

Vanek is a four-time 30-goal-scorer, and has managed 20 goals in each of his eight seasons in Buffalo, including last year, when he had 20 goals in 38 games.

In the meantime, the left wing will have to adjust to a new role on the Sabres' top line. Rolston has had Vanek playing on the right wing alongside centre Cody Hodgson and left wing Marcus Foligno.

YOUTH IS SERVED

The Sabres' opening-day lineup could feature four of five first-round picks the team has drafted over the past three years.

There's Ristolainen (No. 8 pick in June), as well as forwards Mikhail Grigorenko (No. 12, 2012), Zemgus Girgensons (No. 14, 2012), and Joel Armia (No. 16, 2011), who are being given an opportunity to make the roster.

Another rookie who has shined is forward Johan Larsson, who was acquired in the trade that sent Pominville to Minnesota.

MOTIVATED MIKHAIL

Grigorenko already has NHL experience, after he had a goal and four assists in 25 games with the Sabres last season.

He spent the entire summer working out in Buffalo, and is motivated to improve on last year, which included a lengthy stint with his Canadian junior team in Quebec.

"It's going to be motivating," Grigorenko said. "I've played in this league. And I know I can produce points and help my team."

NEW LEADER

Rolston intends to select a captain before the start of the season, and is confident he has many capable candidates to choose from.

Hodgson, who re-signed to a six-year contract this month, and defenceman Tyler Myers are considered candidates for the 'C.'

Sabres-Red Wings Preview

By Jeff Mezydlo

Associated Press

October 1, 2013

With veteran Daniel Alfredsson in the mix, the Detroit Red Wings are eager to begin play in the Eastern Conference.

The 40-year-old winger hopes to make what could be his only season in Detroit a memorable one starting Wednesday night when the Red Wings try to continue their home success against the rebuilding Buffalo Sabres.

Playing its last year in the Western Conference, Detroit won half of its 48 games during the lockout-shortened 2013 season and reached the playoffs for a 22nd straight time. After knocking off second-seeded Anaheim, the Red Wings took a 3-1 lead on Chicago in the conference semifinals before the Blackhawks won three straight en route to their second Stanley Cup title in four seasons.

Following that disappointing finish, the Red Wings re-signed leading scorer Pavel Datsyuk, gave a surprise \$5.5 million, one-year deal to Alfredsson and brought in veteran center Stephen Weiss.

"They're going to have as good of a team as anyone arguably in the league," Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville said.

Though the Red Wings have not made it past the second round since losing to Pittsburgh in the 2009 Stanley Cup finals, their long-desired move to the East will cut down on travel and could make a club known for solid stick-handling and overall speed an instant contender within a conference where the play is generally considered more wide-open than the West.

"This team will do well in the East," Alfredsson told the Red Wings' official website. "It's a way better travel schedule. Puck possession, a different style and a lot of teams haven't seen them as much."

How well they do could depend largely on Alfredsson.

A two-time 40-goal scorer during 17 seasons with Ottawa, Alfredsson stunned many by signing with Detroit rather than the Senators for what could be his final NHL season before retirement.

Though he had 10 goals in 2013 and more than 24 once in the league's last four full seasons, Alfredsson hopes a new environment and style of play will help revive his game and offer a legitimate shot at hoisting his first Stanley Cup.

"I've been in Ottawa my whole career and looking at my situation I wanted to try something new and exciting," said Alfredsson, expected to be on the second line with Weiss and Johan Franzen.

Weiss posted three straight 20-goal campaigns with Florida before injuries limited him to one in 17 games last season.

Despite the presence of Datsyuk, Franzen and Henrik Zetterberg, Detroit finished in the bottom half of the league with 2.5 goals per game in 2013.

Jimmy Howard, meanwhile, tied for seventh with 21 wins and ranked eighth with a 2.13 goals-against average while starting all but six games. That performance earned him a \$31.8 million, six-year deal in April.

Howard has yielded four goals on 96 shots and posted one shutout while going 3-0-0 in four games versus Buffalo.

The Red Wings are 11-0-1 at home against the Sabres since a 3-2 regulation loss March 6, 1994.

Coming off a 21-21-6 season during which longtime coach Lindy Ruff was fired in February and replaced by Ron Rolston, Buffalo hopes some youth will help lead to its first playoff appearance in three seasons.

"I can't predict how the season's going to go," owner Terry Pegula said. "But I know that the guys in the locker room are pretty upbeat."

Pegula and Rolston hope the likes of 2012 first-round picks Mikhail Grigorenko and Zemgus Girgensons will help improve a club that averaged 2.5 goals and ranked 29th on the power play, converting 14.1 percent. Grigorenko posted a goal and four assists in 25 contests last season.

Picked eighth overall in this year's draft, defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen, who turns 19 at the end of the month, also is expected to be in the lineup Wednesday.

"You're probably not going to see the potential of our team unfold for a couple of months," Rolston said. "But everyone is excited about it. And everyone has expectations that we've got what we need here now."

Thomas Vanek recorded at least 25 goals in his previous seven seasons with the Sabres, then totaled 20 and 41 points in 38 games in 2013.

A free agent after this season, Ryan Miller hopes to improve after posting a 2.81 GAA - his highest in eight seasons as Buffalo's top goaltender.

The Michigan native is 1-3-1 with a 3.81 GAA at Joe Louis Arena.

Vanek, Ott to split time as Sabres' captains

Associated Press

October 1, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Buffalo Sabres forwards Thomas Vanek and Steve Ott will split the captain duties this season.

Coach Ron Rolston announced Tuesday that Vanek will wear the 'C' during home games, while Ott will serve as captain on the road. Defenseman Christian Ehrhoff was named the team's alternate captain.

Buffalo opens the regular season at Detroit on Wednesday.

The Sabres were in need of naming a new captain since closing last season without one after former captain Jason Pominville was traded to Minnesota in April.

Vanek is the Sabres' leading scorer during eight seasons with the team. He's entering the final year of his contract, which leaves his future uncertain in Buffalo. Ott has been the team's vocal leader since being acquired in a trade with Dallas in July 2012.

Sabres notebook: Change to icing rule is touch and go

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

October 1, 2013

The players are a little confused. The linesmen seem confused at times, too. Icing calls are not the same anymore as the National Hockey League shifts to hybrid icing for the 2013-14 season.

The NHL Players' Association voted on Monday to approve the hybrid call, the first change to the touch icing rules since 1937. It was tried during the preseason and went into effect for Tuesday's season openers. The Sabres will use it in regular season play for the first time tonight in Detroit.

Hybrid icing allows the linesman to blow the play dead if he determines the puck will cross the goal line and the defending player has won a race to the end-zone faceoff dots over an attacking player.

If the attacker is leading the race, the play is supposed to continue. Early whistles prevent races to the end boards that can lead to serious injuries, such as the broken heel suffered in April by Carolina defenseman Joni Pitkanen that will keep him out of all of this season.

"I like it," Sabres defenseman Tyler Myers said of the rule. "You don't see too many times the other teams beating you down the ice for an icing. With as little as that happens and with some of the injuries I've seen in the past, I think it went pretty well in the preseason. There were some calls that probably weren't right but everybody has to get used to it."

Goaltender Ryan Miller said an early sticking point seems to be where the puck is shot down the boards, curls behind the net and comes out the other end. In Miller's eyes, linesmen are struggling to determine which players are actually racing for the puck. Miller added on-ice discussions with linesmen sometimes differed from league video tutorials provided to players.

According to the rule, the linesman has to determine who would have touched the puck first and can either whistle the play down or let it continue.

"I didn't like how sometimes the race would be on the opposite side of the ice from the puck," Miller said. "I got kind of annoyed on where the races were being judged. ... I felt there was confusion out there still. I think it's going to be a work in progress."

"From a safety standpoint it makes sense. I'm all for the hybrid icing. I just want to see the rule made a little bit more clear. Between the linesmen and players, we need to be getting the exact same video and explanation. It seemed like we were getting two different explanations."

The AHL announced Tuesday that it is also going back to hybrid icing.

The league started with it last year but dropped it when the NHL lockout ended in order to maintain consistent application in both leagues.

The NHL's approval made the AHL decide to put the rule back in, so the Rochester Amerks will use it from the outset of their season. They open Friday night in Blue Cross Arena against defending Calder Cup champion Grand Rapids.

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Rookie center Johan Larsson and enforcer John Scott skated as extra forwards in Tuesday's practice and are good bets to be the Sabres' healthy scratches up front tonight.

Winger Marcus Foligno has officially gone on injured reserve with what's believed to be a shoulder strain and coach Ron Rolston said he's unlikely to play this weekend, in either the home opener Friday against Ottawa or Saturday's game against Pittsburgh.

Foligno skated in the early portion of Tuesday's practice in a red (non-contact) jersey and then left the ice. The Sabres need him to be pretty much at 100 percent so he can play his normal physical game without worrying about his injury.

"He's been going out and trying it and it's not where it needs to be," Rolston said.

The Penguins, meanwhile, announced that defenseman and Norris Trophy finalist Kris Letang has gone on injured reserve with a lower-body injury and will miss their season opener against New Jersey and Saturday's visit from the Sabres.

...

The Sabres have announced they will host a Party in the Plaza on Friday prior to the home opener against Ottawa. The party will take place in Alumni Plaza, located outside of the arena along Perry Street, from 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. There will be music from The Informers and food and beverages will be available for purchase.

Pominville on Sabres' dual captaincy: 'I think it's weird'

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

October 1, 2013

Former Sabres captain Jason Pominville had his role filled today by Steve Ott and Thomas Vanek, who will share the 'C' in Buffalo much like Daniel Briere and Chris Drury did from 2005-07. Pominville, of course, was on those teams and things seemed to work pretty well.

But he doesn't seem sold on the Sabres' latest foray into a shared captaincy.

"I think it's weird," Pominville told the Minneapolis Star-Tribune today. "They've done [the rotating thing] in the past. I don't know if it's their way of doing it. It just feels a little weird to have a couple guys. Usually you want that one guy."

Pominville will come back to Buffalo with the Wild on Oct. 14. He continues to talk to Minnesota about a contract extension and is reportedly seeking a deal of more than \$5 million per season. The Wild are being cautious. They have big contracts to pay and are expected to be major players in the Vanek sweepstakes next summer, given the fact he lives in suburban Minneapolis and was a former star at the University of Minnesota. Pominville said he'd rather not talk during the season.

"I don't really want to have that distraction, so hopefully it can get done," he said. "If not, there's still a lot of time."

The Wild's Web site also has a story on Pominville, who delves into details of trade deadline day and says of Minnesota: 'It's starting to feel like home.'

Rolston's pick for Sabres' 'C' is a split decision

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

October 1, 2013

Practice ended at First Niagara Center and Ron Rolston gathered the Buffalo Sabres around him at center ice late Tuesday morning. But what's normally a 5-minute chat might have lasted 30 seconds because Rolston ushered the players into the locker room for a meeting.

With jokes flying on Twitter and from the media waiting outside about Papal white smoke emerging, some hoots and a couple rounds of loud applause instead emanated from behind the closed doors.

Then came the final verdict on a major decision from Rolston going forward with his team: Wingers Steve Ott and Thomas Vanek have been named co-captains and defenseman Christian Ehrhoff is the alternate captain.

Ott will wear the 'C' on the road and Vanek gets the honor at home. Each player will join Ehrhoff with an 'A' on nights they're not serving as captain.

"We just thought both guys represented what we wanted," Rolston said. "Nothing more, nothing less than that. It's all about the influence they have on the team. Those guys are big influences on the team. We thought that was the way to go."

So Rolston's system means first up wearing the top letter will be Ott, who will be the captain for the season opener tonight in Joe Louis Arena as the Sabres meet the Detroit Red Wings.

"It's a tremendous honor, the ultimate honor to wear the C for this team," said Ott, a trade acquisition from Dallas 15 months ago who has quickly become a main locker room voice.

"It's an honor but as I've told the guys, this letter doesn't mean much if we don't do anything as a group," added Vanek, a member of the organization since he was taken with the No. 5 overall pick in the draft in 2003. "... To share it with Steve and Christian is a great honor."

There were a lot of moving parts to Rolston's decision, which gives the Sabres co-captains for the first time since the glory days of Daniel Briere and Chris Drury from 2005 to 2007.

The biggest thing is that Ott and Vanek are in the final years of their contracts and teams generally pick their captains for the long term.

Ott has stated publicly his desire to re-sign while Vanek has openly taken a wait-and-see approach while evaluating the Sabres' rebuild.

“That wasn’t a part of things at all. We wanted the best influence on our young players,” Rolston said. “Thomas has been a big part of this organization for a long time. He knows how it ticks. He wants to have a great year and he also has been really good in camp in helping our young guys develop, whether it’s on the bench or in the room.”

But Rolston acknowledged the elephant in the room when he said of Vanek, “He’s in the last year. He wants to have a great season. We assume he’s going to be here. We want him to be here. And he wants to be here. We want him to be a captain for us.”

Pointing to the letter on his sweater as he spoke, Vanek said being named captain will have no bearing on his ultimate decision to stay or go.

“I said from day one I’ve liked it here, I enjoy being here and having my family grow up here,” he said. “Is it going to make a difference? It’s not about this. It’s about how good our team is.”

All three players are popular in the locker room and Rolston’s decision was well received.

“I think everyone in the room is a believer in all three guys,” said center Tyler Ennis. “But like Ron and ‘Vanner’ and ‘Otter’ said, we all have to lead, all have to do certain things to get this team rolling. We have a lot of faith in those guys.”

“Good choices,” said Ryan Miller. “Veteran players, guys familiar with what we need with this team and in this area.”

Added Tyler Myers, “They back it up with what they do on the ice. They’re really hard workers. The guys in the room really look up to those three. It was a really good pick.”

Oddly enough, the man Vanek and Ott replaced didn’t see the wisdom in Rolston’s decision.

“I think it’s weird,” Minnesota Wild winger and former Sabres captain Jason Pominville told the Minneapolis Star-Tribune. “They’ve done the rotating thing in the past. I don’t know if it’s their way of doing it. It just feels a little weird to have a couple guys. Usually you want that one guy.”

Clearly the Sabres have their one guy if Vanek is dealt. Assuming he re-signs, the captaincy is going to be Ott’s for the taking. Ott is an agitator and one theory was that some of his antics might be too much for a captain. He admitted he’s heard that talk.

“I try to ride a fine line or an edge,” Ott said. “Over the last so many years since I started wearing an A, I’ve tried to stay on the right line and lead and be an example for the team.”

Ott’s first game as captain will be a toughie.

The Red Wings make their long-awaited move back to the Eastern Conference tonight with the first of four meetings against Buffalo this year as part of the newly formed Atlantic Division. And they’ve got plenty of experts picking them to play deep into May and perhaps June.

“They’ve managed to stay on top for many years,” said Ehrhoff, a regular Red Wing opponent from his days in San Jose and Vancouver. “They’ve always found a way, even with guys like Nicklas Lidstrom leaving, to stay on top. It’s going to be a tough opponent for us to see them on a more regular basis.”

“It’s going to be a good chance to get home, hopefully pick up some energy from friends, family and some excitement,” said Miller, a Michigan native and ex-Michigan State star. “Get back to Joe Louis Arena, get back around to where I started playing. Maybe that’s a good way to start.”

Red Wings start Eastern Conference play vs. Sabres

By Mike G. Morreale

NHL.com

October 2, 2013

SABRES (0-0-0) at RED WINGS (0-0-0)

TV: NBCSN, TSN2

Season series: While there isn't much of a history between the organizations, it's the third time the teams will face off in a season opener. Kris Draper and Tomas Holmstrom led the Detroit Red Wings to a 2-0 victory against the Buffalo Sabres at Joe Louis Arena in 1999, and during the 1975-76 season the Sabres won 4-0 win at Memorial Auditorium. In the most recent meeting between the teams, Jan. 16, 2012, the Red Wings scored a 5-0 victory, the second win in two games against the Sabres that season.

Big Story: The Red Wings begin play in the Eastern Conference with two additions -- Stephen Weiss and Daniel Alfredsson. The move to the East was music to the ears of players and coaches since the team will be playing the majority of its road games against teams in the same time zone. Detroit will play 14 games outside of the Eastern time zone this season, 15 fewer than in 2011-12, the lasy 82-game season.

Team Scope:

Sabres: One of the biggest talking points of the preseason was who coach Ron Rolston would have at center to begin the 2013-14 season. It appears as if Cody Hodgson will be the top-line center, with left wing Thomas Vanek. Rookie Mikhail Grigorenko played all seven preseason games in the middle while Cody McCormick served as center in the team's last few preseason games. Tyler Ennis was shifted to center two weeks ago and has been playing there ever since. Kevin Porter might also see significant time at center.

Vanek and Steve Ott were named the team's new captains on Tuesday. Vanek will serve as captain for home games and Ott on the road.

Red Wings: The Red Wings lost four of their final five preseason games to finish 3-5 in September. The good news is that in the one victory during that stretch, Daniel Alfredsson earned his first preseason start and finished with a goal, an assist and four shots on goal. Alfredsson had missed the previous four games with a sore groin.

"I had some very good looks where I didn't bury it, but it feels good when you have the puck and you're playing on the offensive side more," Alfredsson told

reporters after the game. "It gives you more energy, and I thought we had fun out there."

Injury Report: The Red Wings are expected to be without forwards Darren Helm (lower back, groin) and Patrick Eaves (MCL, ankle), and goalie Jonas Gustavsson (groin). ... Sabres right wing Corey Tropp will miss approximately one month after having surgery to repair a broken jaw and forward Joel Armia (broken hand) is out. Forward Marcus Foligno (upper body) is doubtful with a muscle strain.

Sabres name Vanek, Ott as captains

NHL.com

October 1, 2013

The Buffalo Sabres on Tuesday announced they would have two captains this season, with forwards Steve Ott and Thomas Vanek splitting the job.

Vanek will wear the "C" for home games, while Ott will wear the "C" for road games. In addition, Christian Ehrhoff was named an alternate captain for all games.

"We just thought both guys represented what we wanted," Rolston said. "Nothing more, nothing less than that. It's all about the influence they have on the team. Those guys are big influences on the team. We thought that was the way to go."

They replace Jason Pominville, who was traded to the Minnesota Wild last season.

Both players were flattered by the selection. Vanek, 29, has spent his entire career with the Sabres, starting with when the team made him the fifth pick of the 2003 NHL Draft. Vanek is sixth on the club's all-time list with 250 goals, and 10th with 488 points.

"Obviously it means a lot to be representing this great organization with Steve and Christian," Vanek said. "It's an honor, but as I've told the guys, this letter doesn't mean much if we don't do anything as a group."

"Thomas has been a big part of this organization for a long time," Rolston said. "He knows how it ticks. He wants to have a great year and he also has been really good in camp in helping our young guys develop, whether it's on the bench or in the room."

Ott, 31, was acquired by the Sabres last summer from the Dallas Stars as part of the deal that sent Derek Roy to Dallas. He had nine goals and 15 points in 48 games last season.

"It's a tremendous honor, the ultimate honor, to wear the 'C' for this team," said Ott.

It's the first time the Sabres have used split captains since the 2005-06 and 2006-07 season, when Chris Drury and Daniel Briere shared the captaincy.

Buffalo at Detroit

CBS Sports

October 1, 2013

With veteran Daniel Alfredsson in the mix, the Detroit Red Wings are eager to begin play in the Eastern Conference.

The 40-year-old winger hopes to make what could be his only season in Detroit a memorable one starting Wednesday night when the Red Wings try to continue their home success against the rebuilding Buffalo Sabres.

Playing its last year in the Western Conference, Detroit won half of its 48 games during the lockout-shortened 2013 season and reached the playoffs for a 22nd straight time. After knocking off second-seeded Anaheim, the Red Wings took a 3-1 lead on Chicago in the conference semifinals before the Blackhawks won three straight en route to their second Stanley Cup title in four seasons.

Following that disappointing finish, the Red Wings re-signed leading scorer Pavel Datsyuk, gave a surprise \$5.5 million, one-year deal to Alfredsson and brought in veteran center Stephen Weiss.

"They're going to have as good of a team as anyone arguably in the league," Blackhawks coach Joel Quenneville said.

Though the Red Wings have not made it past the second round since losing to Pittsburgh in the 2009 Stanley Cup finals, their long-desired move to the East will cut down on travel and could make a club known for solid stick-handling and overall speed an instant contender within a conference where the play is generally considered more wide-open than the West.

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How well they do could depend largely on Alfredsson.

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Though he had 10 goals in 2013 and more than 24 once in the league's last four full seasons, Alfredsson hopes a new environment and style of play will help revive his game and offer a legitimate shot at hoisting his first Stanley Cup.

"I've been in Ottawa my whole career and looking at my situation I wanted to try something new and exciting," said Alfredsson, expected to be on the second line with Weiss and Johan Franzen.

Weiss posted three straight 20-goal campaigns with Florida before injuries limited him to one in 17 games last season.

Despite the presence of Datsyuk, Franzen and Henrik Zetterberg, Detroit finished in the bottom half of the league with 2.5 goals per game in 2013.

Jimmy Howard, meanwhile, tied for seventh with 21 wins and ranked eighth with a 2.13 goals-against average while starting all but six games. That performance earned him a \$31.8 million, six-year deal in April.

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The Red Wings are 11-0-1 at home against the Sabres since a 3-2 regulation loss March 6, 1994.

Coming off a 21-21-6 season during which longtime coach Lindy Ruff was fired in February and replaced by Ron Rolston, Buffalo hopes some youth will help lead to its first playoff appearance in three seasons.

"I can't predict how the season's going to go," owner Terry Pegula said. "But I know that the guys in the locker room are pretty upbeat."

Pegula and Rolston hope the likes of 2012 first-round picks Mikhail Grigorenko and Zemgus Girgensons will help improve a club that averaged 2.5 goals and ranked 29th on the power play, converting 14.1 percent. Grigorenko posted a goal and four assists in 25 contests last season.

Picked eighth overall in this year's draft, defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen, who turns 19 at the end of the month, also is expected to be in the lineup Wednesday.

"You're probably not going to see the potential of our team unfold for a couple of months," Rolston said. "But everyone is excited about it. And everyone has expectations that we've got what we need here now."

Thomas Vanek recorded at least 25 goals in his previous seven seasons with the Sabres, then totaled 20 and 41 points in 38 games in 2013.

A free agent after this season, Ryan Miller hopes to improve after posting a 2.81 GAA - his highest in eight seasons as Buffalo's top goaltender.

The Michigan native is 1-3-1 with a 3.81 GAA at Joe Louis Arena.

Buffalo Sabres name Steve Ott, Thomas Vanek co-captains

By Chris Peters

CBS Sports

October 1, 2013

The Buffalo Sabres will have two captains heading into the new season as the team announced Thomas Vanek will wear the C at home, while Steve Ott will do so on the road. Meanwhile, defenseman Christian Ehrhoff will serve as the team's alternate captain for all games.

This move is a bit unconventional, but may be born out of uncertainty. Vanek's contract with the Sabres is up at the end of the season and the veteran scorer has said he wants to see how Buffalo's youth performs before making a decision on re-upping with the team. There's a chance he could be trade bait if the Sabres fall out of contention quickly.

Having two captains might help soften that blow if Vanek's time left in Buffalo is rather brief, as Ott, whose contract also expires at the end of the season, would more than likely fill the role full-time.

Vanek and Ott will be replacing Jason Pominville, who was traded at the deadline last season. The pair posed with their newly C-adorned jerseys for the announcement.

Additionally, this is not the first time the Sabres have used a two-captain rotation. The team did so with rather good results from 2005 to 2007 when Daniel Briere and Chris Drury split the captaincy. The team made it to the Eastern Conference Final in both seasons of the dual captains and won the President's Trophy in 2006-07.

Of course, no one is expecting anything close to that kind of success from the Sabres, but the two captain thing, while it might seem a little odd, is not unprecedented.

Additionally, the Sabres are in need of solid leadership. They're a team in rebuild mode and have a lot of young players that will be learning the ropes a bit on the fly. Vanek is a franchise staple, who has been one of the best players of the last decade for the team. Ott is a relatively new arrival, but is widely known as a well-respected teammate.

More Buffalo Sabres silliness as Steve Ott, Thomas Vanek are named captains

By Allan Muir

Sports Illustrated

October 1, 2013

A team can never have too much leadership. Or too many captains.

That seems to sum up what the Buffalo Sabres were thinking this morning as they stitched a C on the jerseys of both Steve Ott and Thomas Vanek ahead of the 2013-14 season.

Oh, Buffalo...

Technically, they're not allowed to have two captains — Rule 6.1 reads “One Captain shall be appointed by each team . . . No co-Captains are permitted — but the Sabres found a loophole by tapping Vanek to serve as the captain at home games, with Ott doing the duties on the road.

This isn't the first time the Sabres have straddled the fence. Buffalo fans remember back in 2005-07, when Danny Briere and Chris Drury shared the C as a sign of their value to the franchise, the team made consecutive appearances in the Eastern Conference Finals. Of course, both players bolted as free agents in 2007, so umm, that went well.

Coincidentally, both Vanek and Ott are slated to become free agents at the end of this season. Given their history, you'd think it might occur to the Sabres that getting them signed to new deals before assigning each a C would be prudent, but hey, this is the same team that just went double-yellow/blue cape with their thirds.

But to their credit, the Sabres only handed out three letters today. (Christian Ehrhoff was given a permanent A). That sort of restraint is unheard of in Edmonton where they not only handed out letters like orange slices after a squirt game, but they're apparently unsure of what the A stands for.

Don Cherry says 'you fight, you get hurt'

CBC

October 1, 2013

Don Cherry has a message for NHL enforcers who want to drop the gloves: Being injured comes with the territory of being a tough guy.

The never bashful Coach's Corner commentator described on Tuesday night why he wasn't too sympathetic towards Montreal Canadiens forward George Parros, who was knocked unconscious against the Toronto Maple Leafs and taken off the ice on a stretcher with a concussion.

"Here's the name of the game: You fight, you get hurt," he said. "That's the name of the game."

Parros was entangled in a bout with Colton Orr and appeared to get his hands caught in Orr's jersey, falling face-first onto the ice.

Cherry also sounded off on another enforcer, who is big in stature but is also a big coward, according to Cherry: Buffalo Sabres forward John Scott.

Cherry explained Saturday night during his Coach's Corner segment on CBC's Hockey Night in Canada why he was upset at the six-foot-eight winger, who went after the much smaller Phil Kessel of the Toronto Maple Leafs during a brawl on Sept. 22.

"Tough guys never pick on a guy like Kessel, and bing! he does it," said Cherry. "If you wanted somebody, there was [Leafs forward Carter] Ashton, right there, you could have got him, but you turned on a little guy like [Kessel]."

"And you know what I call that? A big guy taking on [a smaller player], is a bully. And a bully to me is a coward. That's what I think of the whole thing. A bully is a coward to pick on the little guy."

Cherry also went on to praise Canadiens goalie Carey Price for his first-period play against the Toronto Maple Leafs, and described why he thought hybrid icing could work...for now.

Thomas Vanek and Steve Ott ready to captain Sabres

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

October 2, 2013

BUFFALO – Shortly before noon Tuesday, the Sabres quickly streamed off the First Niagara Center ice following practice and walked to their dressing room. The metal door closed after all the players had entered.

Inside, coach Ron Rolston began addressing his team's captaincy, which had remained vacant since the Sabres traded Jason Pominville in April.

Cheers emanated from the room a few minutes later. More applause could be heard shortly after that.

Instead of naming one captain, Rolston awarded the prestigious 'C' to Thomas Vanek and Steve Ott, two respected veteran wingers he called "easy picks."

Vanek will serve as captain at home. Ott has the honor on the road. Defenseman Christian Ehrhoff is the new permanent assistant captain. Winger Drew Stafford lost the 'A' he had worn for two years.

Why split the captaincy?

"We just thought both guys represented what we wanted; nothing more, nothing less than that," said Rolston, whose rebuilding club opens the 2013-14 season tonight in Detroit against the Red Wings. "It's all about the influence they have on the team. Those guys are big influences on the team."

Rolston chose two wildly different personalities to lead his team.

The homegrown Vanek, one of the Sabres' top talents since 2005, quietly goes about his business on and off the ice.

"I'm not the most rah-rah guy, but I think when I got something to say, I've always said it, and that will continue," said the 29-year-old, the NHL's first Austrian captain.

Meanwhile, the loquacious Ott, whose Sabres tenure began in January, has quickly earned his keep here.

"He wears his heart on his sleeve and he plays for the crest every night," Rolston said.

As one of the NHL's top agitators, the 32-year-old Ott's constantly toeing the line.

Remember when he licked Jeff Halpern's helmet last year?

“Since I’ve started wearing an ‘A’ ... I’ve tried to stay on the right line and lead and be an example for the team,” Ott said. “Obviously, I play a hard style to try to be competitive. For myself, this isn’t going to change anything, who I am. What’s gotten me in the NHL is my work ethic. That’s what’s going to keep me there, with a letter or without it.”

Ehrhoff added: “He’s one of those guys you hate to play against but you love to have on your team.”

Sabres goalie Ryan Miller said Ott “is pretty much in your face.”

“That’s one of the traits that kind of gets him despised on the ice by some guys,” Miller said. “If you play with him, you really like him for it. He’s a positive guy. He’s always talkative and trying to bring guys up. His joking, his pushing, it’s actually his competitive spirit. He wants to get better on the ice. ... He’s going to try to get the best of you. He’s going to push, push, push and chirp, talk.”

Miller said Vanek possesses some of Ott’s competitiveness.

“He’s hard on himself on the ice,” Miller said. “That translates into, ‘You want to be better.’ So have guys that expect a lot of themselves. Hopefully, that attitude’s something that’s contagious.”

Sharing the ‘C’ doesn’t bother either player. The Sabres split the captaincy once before, from 2005-07 with Daniel Briere and Chris Drury, one of the greatest stretches in franchise history.

“I think it’s good,” Vanek said. “Picking a captain’s so hard. You look at this room, there’s a lot of guys that got left out who deserve it just as much. But at the end of the day, each guy’s got to put their ego away and be happy for the team.”

As a rookie, Vanek watched how Drury and Mike Grier, another popular veteran, carried themselves and interacted with others. Vanek wanted to emulate them.

“That’s the example I’ve been trying to set for years,” Vanek said.

Ott has drawn heavily from Brenden Morrow, his last captain in Dallas.

“What he brought on the ice – extreme work ethic, grit, hard to play against and scoring – but he did it silently and he did it great,” Ott said.

Rolston selected two players whose contracts expire following the season, something he’s not worried about. He consulted with his staff and the organization – “It’s not something that’s done in a vacuum,” he said – before reaching his decision.

“We wanted the best influence on our young players,” Rolston said. “Thomas has been a big influence on this organization for a long time. He knows how it ticks.”

Rolston added: “We assume that (Vanek’s) going to be here. We want him to be here. He wants to be here. We want him to be captain for us.”

Ultimately, Vanek, who noted how much he likes living in Buffalo, said the captaincy won’t influence if he re-signs with the Sabres.

“It’s not about this,” Vanek said as he pointed to his letter. “It’s about our team.”

Notes: Vanek joking about if his honor means a lot to Austrians: “I don’t know. I hope the news will make it there by next week.” ... Rolston on why Vanek’s the home captain and Ott’s the road one: “No rhyme nor reason.” The players will wear an ‘A’ when they’re not captain. ... Sabres winger Marcus Foligno (muscle strain) didn’t practice Tuesday but could return this weekend, Rolston said. Foligno has been skating by himself. ... Sabres defenseman Tyler Myers said he “didn’t see enough reason to vote no for the league’s new hybrid icing rule.” Instead of chasing down the puck, players will now race to an imaginary line in the faceoff dots. Linesmen must make a judgment call. ... Don’t forget, the Red Wings, who just switched to the Eastern Conference, are one of the Sabres’ new Atlantic Division rivals.

HAMILTON: It's opening night for the Sabres

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 2, 2013

Detroit, MI (WGR 550) -- The Sabres put their youngsters to work for the first time tonight as its opening night in Detroit.

New faces on this year's team include Zemgus Girgensons, Rasmus Ristolainen, Johan Larsson, Jamie McBain and Henrik Tallinder. Corey Tropp, Nikita Zadorov and Joel Armia are still with the team on injured reserve.

As this team moves forward into its future, it's impossible for me to know what we're in for this season.

I could make an argument that this is the worst team in the NHL and I could make an argument that they'll challenge for the playoffs. The later would depend on Tyler Myers returning to form and some of the youngsters performing at a higher level than expected.

When the Sabres left the ice in April, many felt Buffalo had seen the last of Ryan Miller. He wasn't traded over the summer and Terry Pegula has said he'd like to sign him to a contract extension. Miller doesn't know if he's open to that so he'll be in net. Miller feels he's in a good place, "Yes, I think so. I've tried to just calm my game down during the last few months of last year, carried that into the summer and inject a little bit of energy in there. I like a lot of what we're talking about so far system wise and I'm just trying to fit in where I can."

There's a huge change in the structure of the NHL as Detroit and Columbus join the Eastern Conference while Winnipeg heads out west. The Red Wings, Florida and Tampa Bay are now in Buffalo's division, but it's coming home to Michigan that interests Miller, "It's a unique situation now with a change in divisions, it's going to be a good chance to get home and hopefully pick up some energy from friends and family and some excitement, get back to Joe Louis arena, get back to where I started playing and that's a good way to start."

With 13 players on the roster between the ages of 18 and 25, many feel like it's a recipe to lose and lose a lot. Miller tends to disagree with that, "I think youth is one thing, but if we're going to stay within a certain kind of system, we're going to be in a lot of hockey games and if we can take that step forward, we're going to be a good hockey team."

There has to be a change of culture in this locker room if this team is going to have any success. Gone is the passive and ineffective leadership of Jason Pominville. It's being replaced with the fire that Steve Ott and Thomas Vanek bring to the table. Miller and Mike Weber will also add to that fire, but what about young kids who are starting to become veterans like Cody Hodgson, Tyler

Ennis and Tyler Myers? Myers has put so much work into his off season and he thinks he's up for a leadership challenge, "I thought I was comfortable the last couple of years being more vocal. It's always easier when you back it up with your play. I think it's harder to be vocal if you're not satisfied with what you're doing on the ice. I'm feeling really comfortable going into the season here and it's just going to be all about how we come together as a group."

I'm sure you've heard me and Bulldog rave about the way Tyler Myers has played through the preseason. Now of course it means nothing until we see it starting tonight. Myers is pleased with his progress, "I went a different route this summer getting into the mental training side of things and I think it made a big difference in the way I approach different situations and it's just a matter of continuing that into the season and making sure I continue to work in the field and just getting better that way."

Mental reprogramming with a sports psychologist is something that Ryan Miller used early in his career. When John Muckler was with the Sabres, he employed one who traveled with the team. It's certainly something Myers never really had thought about, "You don't really think about it that much until you actually take that plunge, but it's been an unbelievable help to me and it's a process. Its habits you have to break and it takes time."

I'll even pull the Bills into this discussion too. With the recent players drafted like Stephon Gilmore, Kiko Alonso, EJ Manuel, Robert Woods, Aaron Williams, Marquise Goodwin, Rasmus Ristolainen, Nikita Zadorov, J.T. Comphere, Zemgus Girgensons, Jake McCabe, Joel Armia, Marcus Foligno and Mark Pysyk, I really believe that losing is going to end soon. This season, probably not, but these players make me think the future is bright for the Buffalo Bills and Buffalo Sabres.

Join Brian Koziol for the pregame tonight beginning at 7:00.

5 Ways the Sabres Can Improve Puck Possession

By Matthew Collier

WGR 550

October 1, 2013

Last season, the Buffalo Sabres missed the playoffs for the fourth time in six years. Any time an NHL team misses the post-season – in a league where teams make the playoffs simply for keeping the lights on in the arena – there are going to be a multitude of reasons for the club's failure. For the Sabres, you could point to a number of reasons for their 12th place finish including coaching, special teams, roster decisions and on and on.

But if you were to pinpoint one aspect of Buffalo's game that caused them to fall behind the elite teams, it was their inability to possess the puck.

A statistic called Fenwick Close, which uses close-game shot totals (on goal and missed) to judge teams' puck possession ranked the Sabres 30th in the NHL in possession. You might say that it isn't about the number of shots, but about the quality, but history might pump your breaks.

The 2013 Cup winning Chicago Blackhawks were second in the NHL in Fenwick Close, averaging 55.8% of the total shots in a given game. The Bruins were fourth. The Western Conference Finalist Red Wings were fifth. And when the L.A. Kings shocked the world as an eighth seed in 2012, they didn't shock the stat world, because they were fourth in Fenwick Close during the regular season.

(Read more on Fenwick Close and possession [here](#))

It's common sense, really. The best teams control the game. And the Buffalo Sabres did not control the game last season.

But this year's a new year. There's a new coach and plenty of new faces on the opening night roster. There's cautious optimism about a young team and reason to think they could compete. But unless the Sabres improve their puck possession, they'll be making it five out of seven years without playoff hockey in Buffalo.

How can they do it?'

5) Improve zone exits

Puck possession begins with play in the defensive zone. Elite defenders have the ability to get the puck out from behind their own net up to streaking forwards or successfully carry it into and through the neutral zone. The Sabres struggled terribly to get the puck out of their own zone.

Roster changes on the blue line may give the Sabres a boost in getting pucks out of their own zone. Rookie defenseman Mark Pysyk excelled in Rochester in making quick decisions under pressure and moving the puck out of the Amerks' own zone. He showed his skill in Buffalo, in 19 NHL games, he had a Relative Corsi (Puck possession on ice vs. off ice) of +7.4, which was only behind Christian Ehrhoff and Alex Sulzer.

Sending Sulzer to Rochester may prove a bad move. Ehrhoff's chemistry with his fellow German is real. When the two were paired together, Ehrhoff had a 56.7% Corsi percentage (similar to Fenwick percentage, but includes blocked shots) – better than with any other player.

That said, Henrik Tallinder has been a solid possession player and the puck-moving rookie Rasmus Ristolainen are likely to get pucks out of the D-zone better than the aged Jordan Leopold and Robyn Regehr did last year.

Here's a great article on Zone Exits

4) Stay aggressive when ahead

If you've listened to WGR's Paul Hamilton any time over the last three or four years, you've heard him say that the Sabres play back on their heels when they have a lead. Turns out, there's statistical evidence that they do.

When the Sabres were up by one goal in 2013, they controlled on 35.9 percent of shots at or on goal. That was worst in the NHL. In fact, the Blackhawks were 20 percent (!) better at 55.9 percent. When they were u by two goals, they basically never had the puck. They were, yet again, last in the NHL at just 29.5 percent. Chicago? 55.0 percent. How can you hold onto a lead with the other team taking 70 percent of the shots? (Yet we blame Ryan Miller, but that's a discussion for another day)

Can it improve this year? This will depend on Ron Rolston and the team's leadership. Rolston can push his skill players to continue to carry the puck into the zone and look to make it a three goal lead instead of trying to protect a two goal lead. Also some new(ish) players like Kevin Porter, Brian Flynn and Zemgus Girgensons should add defensive skill and an attitude that could help the team play better when ahead.

3) Carry the puck in the offensive zone

If puck possession is the color black, zone entries and exits are the Miley Cyrus' haircut and twerk. Or something like that. They're in vogue in the hockey stat community, that's all. OK.

Anyway, one of the findings of zone entrance and exit studies is that carrying the puck in is much more effective that dumping it behind the opponents' net and

chasing after it. It's kind of common sense, right? You're giving away possession of the puck like a punt and hoping to get it back.

This study by Broad Street Hockey demonstrates the effect in terms of possession. The study also indicates that teams dump the puck in the zone more often when they are leading. The Sabres could stop doing that and keep their foot on the pedal while up.

2) Find correct line combinations

This one goes along with the Ehrhoff/Sulzer bit. The website stats.hockeyanalysis.com has a breakdown of how players perform when paired with different teammates. For example, when Cody Hodgson was on the ice with Thomas Vanek and Jason Pominville, he had a Corsi percentage of around 48%. When he was on the ice at the same time as Steve Ott, his Corsi percentage was 6 percent worse. With Nathan Gerbe it was 8 percent worse.

The challenge early in the season for Ron Rolston will be to find the line combos that are performing the best in terms of possession. One line to keep an eye on in terms of possession is the top line of Vanek-Hodgson-Stafford. Stafford's Corsi percentages were strong with Tyler Ennis and Marcus Foligno in 2011-12 and 2013, but with Hodgson (in limited minutes) his percentages were 40.5 and 45.6.

1) Put players in a position to succeed

Lindy Ruff used players in every type of situation and often against similar competition. So he might use Cody Hodgson in the offensive zone against an opponent's fourth line, then start him in the defensive zone against the top line on the next shift. Some coaches have gone to using more offensively skilled players at a higher percentage in the offensive zone. For example, the Pittsburgh Penguins used Evgeni Malkin, a one-dimensional scorer, in offensive zone faceoffs 63.6 percent of the time vs. 36.7 percent defensive zone.

The Sabres would be wise to do this. They have many one-dimensional players including Hodgson, Vanek, Ennis, Stafford and several defensively skilled players like Kevin Porter, Patrick Kaleta, Zemgus Girgensons and Brian Flynn. Ruff tried to force his one-dimensional players into two-way roles and it didn't work. Rolston has an opportunity to tweak (twerk?) the usage and improve the team's ability to get shots in the offensive zone and prevent them in the defensive zone.

Sabres name captains

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 1, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Ron Rolston has named Thomas Vanek the Sabres captain at home and Steve Ott the captain on the road. Christian Ehrhoff will replace Drew Stafford wearing the 'A'.

This is a decision Rolston has been wrestling with all preseason. He said, "We just felt both guys represented what we wanted, nothing more and nothing less than that. It's all about the influence they have on the team."

Ott had to wait to play his first game as a Sabre until the lockout was over in January. After just 48 games in this organization, he's now a co-captain. Rolston said, "He's somebody that gives you the same thing every night so he sets an example for guys in terms of how you want guys to compete."

The elephant in the room is of course Vanek and Ott are in the last years of their contracts and one or both could be traded. Still, Vanek is pleased, "It means a lot to be representing this great organization with Steve and Christian so it's an honor, but as I've told the guys, this letter doesn't mean much if we don't do anything as a group."

Many of the players have said there need to be more accountability in the dressing room with the players. Vanek said, "It doesn't come down to the three of us. I think we have a group of seven or eight who need to be more vocal than in the past and haven't stepped up. It starts with us both on and off the ice, but it's more than us."

Vanek credited Chris Drury and Mike Grier as players that helped mold him as a leader.

Unlike Vanek and Ryan Miller, Ott has been very vocal in his desire to remain a Sabre. He said, "It's a tremendous honor, the ultimate honor to wear the 'C' for this team."

If Steve Ott's on your team he plays a style that fans and teammates love, but it's also a style that can get him into trouble. Ott said, "I try to ride a fine line, on the edge. I think over the last several years when I started wearing an 'A', I've tried to stay on the right line and lead and be an example for the team, but this isn't going to change who I am. What got me into the NHL is my work ethic and that's what's going to keep me there."

The Sabres have 13 players between the ages of 18 and 25 on the roster. Ott knows how to lead the kids, "It's coming to the rink prepared every single day."

Christian comes in, one of the best players in shape on the team, Thomas comes in and is THE best player on our team and it starts with us, but there are many of these guys that are already leaders.”

By NHL rule, Ryan Miller isn't allowed to wear a letter on his sweater. He and Vanek are the only two left that came up together. Miller said, “I think good choices. Guys familiar with what we need either in this team or this area in Thomas and guys like Steve, you see his competitive spirit every night so I think that's what we appreciate, so it's a good blend.”

Miller has always been a voice in the room. He said this season he's going to back off a little, “I've been around a while. I'm just trying to stay pretty quiet right now and just do my thing, work hard. It's what the young guys need to see, everybody works hard, everybody does their job and that's what we're trying to establish right now.”

Miller hasn't been teammates with Ott long, but he's developed an appreciation for the player, “Everybody in the community already knows a lot about Steve because Steve is pretty much in your face. It's one of the traits that gets him despised on the ice by some and when you play with him, you really like him for it. He tries to get guys up and his joking and pushing is actually his competitive spirit.”

Tyler Ennis has been here long enough to start leading himself. He likes the captain choices, “I'm excited, both bring different elements. Everyone in the room is a believer in all three guys, but we all have to lead and we all have to do things to get this team rolling.” As far as if he's ready to lead he said, “Absolutely, yes. I think it's necessary and I think we need it. We're a young team and I understand where I am and only being 23 turned 24. I am one of the older guys.”

Tyler Myers is a guy that's going to have to step up as a leader. He said he figured it might go this way. “I don't think it's much of a surprise, but those three a very quality guys in the locker room and they can it up with what they do on the ice. The guys in the room really look up to those three so it was a good pick.”

Marcus Foligno wasn't able to practice due to a shoulder strain. Rolston expressed doubt about if Foligno will be able to play at all this week.

Sabres Name Captains For 2013-2014

By Pete Gallivan

WGRZ

October 1, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. - The Buffalo Sabres announced Tuesday that Thomas Vanek and Steve Ott would serve as co-captains, with Christian Ehrhoff the lone assistant captain.

Vanek will wear the "C" during games at the First Niagara Center, while Ott will serve as captain for road games. Ehrhoff's jersey will bear the "A" for all games.

Vanek said during his introduction that any number of players deserve the captaincy and that he is honored by the privilege. But he added, the bottom line is winning "this letter doesn't mean much if we don't do anything as a group."

Ott says that his biggest example and contribution to the team is his hard working style. He says the honor of being named captain will not change the way he approaches the game or plays it. "This isn't going to change who I am. What's got me into the NHL is my work ethic and that's what is going to keep me here, with or without a letter."

Ehrhoff, who is typically soft-spoken off the ice says that he is willing to say what needs to be said, in the locker room and on the ice. "I am one of the more vocal guys on the bench during a game. Obviously with a lot of younger guys coming in, we need more from the older guys so it's not too quiet. We're up to the challenge."

The Sabres traveled to Detroit Tuesday in advance of Wednesday's season opener at Joe Louis Arena Wednesday night. That means as the Sabres make their 2013-2014 debut, Steve Ott will make his debut with the "C" on his sweater.

FOLIGNO OUT WEDNESDAY, MAY MISS MORE TIME

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

October 1, 2013

Buffalo Sabres coach Ron Rolston said after practice Tuesday at First Niagara Center that forward Marcus Foligno will not play in the team's season opener against Detroit.

Foligno sustained an upper-body strain in a preseason game on Sept. 22 against Toronto and has not participated in a full practice since. He's worked with the team's power play units the last few days before the rest of the team has taken the ice but has done so while sporting a red non-contact jersey.

He may miss the games over the weekend against Ottawa on Friday and in Pittsburgh on Saturday as well.

Here's what Rolston had to say on Foligno's status:

"He's been skating. We've been trying him every morning, so I don't know. It would be hard now. Possibly on the weekend, but it's not a for-sure thing.

"He's been going out in the morning and trying it and it's just not where it needs to be to put him in that situation where if he gets bumped or anything like that to set him back further. So we want him back in the lineup, but we want to make sure that when he's back, he's healthy and we don't put him in any situation where he could further injure something."

OTT AND VANEK TO SHARE CAPTAINCY

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

October 1, 2013

Buffalo Sabres coach Ron Rolston announced Tuesday that forwards Thomas Vanek and Steve Ott have been named team captains.

Vanek will serve as captain for home games and Ott will serve as captain on the road. Rolston also named Sabres defenseman Christian Ehrhoff the team's alternate captain for all games.

Rolston made the announcement in the Sabres dressing room after practice at First Niagara Center. He said the decision to go with two captains was an organizational one, made after much discussion.

"We just thought both guys represented what we wanted," Rolston said. "Nothing more, nothing less than that. We thought it's all about the influence they have on the team. Those guys are big influences on the team, so we thought that was the way to go."

Ott and Vanek will be the 24th and 25th players to wear the "C" for the Sabres. Excluding the rotating captaincy of the 2003-04 and 2007-08 seasons, they are the 17th and 18th full-season captains in Sabres history.

Vanek, drafted by the Sabres fifth overall in 2003, is sixth all-time in goals for the franchise and 10th all-time in points. He said that being named a captain will not change how he plays or how he approaches his teammates.

He's poised to lead a group that has missed the playoffs the past two seasons and Vanek hopes to help change that this year.

"Obviously it means a lot to be representing this great organization with Steve and Christian," Vanek said. "It's an honor, but as I've told the guys, this letter doesn't mean much if we don't do anything as a group. Again it's nice, but it's not where we want to be."

Vanek is one of the longest-tenured players on the team and Rolston took into account how the veterans have helped the younger, less experienced players since he took over as coach in February.

"Thomas has been a big part of this organization for a long time. He knows how it ticks," Rolston said. "He wants to have a great year and he also has been really good in camp and in helping our young guys – whether it's on the bench or in the room – develop. That was very important in that decision."

Ott joined the Sabres after being acquired in a trade with Dallas last summer. After the team traded captain Jason Pominville in March, Ott was named an alternate

captain for the rest of the season. He previously served as an alternate captain for the Stars under Brendan Morrow.

He also said his style will not change because of the new letter on his chest.

“I’ve tried to stay on the right line and lead and be an example for the team. Obviously I play a hard style, try and be competitive, but for myself, this isn’t going to change anything or who I am,” he said. “What’s got me to the NHL is my work ethic and that’s what’s going to keep me there with a letter or without it.”

Rolston pointed out that Ott’s demeanor both on and off the ice played a big part in naming him a captain.

“He puts everything out there and he wears his heart on his sleeve. He plays for the crest every night,” Rolston said.

Vanek and Ott are both entering contract years, but Rolston said that never played a role in the decision process.

Ehrhoff, entering his third season with the Sabres, will lead a defense that has a good mix of experience and youth. The Sabres brought back veteran Henrik Tallinder but have rookies like Mark Pysyk and 18-year-old Rasmus Ristolainen on the roster as well.

“With a lot of young guys coming in, there has to be a little more from the older guys so it’s not too quiet. We are up for the challenge,” Ehrhoff said.

The Sabres last used a two-captain rotation in 2005-06 and 2006-07, when Chris Drury and Daniel Briere served as co-captains. Vanek, who was a rookie during that first season, said that Drury was a tremendous influence on him.

“It wasn’t just because he wore the ‘C.’ It’s because how he carried himself, how he worked hard, how he got along with people,” Vanek said. “Him and Mike Grier – even though Mike didn’t have the ‘C’ – are two of the guys I learned a lot from and that’s the example I’ve been trying to set for years for other young guys coming in.”

Vanek, Ott, Ehrhoff and Rolston all made note of how there are many leaders on the team who take charge in their own way. Vanek said that leadership on the team doesn’t stop with the three players wearing letters.

“It doesn’t come down to the three of us. We have a group of seven, eight who have to be more vocal than in the past – who haven’t stepped up,” Vanek said. “I think it’s a group effort. I think it starts with us obviously on the ice, off the ice but it’s more than us. Big picture, there are a lot of guys who are leaders and they need to help us.”

