



Buffalo Sabres

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Toronto at Buffalo

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After firing their general manager and head coach, the lowly Buffalo Sabres are ready to move forward with two familiar faces guiding the way.

With former star Pat LaFontaine now overseeing hockey operations, Ted Nolan steps behind the Sabres' bench for the first time in almost 17 years as interim coach Friday night against the visiting Toronto Maple Leafs.

Absent from the playoffs the past two seasons, Buffalo (4-15-1) has the fewest points in the NHL and its loss total is the most in franchise history through 20 games. The Sabres got their first win in 10 home games with a 3-2 shootout victory over Los Angeles on Tuesday, but that wasn't enough to keep owner Terry Pegula from firing longtime general manager Darcy Regier and coach Ron Rolston a day later.

"So why now? I just decided, and that's the only answer I can give you," Pegula said. "Sometimes you get to the point where a change is needed."

Regier, who traded away star winger Thomas Vanek last month, had been the GM since 1997. Rolston went 19-26-6 since replacing the fired Lindy Ruff in February.

LaFontaine, a Hall of Famer who starred for the Sabres from 1991-97, fills the newly created role of president of hockey operations and will look to fill the vacant GM position.

"Our job is top to bottom to bring a championship caliber team year to year," he said.

His first move was to bring back his former coach. The 55-year-old Nolan went 73-72-19 and won a Jack Adams Award while coaching in Buffalo from 1995-97, and his only other stint as an NHL coach was with the Islanders from 2006-08. More recently, he was coach of the Latvian men's national team, a role he'll keep for the 2014 Winter Olympics.

Known as a motivator and developer of young talent, Nolan inherits a team that has four players under the age of 20 on the current roster and is scoring a league-worst 1.65 goals per game.

"You can have all the talent you want, if you don't compete, it doesn't make any difference," Nolan told the Sabres' official website. "That's what I (said) to the team. I said, 'We're not going to promise if we compete, we're going to start winning. That has nothing to do with that. But if we compete, it gives us a chance to win. Without that, it doesn't work.'"

With LaFontaine and Nolan on board, the Sabres look to win consecutive games for the first time this season after Ryan Miller made 43 saves and Cody Hodgson scored twice against the Kings.

Hodgson has been one of the few bright spots while leading Buffalo with seven goals and eight assists. The Toronto native had three assists during the Sabres' 5-4 home shootout victory over the Maple Leafs on March 21 in the teams' most recent meeting.

Toronto (11-6-1) has earned five points in the last three games against the Sabres and owns one of the Eastern Conference's best records, but expects a serious challenge from a team filled with some renewed purpose.

"Anytime (a coaching change) happens it usually sparks a team to give that much more in a game," Maple Leafs defenseman Dion Phaneuf said. "We expect a tough game."

Toronto has recorded three regulation goals while going 1-2-1 following a three-game winning streak during which it scored four times in each contest.

Mason Raymond gave the Maple Leafs a 1-0 lead in the second period at Minnesota on Wednesday, but the Wild tied it late in the third and won 2-1 in a shootout.

"We've just got to move on," said Toronto's Jonathan Bernier, who made 33 saves.

The Maple Leafs could be without forward Nazem Kadri after he was assessed a match penalty and ejected for hitting Minnesota's Mikael Granlund in the head during the third period. Second on the team with 14 points, Kadri also received an interference penalty in the first for running over Wild goaltender Niklas Backstrom.

Sabres start 'second season' under Nolan

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

November 15, 2013

His stunning return on Wednesday was such a whirlwind that Ted Nolan barely had time to leave the dais in the First Niagara Center pavilion, greet his team in the locker room, don a sweatsuit and take the ice to watch practice. Nolan did some talking but often watched his new assistant coaches run drills.

Not so Thursday. Nolan was completely in charge.

His whistle sharply chirping almost non-stop and his voice echoing through the empty arena, Nolan put the Buffalo Sabres through a 65-minute workout far above the tempo of any seen under the departed Ron Rolston.

How will that translate in the interim coach's first game behind the Buffalo bench in more than 16 years? We get the answers tonight at 7 in the opener of a home-and-home series against the Toronto Maple Leafs.

At 4-15-1, the Sabres are obviously a major work in progress. So Nolan wasn't throwing out any huge plaudits around when asked his view of practice Thursday.

"It went OK," Nolan said, with the emphasis on "OK." "We've got a lot of work to do. The biggest thing is to get these guys to feel good about themselves. If you feel good about yourself, you'll get better."

There was clearly more chattering, more playful hooting and hollering from the players during practice. Drills were high tempo and quickly transitioned from one to the next. The workout opened with simultaneous battle drills of three forwards and two defensemen in all four corners of the rink. There was skating, passing, breakaways, the works.

A couple of times, Nolan briefly stopped a drill or made a player repeat one if he felt it could be done better. The old adage of you-play-as-you-practice certainly applies.

"He definitely preached that. Make sure we have good practice habits and I think we did a good job today," said winger Matt Moulson. "I thought it was a great practice. It was pretty hard when we were moving out there. It was a good tempo and we'll try to bring that to the game."

"It was good. Everybody was going hard," said defenseman Mark Pysyk. "With a new coach nobody wants to sit back. Everybody was pushing each other and skating well."

Nolan definitely pushed his new team and said afterward he would be checking in with strength and conditioning coach Doug McKenney about working on some players' fitness levels.

"There's not much we can do right now. We're 20 games into the season," Nolan said. "We got what we got. We've got to work with what we have. ... These guys are all professional athletes and I'm quite sure they worked their tails off in the summer. Physically I don't think there's much of a concern. Mentally is the thing we have to work on."

The pressure release caused by the dismissals of Rolston and General Manager Darcy Regier seemed to help the players in that area. Nolan will be coaching the Sabres tonight for the first time since they were eliminated in Game Five of the Eastern Conference semifinals here against Philadelphia on May 11, 1997.

"The feeling is that guys know this is a fresh clean slate and you've got to be at the top of your game," said captain Steve Ott. "Nothing is given right now. I'm sure everything is going to be earned here, no matter if you're a leader, a veteran guy, a young guy."

"There's a ton of energy. It was hard work today," said center Cody Hodgson. "There was a lot of stuff that was new to us but we battled hard. It definitely was a good day. Any time a coach is fired, a GM is changed, stuff like that, you feel bad as a team, but we definitely need to respond and work harder."

Nolan announced one key roster change, moving 19-year-old Zemgus Girgensons from the wing to center tonight between Ott and Tyler Ennis. Girgensons has been a top center for Nolan on the Latvian Olympic team.

Hodgson centered Moulson and Drew Stafford. Marcus Foligno was between Ville Leino and Brian Flynn while Cody McCormick centered John Scott and Corey Tropp. Mikhail Grigorenko and Johan Larsson were extra forwards Thursday.

Whoever plays tonight, it seems unlikely the Sabres will sleepwalk through games any more under a coach whose old Buffalo clubs were billed as "The Hardest Working Team in Hockey."

"It was an up-pace tempo. The boys were skating," said Scott. "It was up and down the ice, no breaks. He wants to play a certain type of game and he definitely drilled it in our heads. We better get used to that because it's going to be like that the rest of the year."

The Sabres are 20 games into their season but tonight is a second season opener in Nolan's mind against veteran NHL coach Randy Carlyle of the Leafs.

“What happened yesterday is done. It’s over with. What happened in the first 20 games in your season is done. It’s over with,” he said. “We’re turning a new page, we’re starting a new chapter. I talked to some of the players and every stat they have is out the door. Forget about it.

“Against the Leafs we start anew and we’re going to compete. Toronto is a very good team. They’ve turned it around quite a bit in the last year or so. I know their coach demands a lot and we’re going to demand a lot here too.”

Sabres notebook: Players downplay rematch with Leafs

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

November 15, 2013

No big words. No threats. Lots of buzzkill.

If you expect to see any sort of payback tonight in First Niagara Center between the Sabres and Toronto Maple Leafs from their preseason line brawl, both sides say you'll be disappointed.

Of course, we all know what's said in private could be dramatically different than what was said in front of the cadre of reporters and cameras that filled the Sabres' locker room Thursday because the Toronto media was in town following the Leafs on their trip from Minnesota.

In fact, there was such a crowd waiting around the locker of Sabres enforcer John Scott that they were directed in front of a nearby wipe board to speak to him in the spot goaltender Ryan Miller normally uses for his postgame chats.

"I think it's being blown out of proportion with this game," Scott said. "It's something that happened in the preseason. I don't think much is going to happen from it."

"It happened a long time ago," added Leafs coach Randy Carlyle. "It's things like that we don't like to remember. We're just trying to move on from that. We're here to play a hockey game that's going to give us the best chance for success and they're a hockey club that wants to show its new coach what they're made of. It should make for an exciting time."

The brawl, of course, went full-on when the 6-foot-8 Scott tried to engage Leafs winger Phil Kessel right off a faceoff after a fight between Toronto's Troy Bodie and Buffalo's Corey Tropp resulted in Tropp getting a broken jaw.

Kessel responded with swings of his stick at Scott that earned him a suspension from the final three preseason games but Toronto winger David Clarkson missed the first 10 regular season games after he jumped off the bench into the fray. Goaltenders Ryan Miller and Jonathan Bernier also were ejected after staging a slugfest of their own. Kessel was not in the Toronto locker room Thursday while it was open to reporters.

Cracked a smiling Sabres interim coach Ted Nolan: "They want to carry over, they can do it. I have nothing to carry over. I wasn't there. I'm brand new."

Scott said he has already spoken to Nolan about his role on the team and downplayed any sort of revenge plans.

“He wants me to play my game, go out there and hit, actually not be too concerned about fighting,” Scott said. “He wants me to be a hockey player, be responsible and physical and go from there.”

“We’re not worried about one individual person,” Clarkson said. “We’re worried about winning games. You have to go out and find ways to win.”

Scott will play tonight for the first time since getting suspended for seven games for a head shot against Boston’s Loui Eriksson in the Oct. 25 game here. He was actually eligible to play the last two games but former coach Ron Rolston kept him as a healthy scratch.

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New President of Hockey Operations Pat LaFontaine said Wednesday his search for a new general manager would begin immediately and a report from the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review said the Sabres will be granted permission to talk to Penguins assistant GM Jason Botterill – a former Sabres player and rising prospect in NHL executive ranks – about their vacant post.

Botterill, 37, is in his fifth season with the Penguins and is considered an expert with the salary cap. He spent the last three years of his pro hockey career in the Buffalo organization, including 36 games with the Sabres in 2002-03 and 2003-04.

...

Sabres President Ted Black revealed on his weekly show Thursday morning on WGR Radio that Nolan and LaFontaine were at his home watching Tuesday’s shootout win over Los Angeles on television. They were later joined by owner Terry Pegula, and Pegula and Black then headed downtown after the game to dismiss Darcy Regier and Ron Rolston.

Neither Rolston nor Regier has responded to Western New York media requests for comment on their dismissals. Rolston did, however, file a text message response to CBC’s Elliotte Friedman late Wednesday night.

Wrote Rolston: “I appreciate the opportunity to have coached for the Buffalo Sabres. Developing a young team is a process and I regret that I was not afforded the time to fully realize the goals that were set for the coaching staff and the team. Regardless, coaching and developing hockey players will remain my passion and my profession, and I look forward to a new challenge.”

Said defenseman Mark Pysyk, who played with Rolston most of last season in Rochester and Buffalo: “You never want to see somebody you worked with have that happen. But you can tell everybody’s excited.”

...

The Leafs will be down three centers tonight as Tyler Bozak and Dave Bolland are injured and Nazem Kadri earned a three-game suspension from the NHL Thursday for his hit to the head of Minnesota's Niklas Backstrom during the Leafs' shootout loss Wednesday in Minnesota. They are expected to make a minor-league recall for tonight's game.

An older, wiser Nolan embraces second chance

By Bucky Gleason

Buffalo News

November 14, 2013

Sandra Nolan tried to brace herself when her husband gave her the news from Latvia, but she failed miserably. She's a kind and classy woman with a gentle touch, a mother of two boys who rarely cursed. She was the voice of the Nolan house, and she raised her sons to watch their language and treat others with respect.

Everybody has their moments, of course. They usually come when something catches us completely off guard. She heard Ted say something about "coaching" and "Buffalo" in the same sentence, enough to break through the filter between her brain and tongue. The whole thing seems like a blur. She was stunned.

It just, you know, came out.

"I swore, and I'm not a swearer," she said with a laugh. "You don't want to hear the word. It was the big one."

Yep, she dropped the F-bomb.

"I never heard her say that before," Ted Nolan said.

It was strategically placed within "you gotta be kidding me," which pretty much summed up the reaction of many in the legion of Sabres fans. The mere thought of Nolan coaching the Sabres again was difficult for anyone to fathom, let alone the woman who never left his side after so many others inexplicably abandoned him.

After hearing the news and getting past the initial shock, she hung up the phone and bawled like a baby. She cried for five minutes in their empty home in Garden River First Nation, near Sault Ste. Marie, Ont. She understood that, some 4,000 miles away in Latvia, the strongest man she ever knew was doing the same.

"There were tears overseas and years in Northern Ontario," Nolan said Thursday after his second practice since being named Sabres interim coach. "They were tears of joy, especially coming here. If it happened in some other city, the emotion wouldn't be as high. I loved coaching here back when I did. I never lost the spirit of Buffalo."

You need to understand Nolan to fully appreciate the journey back, how a wrong was righted more than 16 years later. Nolan never should have been sent on his way in 1997 after he was insulted by, and quickly rejected, a one-year contract offer. He had other jobs and built a happy and successful life, but he was never truly whole again.

Nolan didn't even realize as much until after he was hired Wednesday how much it affected him. He could have coached in several cities, or maybe won a Stanley Cup somewhere, but he never would have been completely content without having another crack in Buffalo. His return provided something he never expected.

Eternal peace.

"I couldn't agree with you more," he said. "It was one of those things, one of those stamps, that now your soul can rest. Now you enjoy what you're doing and get back to what you love to do. You do it with more desire and more passion than you did in the past because you have more maturity and experience."

Nolan had effectively pushed his exit from Buffalo in 1997 to the side, rationalized that it wasn't meant to be, forgave the people responsible and concluded that life wasn't always fair. He spent more than 16 humbling years making himself a better person, a better father, a stronger leader and, in turn, a better coach.

He looks and carries himself much the same since he last stood behind the Buffalo bench and watched the Sabres get knocked out of the playoffs. He returns Friday night against the Maple Leafs with the same enthusiasm but more perspective. His life has changed, which means it improved. That message should not get lost.

"Everybody changes," Nolan said. "I'm not the same guy I was 20 years ago, and I'm sure you're not, either. We have to change with the times when we're here. The one thing that hasn't changed is what it takes to win."

"It has not changed since the 1940s or '50s or '60s or 2013. What it takes to win is having a certain compete level that you have to do. You have to do certain things that other people don't want to do. And that's why winning is so tough."

Ah, yes, Ted Nolan is back.

He's a rarity in that Sabres fans would pay just to see him coach, to watch him get more out of players than they ever imagined with a simple, direct message. His thick backbone and honest approach draws people near. He's unwavering in his beliefs and his loyalty. He has a knack for stirring the masses.

And he's a gifted motivator.

Heck, by the time Nolan was finished talking Thursday, I was ready to break down the door and establish a forecheck in the media room. That's the effect he can have on people. It's precisely what the Sabres and their collection of young players needed as they plow forward through a difficult season.

It was obvious during an upbeat practice Thursday morning and in the dressing room afterward. His players were optimistic and excited. There was a sense the shackles had been removed and they were finally free, that Nolan and Pat LaFontaine would work with them after feeling as if upper management worked against them.

I'm not going to roll into carving Darcy Regier. It's not worth my time or yours, not to mention the space in the newspaper. I will say that several players were thrilled Thursday that he and Ron Rolston were gone. There was an unmistakable buzz in the dressing room that had been absent for many, many years.

"If it happened somewhere else, it would have been OK," Nolan said. "To have it happen here is great. This time is totally different. I had some dark moments, I really did, when I got let go from here. I might have lost my job. I may not have coached. I never lost who I am as a person, as a man."

Nolan isn't a miracle worker. He's not going to magically teach teenage players how to beat grown men. But already he has wrapped his arms around his players and showed them he's with them. He's going to pull whatever he can from whomever he can. If he can get a fraction more out of each player, the Sabres will become a better team.

It will be interesting to see how much he can help Drew Stafford, for example. Stafford is loaded with ability but has largely underachieved. He spent years playing scared, fearful that one mistake would lead to a benching. He's the kind of player who could thrive if unleashed by Nolan, a coach who understands the power of persuasion.

It's happened in the past.

Most of his players are too young to remember. Anybody who recalls Nolan's teams from the last year at Memorial Auditorium and the first year at Crossroads Arena – people who watched LaFontaine lead the Sabres in scoring one year and Derek Plante the next – knows Buffalo will be ready to play. The outcome is secondary.

At least there will be electricity flowing through First Niagara Center, generated by a simple move that was a long time coming. Toronto being in town, after all that happened in the preseason, will make the atmosphere that much better. Years from now, having Nolan and LaFontaine together again will make the franchise that much better.

I swear.

Feeling good about Sabres long overdue

By Donn Esmonde

Buffalo News

November 14, 2013

It is the beginning of the end of the suffering. Hallelujah.

Sabres owner Terry Pegula came to his senses Wednesday and put people in high places who will – unless I miss my guess – allow this area to start feeling good again about its hockey team.

That's all I care about. The intricacies of players and strategies are expertly covered by The Buffalo News sports department. What matters to me, and I think to a lot of people, is having a team that we can be proud of. A team that reflects the tough, character-laden nature of a place where snow blasts in horizontally across the lake. A place where smokestacks and grain elevators reflect a broad-shouldered, no-excuses mentality. A place where hard times have lasted for a lot of our lifetimes. That kind of team, for this kind of place.

That is, sadly, not the kind of hockey team we have had for most of my 32 years here. Instead, the Sabres in the post-French Connection years – except for a few memorable stretches – have been too small, too soft and too frilly.

Wednesday's overdue jettisoning of General Manager Darcy Regier removes the architect of 16 years of mostly mediocrity (with his promise of more "suffering" to come). The worst of his shortcomings was a failure to build teams that reflected the identity and character of their city.

The lowest point, aside from this season's abyss, was when Boston tough guy Milan Lucic took out defenseless goalie Ryan Miller in a road game two years ago and no Sabre had Miller's back. It felt like the whole town hung its head the next day. It's tough to hold a heart-challenged team close to your heart, much less pay money to see it.

Professional sports teams, for better or worse, represent to the outside world the town in which they play. Granted, pro athletes are mercenaries whose time here is usually brief. But during their stay, they wear the colors and carry the civic flag. We want a team whose identity reflects how we see ourselves and want to be seen by the world. That's especially true in a city that outsiders don't believe has much going for it.

That's why it's particularly painful to be stuck with character-lite, heartbreaking pro sports teams. Between the Sabres lately and the long-dry Bills, Buffalo's pro teams have – instead of providing a point of pride – fed our communal inferiority complex.

It is no accident that Pegula hired Pat LaFontaine, an all-time Sabre whose modest physical stature enveloped a huge competitive heart. Nor that LaFontaine brought back Ted Nolan, who in his brief '90s tenure here coached the “hardest-working team in hockey” – a character-laden squad that still is fondly remembered. It was an easy team for us to embrace. It’s a mystery why that sort of tough, talented, no-quit squad was the exception here, not the rule.

Buffalo is not a three-shift town anymore. But for all the talk of a health-and-service economy, we still make things. Nearly 1 in 10 workers here has a manufacturing job. We have two auto plants and plenty of hands-on labor.

We deserve a hockey team that reflects who and what we are. For the better part of 30 years, it is all this city has asked. With Wednesday’s upheaval, our civic prayers will finally begin to be answered.

Sabres, under Nolan, start home-and-home vs. Leafs

By Eric Goodman

NHL.com

November 14, 2013

MAPLE LEAFS (11-6-1) at SABRES (4-15-1)

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

Last 10: Toronto 5-4-1; Buffalo 3-7-0

Season series: This is the first of five games between these Atlantic Division teams, with another Saturday. The Buffalo Sabres were 2-1-1 against the Toronto Maple Leafs in 2012-13.

Big story: Interim coach Ted Nolan makes his return to the Buffalo bench after compiling a 73-72-19 record from 1995-97. Nolan was hired Wednesday, along with Pat LaFontaine as director of hockey operations, when Sabres owner Terry Pegula fired general manager Darcy Regier and coach Ron Rolston. The new leadership takes over the last-place team in the NHL, although the Sabres did manage their first home win of the season Tuesday, a 3-2 shootout decision against the Los Angeles Kings.

"We know that there will be a different face behind the bench and there'll be motivation for players from the Buffalo side to make a first impression," Maple Leafs coach Randy Carlyle told the team website Thursday. "... It is a shock to the organization and the people involved, at the ice level specifically."

Team Scope:

Maple Leafs: Toronto will play without center Nazem Kadri, who was suspended three games by the NHL Department of Player Safety on Thursday for a goalie interference penalty against the Minnesota Wild on Wednesday. Centers Tyler Bozak and Dave Bolland are on injured reserve.

"There's always the option of bringing a guy up from the American Hockey League," Carlyle said prior to learning Kadri was suspended. "We've explored different avenues, multiple. So it's not like you have to have Plan A, B, C, D and E in the drawer here."

"That's what the life of a hockey coach and management team is, and when you go through situations like this you try to make the best decision that's going to give you the best possible chance to have success with the people that you have here."

The Maple Leafs had won four of five games before dropping two straight on this three-game road trip.

"You can't sugarcoat it, [the missing centers] are obviously a big part of our team and a big part of our success," center Jay McClement said. "But I think we have enough depth ... that we can hold the fort here and continue to plug away and hopefully win some games until we get some guys back."

Sabres: According to Chris Ryndak of buffalosabres.com, Nolan had his assistant coaches run practice Wednesday but Thursday he demanded a fast-paced, physical session with some players practicing at different positions, including rookie Zemgus Girgensons at center for the first time, with Steve Ott and Tyler Ennis flanking him.

Though the practice reportedly was intense, Girgensons said he was satisfied with the new coaching style.

"[Nolan] wants simple hockey but you have to play hard. He wants all the guys going 100 percent," Girgensons told the website. "If you're not going to do that, most likely you're not even going to be out there. He wants the guys to compete, and I think that's what we need in this team right now."

Forward John Scott is eligible to return to the lineup after completing his seven-game suspension for a hit on Boston Bruins forward Loui Eriksson on Oct. 23.

Who's hot: It hadn't been confirmed Thursday who would start in goal for Toronto. Jonathan Bernier and James Reimer have combined for a 1.54 goals-against average over the past seven games. ... Sabres forward Matt Moulson has two goals and six assists in seven games since coming from the New York Islanders in a late-October trade.

Injury report: Bolland (ankle) and Bozak (lower body) are on injured reserve. ... Sabres defenseman Mike Weber (thumb) is on IR.

There's hope for the long term in Buffalo

By Greg Sukiennik

ESPN.com

November 14, 2013

How resigned were fans of the Buffalo Sabres to the likelihood that nothing about the dreadful state of their hockey team would ever change?

Let's put it this way: I'm not the only Sabres fan I know who saw the following tweet Wednesday morning and immediately thought "Someone's hacked the team's Twitter page."

Pat LaFontaine and Ted Nolan are in as team president and interim coach? Longtime GM Darcy Regier and rookie coach Ron Rolston are out? No way. That's a cruel joke, right?

Not this team, which stood by Regier despite missing the playoffs in four of the past six seasons. Not the Sabres, which had seemingly taken the "we win when we lose" tanking of a season for high draft picks to an NBA extreme.

Except that it was true.

Who says Santa doesn't love Buffalo? It's Christmas in November. And time to cue up one of Sabres Hall of Fame broadcaster Rick Jeanneret's classic calls (and let's face it, there's no other kind): "Ohh, 'tis the season! Fa-la-la-la-la, la LaFontaine!"

Like a lot of Sabres fans, I was prepared for losing this season. Just not quite so much of it -- they're a league-worst 4-15-1 -- and not quite so convincingly. They were outshot 30-7 through two periods against the Kings on Tuesday night, for crying out loud. That's pretty much all you need to know.

Buffalo sports fans will put up with a lot, but they generally won't tolerate a lack of effort, real or perceived. And there have been times over the past three seasons when this team has seemingly lacked the skate-like-your-laces-are-on-fire intensity that can make up for a multitude of shortcomings in hockey.

Nolan should fix that immediately. He's well-known for demanding effort from his players and getting them to skate through walls for him. He won a Jack Adams Award as coach of the year in 1997, after leading Buffalo to a division title. They didn't call his Sabres "the hardest-working team in hockey" for nothing.

If Nolan is seen by Sabres fans as at least a short-term fix, then LaFontaine is regarded as the long-term cure. He remains wildly popular in Buffalo, where his No. 16 hangs from the rafters. He's one of the greatest U.S.-born players in the game's history, and one could argue he'd be THE greatest had it not been for the concussions that shortened his career.

That reputation alone will open the doors to front office candidates and free agents who would have never previously considered America's North Coast.

Here's something else about Buffalo sports fans: They can be negative and bitter -- as the song goes, "you would cry too if it happened to you" -- but that's because deep down, they want to back a winner. They want their town, which has endured decades of economic difficulties, to be a winner. Heck, they threw Terrell Owens a party when he signed with the Bills, and that was for just showing up.

There likely won't be another eighth-place-or-bust playoff push for the Sabres as there was in the past three seasons. Any team that starts out 4-15-1 likely needs more than the spark of a coaching change to overcome the sins of its first 20 games in the following 60.

But Wednesday's surprising announcement at least offers hope in what had become a relentlessly depressing season.

Former NY Rangers GM Neil Smith rumored for Sabres general manager job

By Pat Leonard

New York Daily News

November 15, 2013

The GM of the last New York hockey team to win the Stanley Cup is not working in an NHL front office. The Buffalo Sabres never have won a championship, so it's no wonder Neil Smith has been rumored for the GM job.

Smith, 58, who assembled the 1994 Rangers team that snapped the Blueshirts' 54-year Cup drought, has the pedigree and also a shared history with Pat LaFontaine, the Sabres' new president of hockey operations brought on after this week's firing of coach Ron Rolston and GM Darcy Regier.

Smith, who remained the Rangers' GM through 2000, brought LaFontaine to the Big Apple as a player in a 1997 trade, where the Hall of Fame center's career unfortunately ended due to a concussion. Then, in the summer of 2006, Smith and LaFontaine both occupied positions in the Islanders' front office, until owner Charles Wang abruptly fired Smith as GM 40 days in, and LaFontaine resigned his senior adviser post in protest.

Smith was unable to work within the management-by-committee system Wang attempted to install. Wang hired Ted Nolan, Buffalo's interim coach, in 2006 on Long Island and spent two seasons behind the bench.

"Our job is top to bottom to bring a championship-caliber team year to year," LaFontaine said when introduced Wednesday in Buffalo.

So far, the Sabres reportedly will be granted permission to interview Pittsburgh Penguins assistant GM Jason Botterill for the GM position, according to the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review.

Montreal Canadiens assistant GM Rick Dudley and Toronto Maple Leafs assistant GM and ex-Devil and Islander center Claude Loiselle also are considered candidates. Former Sabres and Islanders captain Michael Peca also was floated as a darkhorse by former Ranger goalie-turned-analyst Martin Biron.

CULLEN: SABRES PRESENT BIG CHALLENGE TO LAFONTAINE, NOLAN

By Scott Cullen

TSN.ca

November 13, 2013

The Buffalo Sabres have been a complete mess in the 2013-2014 NHL season, accumulating just nine points in 20 games, and it cost general manager Darcy Regier and head coach Ron Rolston their jobs Wednesday, with Sabres legend Pat Lafontaine taking over as President of Hockey Operations and Ted Nolan assuming head coaching duties. Scott Cullen looks at the state of a team for which things can only look up.

Last season, the Sabres finished with 48 points in 48 games, finishing 22nd out of 30 teams; not nearly good enough for the playoffs, but not utterly disastrous, which means not bad enough to secure a premium pick at the top of the first round. They traded veteran winger Jason Pominville and defenceman Jordan Leopold during the season, but seven of their top eight scorers were returning for the 2013-2014 season.

Even so, the Sabres ranked 29th in my preseason Power Rankings, with not enough proven talent, aside from left winger Thomas Vanek and goaltender Ryan Miller who, as pending unrestricted free agents, were prime candidates for trade.

Of course, Vanek was traded, to the New York Islanders and the Sabres received a quality package in return, but it is a curious turn of events to allow Darcy Regier to oversee the start of a rebuilding process and take responsibility for trading the club's best player, only to clean house in the front office two-and-a-half weeks later.

Now, this doesn't mean that people shouldn't have been fired (On XM NHL Network Radio last Friday, I said that Rolston was my pick to be the next coach canned). The Sabres have been unabashedly terrible. They have one regulation win in 20 games and that was in a game at Florida in which they were outshot 45-21 by the Panthers, a team that sits a lofty 28th in the NHL standings.

The Sabres have the worst puck possession stats in the league, by a sizeable margin and, given these poor underlying conditions, will need patience in order to develop a roster that is consistently competitive because they can't even argue that they've been especially unlucky to have this poor record.

Matt Moulson, a pending unrestricted free agent who was acquired as part of the package in exchange for Vanek, has 17 points in 18 games with the Islanders and Sabres, and Cody Hodgson has 15 points in 20 games; they are the only Sabres with more than 10 points through the first 20 games of the season.

These are the skaters at the top of Buffalo's pay scale:

RW Drew Stafford, who has a \$4-million cap hit, has two goals and six points. A three-time 20-goal scorer, Stafford topped out with 31 goals in 62 games as recently as 2010-2011.

LW Ville Leino, a \$4.5-million cap hit through 2016-2017, has one point in eight games and has been a healthy scratch even when he's not injured.

D Christian Ehrhoff, signed through 2020-2021 at a \$4-million cap hit, has four assists in 19 games. He's not playing poorly, but isn't good enough to be a difference-maker on a bad club.

D Tyler Myers, inked through 2018-2019 for \$5.5-million per, has four points and is minus-9. His play has declined dramatically since his impressive rookie campaign of 2009-2010.

No team can generate positive results in a salary cap league when their highest-paid players are so unproductive.

The highest-paid player remaining in Buffalo is G Ryan Miller, who has a \$6.25-million cap hit on a contract that expires at season's end. Miller has a .916 save percentage, pretty much his standard since 2010-2011, and good enough that he will likely hold some appeal on the trade market when the time finally comes to move out a 33-year-old who is not a fit for a team at this level of rebuilding. Once Miller is moved, that would be right down to the foundation.

Is there hope for the future? Sure, eventually.

The Sabres have given substantial playing time to young players this season.

Teenage defencemen Rasmus Ristolainen and Nikita Zadorov have played more than 17 minutes per game, immediately after they were drafted in 2013 and 21-year-old rookie Mark Pysyk plays 21 minutes per game on the blueline, ranking third behind Ehrhoff and Myers. As the experience with Myers has shown, there is not necessarily a linear path from teen NHL defenceman to future NHL star, so even if the young defencemen pan out, there is some risk and it should take time before they can be counted on to anchor the unit.

The Sabres also have prospects Brayden McNabb and Chad Ruhwedel toiling in the AHL for Rochester and they could be due for a look this season. Add in University of Wisconsin defenceman Jake McCabe and Buffalo has a solid crop of blueliners in the organization. Solid enough that they might want to consider sending Zadorov back to the Ontario Hockey League for another season rather than letting the first year of his entry-level deal burn as part of this disastrous campaign.

The story is less promising up front. Hodgson, Tyler Ennis, Marcus Foligno, Johan Larsson, Zemgus Girgensons, and Mikhail Grigorenko are all under 25, and Joel Armia holds potential as a scoring winger but, even in the best-case scenario, it's going to be a while before they become impact players, if any are going to have a notable impact at all. (Incidentally, Armia is ready to make his AHL debut after suffering a broken hand in training camp).

Assuming that Miller gets moved, the Sabres will have Jhonas Enroth and Matt Hackett as their top two goaltenders (depending on the return for Miller). That's not the strongest duo, but Enroth has a .914 save percentage in 60 NHL games as Miller's backup, so he's worth a try, at least while the rebuilding process is in full effect.

What is most promising for the Sabres is that they have seriously stockpiled draft picks over the next couple seasons (something for which the next GM, or even Lafontaine, can thank Regier. The Sabres own the Islanders' first-round pick in 2014 (Vanek trade) as well as second-round picks from the Kings (two, for Robyn Regehr), Wild (Pominville deal) and Islanders (Vanek) over the next two seasons, plus whatever returns they might get for their veteran unrestricted free agents that could be moved before this season's trade deadline.

Including their own first and second-round picks, the Sabres will have eight picks in the first two rounds over the next two drafts. Then consider that Miller, Moulson and Steve Ott are all pending unrestricted free agents that should hold significant appeal around the league. Getting picks and prospects in return could give the Sabres in the neighbourhood of a dozen picks in the first two rounds over the next two drafts. Times are tough now, but those picks should really replenish the talent in the organization.

(Note: the Sabres likely can't empty the cupboard completely because they will have to get to the salary cap floor in 2014-2015 and, per Cap Geek, they have 14 players under contract for \$34.9-million next season.)

Draft picks and prospects are uncertain, but if a team is as bad as the Sabres are currently, it's encouraging to have picks that could help change the direction of the franchise and, given their current place in the standings, the Sabres are not likely to be dramatically better as soon as next season, which means they could be in contention for the Connor McDavid Sweepstakes, also known as the 2015 NHL Draft.

Acquiring talent through the draft should ultimately change the Sabres' fortunes, but that build is a slow process -- it could be five years before a playoff berth is a reasonable expectation (or, ask the Edmonton Oilers, the process can take even longer).

In the meantime, Ted Nolan is going to have to instill a work ethic in the Sabres young players; something could have a lasting effect going forward. Given that

this is already a lost season, there is no reason for Nolan not to play his young players and play them a lot, since they might as well find out who can handle playing at the NHL level.

There is a feeling, in some circles, that by digging into the franchise's past to hire Lafontaine and Nolan (and rumours have begun that ex-Sabre Rick Dudley could be the next GM), the Sabres are merely looking for some positive PR spin. Maybe that's the case. We'll have to see what kind of decisions the new braintrust makes and how well they set the franchise up for the future.

It will be a big job for a team is going to have a lot of long nights for this season and beyond.

REPORT: PENS' BOTTERILL GRANTED PERMISSION TO SPEAK TO SABRES

TSN.ca

November 14, 2013

Pittsburgh Penguins assistant general manager Jason Botterill will reportedly be granted permission to interview with the Buffalo Sabres for their vacant general manager position.

Rob Rossi of the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review reports that Botterill has been granted permission to speak to the Sabres but he had not been contacted about the Sabres opening as of Wednesday.

The Sabres on Wednesday fired general manager Darcy Regier and head coach Ron Rolston. They subsequently hired Pat LaFontaine as their new president of hockey operations and also named Ted Nolan as interim head coach, his second time as bench boss of the team.

TSN Hockey Insider Bob McKenzie has also reported that Toronto Maple Leafs assistant general manager Claude Loiselle, Montreal Canadiens assistant general manager Rick Dudley and Boston Bruins assistant general manager Jim Benning are also names being considered for the Sabres' vacancy.

Should the Sabres keep Miller, Moulson and Ott?

By Ryan Dixon

Sportsnet

November 14, 2013

We don't yet know the name of the man who will rebuild the Buffalo Sabres, but his course of action, it seems, couldn't be clearer.

Sooner rather than later, new Sabres president of hockey operations, Pat LaFontaine, will hire somebody to sit at the general manager's desk previously occupied by Darcy Regier. About five minutes after that person memorizes his new phone number and finds out where the men's room is, he's expected to start canvassing the league to find out what kind of return three pending unrestricted free agents – Ryan Miller, Steve Ott and Matt Moulson – might fetch.

Parlaying veterans on expiring contracts for picks and prospects is Rebuilding 101. And typically, we're all for teams going all in when it's time to turn the soil. But in this specific instance, there's a case to be made for keeping a trio of players who each have something undeniably Buffalo about them.

Starting at the top, no player this side of Nail Yakupov has been linked to more trade rumours this season than Miller. The asking price when Regier was doing the bargaining was said to be astronomical – as in, two first-rounders and a second – and if the Sabres can squeeze that out of a team desperate for goaltending, pulling the trigger might be the only option. Not to be overlooked in this equation, however, is the fact Miller is playing fantastic hockey for an awful team. If the Olympics kicked off tomorrow, he'd be starting for Team USA, as he did in 2010. That same season, he won the Vezina Trophy as the league's top netminder, and while that kind of feels like a decade ago with all that's gone on in western New York since then, at 33, Miller still looks like he could remain a top-flight goalie for five-plus years. That means, for a last half of a new deal, he could be playing on a strong club.

That Miller will end his career somewhere else feels like a bit of a foregone conclusion, but he's also a lifelong Sabre who backstopped the team through its last high tide, when Buffalo made back-to-back Eastern Conference final appearances in 2006 and '07. Given the hiring of LaFontaine and old/new coach Ted Nolan, the Sabres are obviously conscious of employing people who have a history with the team. Why not extend that to the ice and see if a guy who plays the position better than anyone you're likely to find as a replacement wants to stick around to finish what he started?

As for Moulson, he landed in Buffalo when Regier made his last big transaction with the club, shipping another guy who was headed to the open market, Thomas Vanek, to the New York Islanders for a big return that also included a conditional first-rounder and a second in 2015. (If the Isles end up with a top-10 pick this summer, they can defer giving their first selection to Buffalo for one year.) Just

dealing with the draft picks for a moment, the Sabres chose 12th and 14th overall in 2012, selected five times in the first two rounds last summer, and have a total of nine more picks in the first two rounds of 2014 and 2015. That's just about an entire junior roster right there. Certainly, the more young blood you have around, the more likely it is you'll cultivate stars, but by the same token, there's already a pretty serious cache of kids and picks to start with. Wouldn't the organization be better served if a guy like Moulson, whose underdog story is the kind of thing they like in Buffalo, might be interested in sticking around to show the up-and-comers a thing or two about fighting for goals around the net, while playing just an hour or so down the road from his Toronto-area home?

In the case of Ott, his edgy style plays very well in a blue-collar town, and is a big reason he was named the team's captain earlier this year. If you want fans to keep forking over money during the rough times, you better ice a couple guys who are simply incapable of not giving it everything they have on a nightly basis. Ott fits that bill.

Teams that undergo massive rebuilds always talk about not allowing a "culture of losing" to creep in. That's why management types are loath to use terms like tanking. Often you'll see young clubs go out and add a veteran or two known for their tenacious approach, even when it means keeping a developing player off the roster. That's what the Calgary Flames did last week when they brought in Ladislav Smid from Edmonton. If Buffalo is inevitably going to go out and find a few guys like that to act as tutors for the younger players, why not try to keep the ones they already have?

Of course, this only works under the condition that Miller, Moulson and Ott have a keen interest in staying with Buffalo. None of them have won a Cup before and it's completely understandable if they'd prefer to bolt.

But if they're open to a rebuild that could have the Sabres back in the hunt in a couple years, there's something to be said for having them stick around. Besides, Buffalo has plenty of picks and prospects already; it could use some capable people to light the way.

Buffalo Sabres' new coach Ted Nolan back in comfort zone

By Steve Simmons

Toronto Sun

November 14, 2013

BUFFALO - There is never an easy answer with Ted Nolan, never a convenient or succinct explanation of where he's been, how he's been away this long, why the rest of the National Hockey League hasn't been pounding down doors to try to hire the onetime coach of the year.

There are always whispers, questions, stories that don't exactly add up, and yet a directness from him that belies all the doubts that surround his coaching name.

Nolan is back where he is most comfortable, 16 years after walking away from a meagre contract offer by Darcy Regier - the same Regier now gone in the purge of the Buffalo Sabres - looking like he belongs on the ice at First Niagara Center, sounding confident as ever in the city where he had his greatest professional success.

It seems funny, inaccurate when you look it up and see that Nolan coached only two seasons with the Sabres, one of them successful, the one he was coach of the year: It feels longer than that. The excitement of the people in western New York is absolute about his return.

This isn't Joe Gibbs returning to Washington after three Super Bowls and or even Cito Gaston coming back to manage the Blue Jays after two World Series wins: This is Ted Nolan, two and out in Buffalo, two and out with the Islanders. And that is his the resume as an NHL head coach.

"Somebody asked me the other day: 'Do I have something to prove?'"

"I have nothing to prove," said Nolan, standing in the media room in Buffalo, wearing his brand new Sabres track top. "I think I stopped thinking like that when I was 23 years old.

"Coming from where I came from, we always had to prove how we could compete, how we could fit in. I'm done trying to prove anything.

"I've done enough in my history of working and competing. I can coach. I know that. We're going to try and make this team better ... Maturity and history is a great teacher."

There has never been much question about whether Nolan could coach. The questions have always been: Could he get along? Could he work hand-in-hand with his general manager? Could he be a team player? Was he too consumed by his own self-importance to succeed in big-league hockey?

And, was he a short-term solution to a long-term problem?

In Buffalo, he doesn't seem to care and neither do the Sabres. When last he left the club, insulted that Regier had only offered him a one-year contract after winning coach of the year and being embroiled in difficulties with superstar goalie Dominik Hasek, he walked away rather than accept what was a snubbing of an offer.

Now, hired to coach the rest of this season, he is more than happy to have no deal beyond this season.

"I got sidetracked somewhere along the line," said Nolan. "I grew up with a lot of First Nation teachings. We focused on now. Who knows what's going to happen tomorrow. I'm not focused on how long I'm going to be here. I'm focused on trying to get these guys ready.

"I've had a lot of reflection time," said the 55-year-old Nolan. "I didn't start coaching in Sault Ste. Marie to get to the National Hockey League. I coached in the Soo at the time because Phil Esposito asked me. I loved it and we had some success."

Nolan took three different squads in the Soo - teams managed by Sherry Bassin - to the Memorial Cup, winning one.

In his stint in the Quebec junior league, he coached the Moncton team to the Memorial Cup tournament.

"How do you define a good coach," said the veteran Bassin, now GM of the Erie Otters. "Give him a good team and if he screws it up, he's not a good coach. I gave Ted good teams. He took us to three straight Memorial Cups. If he wasn't a good coach, he couldn't have done that."

He is good coach and maybe a better father. When there was talk he had been blackballed for reasons almost unexplained - an accusation that has been made and never proven - he chooses to disagree.

"People said I didn't get offered jobs," he said. "I did. Phil Esposito offered me a job in Tampa Bay. I was going to take it." When his boys found out about the offer, both of them cried. They didn't want to move to Florida. They were hockey players.

"Long story short, Brandon (former Carolina Hurricane) played his first NHL game against the Tampa Bay Lightning. Jordan's playing in California (for the Los Angeles Kings)."

And so now it begins again for Nolan, the rest of this season if not longer, the rest of his NHL career - although he will be coaching Latvia at the Sochi Olympics. It

begins with back-to-back games against the Maple Leafs, a Hockey Night in Canada appearance, all this with the limited roster of the Sabres - the roster he will try to make something of.

"What happened in the first 20 games of the season is done, it's over with," said Nolan. "We're turning a new page, starting a new chapter. Every stat (players) have is out the door."

And what's changed since he last coached the Sabres?

"I think everybody's changed," he said, referencing the dressing room music change from rock and roll to hip hop. "I'm not the same guy I was 20 years ago. I'm quite sure you're not. Everybody changes. And we have to change with the times."

Buffalo Sabres tough guy John Scott says he's not a 'meathead'

By Mike Zeisberger

Toronto Sun

November 14, 2013

BUFFALO - John Scott insists he is not “a meathead.”

That was the proclamation of the Buffalo tough guy on Thursday as he stood in front of a couple of Toronto reporters discussing the way many fans and hockey types perceive him.

Of course, if you ask the thousands of Toronto fans who will flow down the QEW for Friday night's Toronto-Sabres tilt at First Niagara Center, “meathead” would be a compliment to a player who has become one of the most despised figures among those in Leafs Nation.

Given the brouhaha he was involved in during an exhibition game against the Leafs at the ACC back on Sept. 22, the first meeting between these two teams since that ugly incident has put Scott directly in the public spotlight.

For his part, Scott takes offence to the stereotype that he is just a goon whose kind should be eliminated from the league. In fact, he truly believes can be an effective physical player, not just a guy who goes fist city at every opportunity.

“I've always had that in the back of my mind, not just a meathead like some GM's and coaches peg me to be,” Scott said.

As for the Leafs possibly seeking retaliation against him for that pre-season brouhaha, the 6-foot-8 behemoth isn't concerned about it.

“I'm not worried about the Leafs,” he said. “If they want to do something, fine. I'm just going to play my game, hit people and be physical.

“I think that (Sept. 22 game) was blown out of proportion.”

Here's a refresher of what happened during that pre-season tilt in Toronto — not that anyone in The Big Smoke has forgotten.

The fireworks ignited when Leafs forward Jamie Devane dropped the gloves with Buffalo's Corey Tropp and put a beating on the young Sabre. Tropp would end up missing considerable time with a broken jaw.

Seconds later, a brawl erupted between the two teams when Sabres forward John Scott dropped his gloves and went after Leafs forward Phil Kessel. Rather than engage Scott in a bout he had no chance of winning, Kessel opted to go Paul Bunyan and took a couple of major league hacks with his stick at Scott.

Among the penalties slapped on Kessel was a match major for deliberate attempt to injure. Kessel subsequently was suspended for three games.

Scott, meanwhile received a five- and 10-minute misconduct as well as a game misconduct. Over 100 penalty minutes were handed out in the incident, which featured goalies Ryan Miller and Jonathan Bernier fighting as well.

All the while, Leafs newcomer David Clarkson, enraged that Scott seemed to be targeting Kessel, hopped off the bench, a mistake that ended up leaving him with a 10-game suspension.

The two teams have not faced each other since then.

Until Friday night, that is.

Cue the circus music?

“I look forward to it,” Scott said. “It’s against a rival. It should be a good game.”

If that’s not enough reason to hype the Golden Horseshoe showdown, Friday also marks the return of Ted Nolan as Sabres coach.

“It’s going to be fun,” Nolan said with a wry grin as he finished off his press conference on Thursday.

In other words: Don’t be surprised if John Scott is in the Sabres starting lineup for the opening faceoff.

More fireworks, anyone?

John Scott says he's changed as Sabres face Toronto Maple Leafs

By Mark Zwolinski

Toronto Star

November 14, 2013

BUFFALO – Big John Scott sounded like a reformed man.

The 6-foot-8 man mountain of a winger, who may be hockey enemy No. 1 in Toronto for a pre-season fight with Phil Kessel, said he doesn't expect any carryover from that incident when the two teams open a back-to-back series Thursday in Buffalo.

"I think it's being blown out of proportion, something that happened in the pre-season. I don't think anything will happen," said Scott, also reflecting on the massive front office changes with the Sabres, and the apparent franchise focus on a new start, beginning with the Leafs visit here Friday night.

But Scott, who has been criticized widely for his one sided "goon" approach to the game, gave the impression after Thursday's practice in Buffalo that he has turned a new page as a player.

"I've always had that in the back of my mind, not just a meat head like some GM's and coaches peg me to be," Scott said.

Scott was speaking after new coach Ted Nolan's first full practice as head coach. The Sabres shocked the hockey world with a complete overhaul of their front office and coaching staff, inserting Nolan behind the bench, and appointing former Sabre legend Pat Lafontaine as president of hockey operations.

Scott said Nolan has asked him to "be a hockey player" and not focus on fighting.

"(Nolan) said go out and play your game, be physical, hit . . . don't be concerned so much about fighting, just be a hockey player," Scott said.

"He's a great coach, very hard worker and very enthusiastic. It's nice to have that change here, someone with a straightforward approach."

Nolan addressed a massive press conference after practice, and stressed that one of his main goals with the Sabres is to get the last place team to feel good about itself, but also to spark the players to greater compete and accountability levels.

As for Scott, one of the lightning rod players in the current fighting debate surrounding the sport, Nolan said he didn't want another fighting side show when the Sabres face the Leafs over the next two nights.

“I mentioned to John the same thing I mentioned to the other players, what happened yesterday is done, what happened the first 20 games is done, we go against the Leafs and we’ll compete hard,” Nolan said.

“If they want to carry it over, they can do that. I have nothing to carry over, I wasn’t there, I’m brand new.”

Scott will return to the Sabres Friday night from a seven game suspension for a hit on Boston’s Loui Eriksson. Scott was eligible to return Nov. 8 but former coach Ron Rolston kept him on the bench.

Scott said that with his size, he has an added responsibility to take caution against hits to the head.

“I will focus on playing the game, if they (Leafs) wanna go there, fine, but nothing has changed in my game ... I’m still physical, I will hit,” Scott said.

“I think I have a responsibility with my size, I think the headshot is key there . . . I have to be more responsible on the ice. I guess I’d have to back off (when he sees a dangerous hit). When I get to a player, I’ve got to be aware of where I am and try to minimize it if I know he’s in a bad spot, just back off a bit.”

Scott, though, won’t back down if the Leafs “come after me.”

“I don’t know, it’s an important game and I won’t be lining up and trying to fight someone. It’s an important game for us and for them and if it happens, then it happens. But I don’t think the Leafs will risk penalties coming after me.”

Scott also looks forward to the return game in Toronto Saturday night.

“I love it, if other team’s fans are booing you, you are doing your job. It should be fun going into Toronto, and it’s close to my home (St. Catharines), I grew up a Sabres fan though, I hated the Leafs,” he said.

Ted Nolan ready for interim debut against Leafs, puts Sabres through spirited practice

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

November 15, 2013

BUFFALO – Ted Nolan’s loud voice boomed throughout the ice during the Sabres’ lively 60-minute practice Thursday inside the First Niagara Center. The interim coach kept encouraging his players, even following them during the up-tempo drills.

The Sabres responded to the fast pace, showcasing much more energy and emotion than they had under Ron Rolston, who was fired Wednesday in a major shakeup.

Players tapped sticks, hooted and hollered. Most importantly, they seemed to be having fun.

“It was really fast,” winger Tyler Ennis said about Nolan’s first real practice after the Sabres prepared for tonight’s home tilt against the Toronto Maple Leafs. “We moved through things quickly. It was definitely higher and a lot more energy.”

Nolan will coach his first Sabres game since May 11, 1997 tonight and his first NHL contest since April 4, 2008.

With another game Saturday in Toronto, Nolan can quickly put his imprint on the 4-15-1 Sabres.

“We have a chance to do it back-to-backers,” Nolan said. “The next is ‘Hockey Night in Canada.’ So it doesn’t get much bigger than that, the stage, and when you’re an athlete, those are the type of situations you want to be put into.”

He added: “I told them buckle up, because it’s going to be a good ride.”

What’s Nolan’s message to his players?

“We want teams to hate playing against us and we got to outwork them, play a lot faster,” Ennis said.

Sabres defenseman Mike Weber called Thursday’s session a fast-paced, NHL-style practice.

“Not a lot of explaining,” he said. “We got to the board to start, get the list of drills and away we go. That’s high intensity, and that’s the way we got to be. Hopefully, this corrects our starts.”

Clearly, Nolan wants the Sabres to play like they practice.

“I think we’re excited,” Ennis said. “I think everyone’s working hard. Our room’s excited. You can feel that energy. Today was a really energetic practice.”

Sabres winger John Scott believes Nolan will instill an identity the Sabres have been missing for years.

“It was an up-pace tempo,” the tough guy said. “The boys were skating. It was up and down the ice, no breaks. He wants to play a certain type of game and he definitely drilled it into our heads. We better get used to that because it’s going to be like that the rest of the year.”

Everybody, Sabres captain Steve Ott said, feels energized.

“I think the feeling is guys know this is a fresh, clean slate,” he said. “You got to be at the top of your game and nothing’s given right now. If it was given, it was too easy. So let’s prove ourselves out there again. I think all the guys are up for this challenge.”

Nolan said Thursday’s practice “went OK.” He spent most of Wednesday’s session observing.

“We got a lot of work to do,” he said. “We got some things to do. I think the biggest thing is getting these guys to feel good about themselves.”

To do that, Nolan has given everyone a clean slate. He doesn’t care much about the Sabres’ awful start.

“What happened yesterday is done, it’s over with,” Nolan said. “What happened our first 20 games of the season is done, it’s over with. I talked to some of the players. Every stat they have is out the door, forget about it. (Tonight) against the Leafs we start anew, and we’re going to compete.”

Nolan’s learning on the fly. He found out several days ago he would be taking over the rebuilding club, although some legal technicalities – he’s the Latvian national team’s coach – prevented him from officially being hired.

To catch up, Nolan has been trying to meet with about four or five players every two hours.

“Every one of them I’ve talked to so far, they’re just like my son, every son and daughter in this room,” Nolan said. “Everybody needs direction. Everybody need encouragement. So we’re going to try to give them some proper direction and encouragement and try to get better.”

Ott said he had “a good chat” with Nolan on Wednesday.

“He said he’s going to be working with things here in the next little while, figuring out which guys tick, which guys don’t,” Ott said. “I’m sure everything’s going to be earned here, no matter if you’re a leader, a young guy or a veteran guy. Everything’s got to be earned.”

But the newness of everything isn’t overwhelming, Ott said. After all, “It’s still hockey.”

“It’s still playing a game we’ve played our whole lives out there,” Ott said. “Obviously, new coach, new mentality. We’re trying to create a new culture, obviously, throughout the season, but it’s still a game out there.”

Sabres and Leafs not expecting many fireworks in first meeting since preseason brawl

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

November 15, 2013

BUFFALO – Ever since Sabres tough guy John Scott ignited a brawl going after Toronto Maple Leafs star Phil Kessel 54 days ago, tonight's tilt between longtime rivals has been circled on the schedule.

What's going to happen? Will there be another melee like the Sept. 22 preseason contest? Will there be any kind of retribution?

Based on what both teams said Thursday, don't expect any craziness to transpire as the home-and-home set begins.

"If they want to carry it over, that's all they can do about it," said interim Sabres coach Ted Nolan, who will make his debut tonight. "I have nothing to carry over. I wasn't there."

Leafs coach Randy Carlyle was there. His ill-advised decision to put skill on the ice instead of grit left his players trying to pry Scott from Kessel, who responded by whacking the enforcer.

Still, Carlyle wants to leave it in the past.

"It happened a long time ago," Carlyle said. "It's things like that that we don't like to remember, and it's time to move on from that. We're here to play a hockey game that's going to give us the best chance for success.

"They're a hockey club that wants to show their new coach what they're made of it. It should make for an exciting time, geographically where we're at and back-to-back. It's six periods of hockey against the Buffalo Sabres."

Sabres captain Steve Ott added: "I think all that stuff's out the window. We need to focus on getting this team going. Obviously, I'm sure they're thinking the same thing. It's going to be a strong game."

Scott responded after Jamie Devane broke Corey Tropp's jaw in a fight. The enforcer will play tonight, his first appearance since his seven-game suspension for hitting Boston's Loui Eriksson in the head ended.

"I think it's getting blown out of proportion, this game," Scott said.

Nolan, of course, loves enforcers and rough-and-tumble hockey. But Scott said Nolan wants him "to be a hockey player, be responsible."

“He said he wants me to play my game, go out there and hit, actually not be too concerned with fighting and all that stuff,” Scott said.

Fresh off a long suspension, Scott said doesn’t care if the NHL’s watching him.

“If they want to worry about that, that’s them,” Scott said. “I’m going to play my game. I’m not worried about it at all. Nothing has changed in my game and my eyes, maybe just be a little careful hitting at times.”

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Rookie Zemgus Girgensons, a winger all season, will play center Friday, said Nolan, who coached the 19-year-old with the Latvian national team. Girgensons skated between Ott and Tyler Ennis on Thursday.

xxx

Nolan said he’s done some “research” and plans to talk with Pat LaFontaine, the new president of hockey operations, about Patrick Kaleta. The Sabres recently assigned the agitating winger to the AHL to develop a calmer style following several suspensions.

xxx

According to the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review’s Rob Rossi, the Penguins will grant the Sabres permission to speak with assistant general manager Jason Botterill if they want to interview him.

LaFontaine is looking for a replacement for Darcy Regier, who was fired Wednesday. Botterill played briefly for the Sabres last decade.

xxx

Nolan doesn’t seem to like the idea of keeping four teenagers on the roster.

“We have to tread to our water smoothly here and see who can mentally sustain that type of pressure on a daily basis, and we’ll make some kind of adjustment,” Nolan said. “Because we send them down to junior or send them back to the minors, that doesn’t deflect what we think about them. It’s how we want them to be a year or two years from now.”

Center Mikhail Grigorenko, one of those teenagers, was a spare player Thursday.

xxx

Mike Weber (broken thumb) wasn't cleared to play earlier this week and has to speak to the doctor again. The defenseman's sporting a splint and said he feels fine.

xxx

The Leafs will be missing center Nazem Kadri, who has been suspended three games for "recklessly" colliding with Minnesota goalie Niklas Backstrom.

DUVALL: Sabres make an ooh-la-la move, finally

By Eric DuVall

Tonawanda News

November 14, 2013

Tonawanda News — It's a day late but hopefully not a dollar short but here's my take on the Sabres news this week.

About time!

An even-handed analysis of Darcy Regier's 16 seasons in Buffalo would show some impressive successes. He was a master at trading players and receiving maximum return. But on balance he failed far more than he succeeded. He had the greatest player in franchise history in goaltender Dominik Hasek but was never able to build a team around him that was a legitimate contender. He deserves credit for building a powerhouse in the 2000s, but again failed to address shortcomings, then allowed co-captains Chris Drury and Daniel Briere to skate away in free agency, a disaster that largely perpetuated the dismal state of affairs the franchise finds itself in today.

Regier regularly overvalued his own players. He chose to resign Tim Connolly (twice). He and Lindy Ruff stood by pedestrian players like Jochen Hecht and Paul Gaustad who continued to log valuable minutes because they were veterans, time that could have been used to groom younger players to take on bigger roles.

And finally, when the wheels really came off, Regier fired Ruff and elevated an inexperienced AHL coach in Ron Rolston — not to mention half the players he was originally tasked with developing — to the NHL with no plan for how to make it work.

The Sabres as a franchise said they were committed to rebuilding but that wasn't what was happening these last two seasons. They were floundering.

Rolston was plainly in over his head. He wasn't getting quality effort, much less acceptable results. He was alienating and embarrassing veterans by benching them. He wasn't inspiring the young players who picked up those minutes to perform any better. The results were obvious to everyone. In the end, it was Regier's coaching hire and Rolston's obvious coaching failures that finally earned Darcy the axe.

Rebuilding a franchise means more than simply trading away all your good players, tanking two or three seasons and hoping the guys you draft grow up to be better than the ones they replaced. It requires a vision for the future and a definitive plan for how to execute that vision. Under Regier, I was never sure what kind of team this was supposed to be. Right now the only kind of team it is, is bad.

Enter my boyhood hero, Pat LaFontaine, to save the day. It goes without saying, I was floored when I heard the news Wednesday morning.

I've respected and admired LaFontaine since his playing days. He was a genuine star, a humble but fearless leader in the sport. Add to that he was one of the smartest players I've ever watched. He brings the immediate cache that comes with having your number hanging in the rafters and inspires faith from a fan base that had lost almost all hope this franchise would turn things around.

With LaFontaine comes former Sabres coach Ted Nolan. That's a more complicated reaction. I liked Nolan — to an extent. There was no denying he got more out of players than other coaches. But maximum effort doesn't always yield maximum results.

It's one thing to inspire a ragtag bunch of goofballs like Matthew Barnaby to run through walls for you. It's another thing to instill a working system of play under which players can succeed over an extended period of time. Effort is a huge part of any successful sports team — and Lord Stanley knows it's been entirely lacking here for far too long — but it also takes refined, erudite coaching to transform a group of players into a team that can play to its strengths in a disciplined way, the same way, night after night, for 82 games.

I question whether Nolan can do that.

Perhaps I'm getting ahead of myself. If this season is lost, and by all accounts it is, maybe Nolan is the perfect choice as interim coach. All the strategy in the world won't matter if players aren't playing hard enough to win. LaFontaine and Nolan spoke of their first objective: a change in culture. If the rest of the year is spent instilling those basic values — hard work, team play, hustle — they will have accomplished something at which their predecessors failed.

In many respects, though the Pegulas have owned the team for two years, Wednesday felt for the first time like they really assumed ownership for its direction.

Of course time will tell how it goes but if reputation is an indication, Pat LaFontaine is a fantastic place to start. For my money, firing Regier and hiring LaFontaine is the smartest thing Terry Pegula has done since he bought the team.

Sabres' shakeup long overdue

By Paul Jannace

Wellsville Daily

November 14, 2013

BUFFALO — The media and fans often have an easy time calling for a coach or general manager to be fired, or a player to be traded or released.

That's always given me an uneasy feeling. There are times where change is needed and that's just a cruel, but necessary, part of the sports business.

Still, you're talking about a human being with a family. Sure, they make plenty of money and many can bounce back with another high-paying job, but there are no guarantees in life.

Despite that, the changes the Buffalo Sabres made on Wednesday were a necessary evil, one that was long overdue.

Terry Pegula rode into town with massive hype and promise, but one huge mistake — he didn't clean house immediately.

Pegula scoffed at the idea that Lindy Ruff would be replaced as head coach or Darcy Regier would be fired as general manager. Yet, he then stood up and announced to the world that the Sabres' sole reason for existence is to win the Stanley Cup.

The Sabres played that quote over and over before games when Pegula took over as owner and it became his rallying cry during his first few months.

Pegula even once famously said that if he wanted to make more money he could "go drill another oil well." He brought excitement because he sounded like someone who would do whatever it took to win a Stanley Cup — money be damned — unlike the previous regime which seemed interested in a profit by any means necessary.

The problem is, the Sabres have actually gotten worse since he took over and are further from winning a Stanley Cup today than they were on Feb. 18, 2011.

Regier and team president Ted Black warned fans of "suffering" to come when they decided to rebuild the team from scratch and they weren't kidding. The Sabres have an NHL-worst nine points and only won their first home game Tuesday night — in a shootout. Plus, the Sabres have won only one game in regulation this season.

This team is bad and the light finally went on in Pegula's head that something more needed to be done.

Pegula should have fired Ruff and Regier as his first act as owner and rebuilt a flawed roster immediately. The Sabres have lacked serious star power for a long time and were not very deep back in 2011. Now, they're full of young, unproved players with a couple of rotting veterans who need to be sent away — Drew Stafford and Ville Leino for example.

Pat LaFontaine is an unknown as an executive — unless you count his bizarre six-week stint as that special advisor to owner Charles Wang with the New York Islanders back in 2006 — but Ted Nolan is certainly a familiar face around Buffalo.

It seemed like after any bad Sabres loss in the last couple of years Twitter would light up with fans claiming to have “seen Ted Nolan in the Buffalo airport,” or saying, “my friend is behind Ted Nolan at Wegmans” to start a ridiculous rumor.

There was nothing ridiculous about Wednesday's press conference. It may have been shocking to see at first, but it was very real ... Ted Nolan is back as the head coach and Pat LaFontaine is running the hockey operations.

This shakeup was sorely needed, but the work is far from over. Now it's time to shake up the roster while keeping the youth in place.

Leino should be bought out and Stafford traded — for anything — and then the Sabres should look at what kind of value they can get from Ryan Miller.

Miller has played very well lately and is making another strong bid for a spot on the USA Olympic team, but the Sabres must commit to the youth.

Long-term, the Sabres need to find two superstar players and fill in with solid role players. Perhaps the future star is already on the roster, but you won't know that until you give these kids every opportunity to play and make mistakes.

This is where Nolan may be a good fit, despite the fact he hasn't coached in the NHL since 2008. Nolan had a hard-working group of average players with an all-time great goalie and squeezed as much out of that team as anyone probably could.

His new challenge will be trying to fix Tyler Myers' game and mold these young players like Mikhail Grigorenko, Zemgus Girgensons, Rasmus Ristolainen, Johan Larsson, and Nikita Zadorov into consistent NHL players.

When Pegula balked at a shake up back in 2011, at least he had a coach with some line of success in the NHL and a general manager who did build some successful playoff teams during his tenure. The argument could certainly be made that Ruff and Regier were being held back by Golisano's penny-pinching ways.

However, two years later that argument went up in smoke. Pegula fired Ruff, but kept Regier for some reason. Then at the end of last season Pegula decided to stand firm with Rolston as the head coach and Regier to rebuild the roster.

There were ample opportunities to remake the team and Pegula never took advantage — until roughly 12 hours after his team beat the Los Angeles Kings in a shootout.

The time had come for a change with the Sabres, so let the real rebuilding process finally begin.

GIRGENSONS MOVES TO CENTER IN FIRST PRACTICE RUN BY NOLAN

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

November 14, 2013

The first practice Ted Nolan ran with the Buffalo Sabres was up-tempo and designed to set the tone for how he wants the team to start playing.

The new interim head coach jumped right in and opened practice with battle drills in all four corners of the ice. Nolan opted to let the assistant coaches run practice on Wednesday and he took time in his first day on the job to talk to the players and learn more about them as people. During practice on Thursday, he took charge and directed all of the drills.

“Today was the first day that I really took over practice and that’s the message we want to get to the team: We gotta up our compete level a little bit and it started here today in practice,” Nolan said after practice at First Niagara Center.

Rookie Zemgus Girgensons said that the on-ice workout may have been the team’s best of the season.

“You can look at all the faces in practice, I think this was the best practice we’ve had, probably the most goals we’ve scored in practice,” he said. “I think it was a great effort by all of the guys. It’s just something new. Everyone has new excitement. Everyone has to prove themselves again from the start, every player. I think it’s just a brand new start for us.”

That idea of a fresh start was echoed by Nolan. He thought the first practice “went OK” and that there is still a lot of work to do moving forward.

“What happened yesterday is done. It’s over with. What happened in their first 20 games of the season is done. It’s over with. We’re turning a new page. We’re starting a new chapter,” Nolan said. “I talked to some of the players. Every stat they have is out the door. Forget about it. Tomorrow night against the Leafs, we start anew and we’re going to compete.”

Girgensons played for Nolan on Team Latvia during the 2013 IIHF World Championships in May. For about two weeks, he learned about Nolan’s style and what he expects from his players first-hand. A similar message has been conveyed in Nolan’s two days with the Sabres.

“He wants simple hockey but you have to play hard. He wants all the guys going 100 percent,” Girgensons said. “If you’re not going to do that, most likely you’re not even going to be out there. He wants the guys to compete and I think that’s what we need in this team right now.”

Girgensons practiced at center for the first time this season. He started playing the wing last year with the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League after playing in the middle for much of his career. He skated on a line with Steve Ott and Tyler Ennis on Thursday.

Nolan told the media after practice that Girgensons will play center on Friday against the Toronto Maple Leafs. Girgensons understands that he is being offered a great opportunity.

“I just need to seize the moment. I can’t let it slip,” he said.

Nolan talked about how when he was coaching junior hockey, it was difficult to have 17 year olds to go up against more mature 19-year-old players. With a team featuring seven rookies – four of them teenagers – decisions will have to be made as to whether it’s best for some of these young players on the Sabres to continue developing in the NHL or down a level in either juniors or the American Hockey League.

He said he will be careful when it comes to the types of situations he puts the younger players like Girgensons in.

“We don’t want to put a kid in a position of failure. You want to make sure he’s in a position that he’s going to feel good about himself,” Nolan said. “You can’t put him on against big-time guys too soon because if you get burnt, it hurts your confidence a little bit. We’re going to work with these guys on a daily basis and put them in where we feel that they’ll have some success.”

Nolan hasn’t coached in the NHL since 2008 and was asked if the attitudes of the players are any different now, especially compared to when he was last behind the Sabres bench back in 1997.

“When we were growing up too, we would always say we didn’t have it as hard as our parents and they probable said we changed,” he said. “And rock-and-roll music came and that was different, so now they have this hip-hop stuff going on and you’ve got the internet going on and all that stuff. So everything does change, but I think the core beliefs in what you want to do as a family man, as an organization, that has not changed.

“Successful companies are successful because they do certain things that others don’t want to do and the same thing with hockey teams. They do things that the other teams don’t want to do. But the big line is finding the right people that want to do it.”

A large media contingent swarmed around Sabres forward John Scott after practice. Nolan said on Wednesday that Scott would be in the lineup Friday night against the Maple Leafs.

It's the first game between the two clubs since a line brawl broke out in their preseason matchup on Sept. 22. Scott and Maple Leafs forward Phil Kessel were in the middle of it.

"I think it's being blown out of proportion, this game. Something happened in the preseason and I don't think much is going to happen from it," Scott said. "... [Nolan] said he wants me to play my game, go out there and hit, actually not be too concerned with the fighting and all that stuff. He wants me to be a hockey player and be responsible and physical and go from there."

Mike Weber remains on injured reserve with a thumb injury he sustained on Oct. 25 in Florida. He's been anxious to get back and has been practicing with the team all week, but has yet to be medically cleared for game action.

He said that if he is not cleared to play this weekend, he thinks he'll certainly be ready to go by Tuesday when the Sabres host St. Louis.

"I've been ready to come back, so right now just waiting on a doctor," he said. "It feels great so I understand I have some hardware in there that has to settle some more into the bone, but I feel great, it feels good. I'm ready to rejoin the boys here. Especially right now, it's an exciting time."

26 Matt Moulson – 19 Cody Hodgson – 21 Drew Stafford / 22 Johan Larsson
9 Steve Ott – 28 Zemgus Girgensons – 63 Tyler Ennis / 25 Mikhail Grigorenko
23 Ville Leino – 82 Marcus Foligno – 65 Brian Flynn
32 John Scott – 8 Cody McCormick – 78 Corey Tropp

10 Christian Ehrhoff – 3 Mark Pysyk
20 Henrik Tallinder – 57 Tyler Myers
6 Mike Weber – 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
61 Nikita Zadorov – 4 Jamie McBain

30 Ryan Miller
1 Jhonas Enroth

Building the bridge for HarborCenter, there's concrete progress

By Jonathan D. Epstein

Buffalo News

November 15, 2013

Amid blustery winds as dawn broke Thursday, workers at the HarborCenter construction site in downtown Buffalo were well on their way to pouring the equivalent of 275 concrete driveways over Perry Street to connect the new building to First Niagara Center.

The pouring of more than 1,200 cubic yards of concrete for the bridge beams marks a major step in the \$172.2 million hockey and entertainment project, which officials say is about one-quarter complete.

It paves the way for workers to pour the rest of the fourth and fifth floors, and then to put up the structural steel for the sixth, seventh and eighth floors. It is also a critical step toward being able to reopen Perry Street below, possibly by the summer, officials said.

"It's a pretty large milestone," said Ryan Poropat, lead project supervisor for M.A. Mortenson Co., the Minneapolis-based general contractor overseeing the HarborCenter project for the Buffalo Sabres and owner Terry Pegula. "What you're seeing today is the first pour of the fourth floor."

The Sabres are building a 20-story mixed-use facility on the former Webster Block. The project will feature two National Hockey League-size rinks and training facilities, a full-service 205-room hotel to be called the Marriott Buffalo HarborCenter and a two-story restaurant, plus street-level retail space and a five-level, 850-space parking ramp.

When completed – expected in September for the ice rinks, restaurant and retail, and May 2015 for the hotel – it will be the first three-rink complex, including the Sabres' home ice across the street, in the NHL.

Work has been under way for months, starting with the excavation of 35,000 cubic feet of dirt, including some contaminated soil, and the driving of more than 1,000 piles into the ground to support the construction. Two giant yellow tower cranes have been in use every day. the site.

By spring, Poropat said, the structure should be up and enclosed so that crews can turn their focus to repaving the streets below, including new sidewalks and curbs.

Portions of Main, Scott, Perry and Washington streets will all be repaired, with the goal of reopening Perry by midyear. Poropat said the project is 14 days ahead of schedule.

HarborCenter bridge to arena taking shape

By Andrew Kulyk

Artvoice

November 14, 2013

If you had plans to pour a concrete driveway at your home or place of business today, chances are you were out of luck in finding a contractor.

Thursday was a big day at HarborCenter, the \$172-million mixed use facility rising on the former Webster Block in front of the First Niagara Center. Concrete was poured to form what will be the bridge deck connecting the facility to the second level concourse of the arena, and spanning across Perry Street.

Over 1100 cubic yards of concrete were brought in today, enough to fill 275 residential driveways. “We’ve been preparing for this day for weeks, setting in the place the rebar and abutments. The concrete trucks starting lining up around 1:30 this morning and we were at it from the break of day,” reported Ryan Poropat, construction manager for Mortensen Construction, the general contractor for the massive project.

With sun and clouds but very windy conditions, there was some question whether today’s undertaking would come off as planned. But Poropat said that they have kept on schedule and gotten through other tricky undertakings with the building even with challenging weather days. “We’re actually on schedule and ahead of schedule and still looking at a September, 2014 completion date for everything but the hotel.”

One of the changes just announced is that Perry Street will be opened to vehicular traffic a lot sooner than expected. When the street was originally closed off last March, the Sabres announced that the street would remain closed until work is finished on the center. Now, apparently, the newly tunneled section of Perry Street will be reopened in late winter or early spring. “People driving under the Center will be able to look up and see exactly the part of the building we are pouring today,” Poropat said.

He also reported that the HarborCenter developers will be doing the finishing work for all streetscapes, sidewalks, and repaving of all streets surrounding the facility. “It will be all new sidewalks, and in fact, we will be repaving Perry Street to beyond this spot (to Illinois Street where the media was assembled today),” said Poropat.

When completed, HarborCenter will feature two regulation sized hockey rinks, including one with spectator capacity for 1800 patrons, training and exercise facilities with 11 separate locker rooms, and will also house a 200 room Marriott Hotel, ground floor retail space including a top flight sports themed restaurant, and indoor parking for 800 vehicles. Combined with the First Niagara Center, this will be the only three rink hockey facility in the NHL.

Major milestone in creation of HARBORCENTER

YNN

November 14, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Construction crews have reached a major milestone in the creation of the HARBORCENTER. The one-of-a-kind mixed use hockey and entertainment facility is on track to open in the fall of 2014, and we're told the building will now really start to take shape.

Crews are pouring between 1,100 to 1,200 cubic yards of concrete into the foundation, and officials estimate Perry Street will be reopened in a few months.

Set-up work started around 1:30 a.m. Thursday, and just a couple hours later, concrete trucks started pouring into the transfer beams on the fourth floor of HARBORCENTER.

Ryan Poropat, the lead supervisor from Mortenson Construction, says once Perry Street is reopened, if you're walking out of a Sabres game, you'll be able to look up and see the bottoms of the beams that are being poured. He says they basically transfer the load of the hockey rinks that will be on the 6th floor to each side of Perry Street and into the ground.

"What you're seeing today - it represents two things: number one - the first pour on the fourth floor, and number two - those pretty sizeable beams that are going to carry that ice skating rink," Poropat said.

"They need to form, the concrete needs to settle and then once it's structurally sound, probably two or three months from now, it will reopen to vehicular traffic here on Perry Street," said Don Heins, HARBORCENTER communications manager.

Heins says the pedestrian bridge linking HARBORCENTER to First Niagara Center is the first piece people will start to notice, and it won't be long until concrete is poured on the 6th floor where the ice rinks will be.