



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Senators-Sabres Preview

By Alan Ferguson

Associated Press

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The Ottawa Senators haven't been winning consistently of late, but a home-and-home series against the scuffling Buffalo Sabres might help them generate some momentum.

The Senators will try to earn back-to-back victories for the first time in a month by adding to their recent success against the Sabres on Tuesday night.

Ottawa (12-14-5) earned just its fourth win in the last 12 games Monday with its first shootout victory in five tries this season. Jason Spezza was the only player to score in the extra session - the team's only conversion in 13 shootout attempts - in a 5-4 victory against Philadelphia, and Clarke MacArthur had a pair of goals in regulation.

"It's about time," goaltender Craig Anderson said. "I think we've been in this situation a few times and haven't been on the right side of that. "We find a way to get two points, and that's really all that mattered. You've got to be excited about two points."

MacArthur has eight goals and five assists in his last 11 games and will try to keep rolling in a matchup against one of his former teams. The winger played his first three-plus seasons in Buffalo, contributing to a 2006-07 squad that won the Presidents' Trophy before losing to Ottawa in the Eastern Conference finals.

"He has probably been our most consistent guy all year," Spezza said of MacArthur. "Even at the start of the year when he wasn't scoring, you just knew it was a matter of time. Now that he is, he's driving us offensively and doing a lot of great things. ... He's been a heck of a pickup."

Those days probably seem like a distant memory for the Sabres (6-22-2), whose 14 points are easily the NHL's fewest. Buffalo is 1-7-1 in its last nine after a 3-2 loss in Montreal on Saturday and is 3-12-1 at home.

Ottawa has won four of five in Buffalo and is 7-1-1 in the last nine overall matchups. The Senators handed the Sabres their first home loss of the season, 1-0 on Oct. 4, with Craig Anderson making 35 saves and defenseman Erik Karlsson scoring with 1:35 remaining.

The Senators put up 46 shots in that game - tied for their most in regulation this season - including 23 in the opening period. Another such effort might help Ottawa post consecutive victories for the first time since claiming a season-high three straight wins Nov. 5-9.

The Sabres will likely have a new top line as they try to deny the Senators that win streak. Coach Ted Nolan put Cody Hodgson, Matt Moulson and Drew Stafford in three different pairings in Monday's practice.

Moulson could remain on the top line, but with Tyler Ennis at center and rookie Zemgus Girgensons at the other wing.

"Our top line was having a little trouble, maybe the chemistry wasn't quite right so we talked to them and we decided that instead of having one (scoring line), we would try to have three," Nolan said. "We're going to have to turn this around together. It's not going to be one or two individuals. It's going to have to be a collective response."

Karlsson has had few problems scoring in recent matchups against Buffalo with six goals and an assist in the last six. Kyle Turris has two goals and four assists in his past five games against the Sabres.

The Senators will host Buffalo on Thursday night

Sabres notebook: Shake-up creates new lines to face Sens

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

December 10, 2013

One of Ted Nolan's messages to the Sabres since taking over is to be consistent. He reinforced the words by being consistent with Buffalo's forwards. Despite their struggles, Nolan essentially kept his lines intact. He gave them every opportunity to mesh and improve.

They didn't, so time's up.

Buffalo is expected to go with four new line combinations tonight when Ottawa visits First Niagara Center. Nolan debuted the units during Monday's practice after watching his team score 10 times in eight games.

"He definitely gave every line a chance," right wing Drew Stafford said. "Obviously, now it's gotten to that point where something needs to happen."

The biggest shakeup involved the top line of Stafford, center Cody Hodgson and left wing Matt Moulson. They will all be on different lines after extended slumps. Stafford has no goals in 13 games, Moulson has two in 16 and Hodgson has one goal and one assist in 10 outings.

"Our top line is having a little trouble," Nolan said. "Maybe the chemistry isn't quite right, so we talked to them and decided instead of trying to have one we'll have three. We have to get this thing turned around together."

The lines Monday featured Moulson skating with the hot duo of center Tyler Ennis and right wing Zemgus Girgensons, Stafford with center Steve Ott and left wing Marcus Foligno, and Hodgson in the middle of Luke Adam and Matt D'Agostini. The fourth line was a four-player unit of Ville Leino, Cody McCormick, Brian Flynn and John Scott.

"It doesn't really matter which line you're playing with," Hodgson said. "You've got to play your game, and maybe we'll adapt or mesh. Hopefully, it does."

The moves were a boost to the statuses of Ennis, Girgensons and Foligno. The stocks of Hodgson and Leino fell.

Ennis and Girgensons have three goals and five points in two games, and they should get even more ice time with Moulson. Foligno had been skating on the fourth line but has impressed recently.

"Everybody told me how he was going to be a big, powerful forward and be a force," Nolan said. "Then I when I got here I saw a big guy. I didn't see a powerful guy. He wasn't using his attributes to his benefit. He's a big man that can be a

little bit more physical. He's been doing that lately, and in return he's been playing really well for us."

Hodgson's new wingers have combined for one goal in 11 games. Leino is in danger of being scratched after failing to score in all of his 18 games.

"Ville's not the only one," Nolan said. "We've got to get certain people playing better. Playing OK is not good enough. We have to play better."

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Defenseman Brayden McNabb will return to the Sabres' lineup after sitting for four games, including a one-day trip to Rochester. McNabb practiced with the Sabres' second power-play unit, working the blue line with Tyler Myers.

"He's right there at the cusp of being a permanent NHL player," Nolan said.

Defenseman Alexander Sulzer returned to practice after missing two games with an injury, but he's not ready to play.

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Finland has named Rasmus Ristolainen to its roster for the world junior championships. It appears the Sabres will allow the first-round pick to go.

"I'm quite sure we'll give him permission to play there," Nolan said.

Ristolainen, sent to Rochester last month, has been out since suffering a concussion Nov. 29.

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The Sabres will begin their winter clothing drive at tonight's game. Fans visiting the arena are encouraged to bring new or gently used coats, hats, gloves, sweaters, boots and scarves. All donated items will be given to the Buffalo City Mission, which will have representatives on hand to accept cash donations.

The drive will continue with home games Saturday against Calgary, next Tuesday against Winnipeg and Dec. 19 versus Boston. Fans who donate will receive coupons for \$25 off a 300 Level II ticket for select upcoming games.

Girgensons ready to shed kid gloves with Sabres

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

December 9, 2013

Ted Nolan knows Zemgus Girgensons has the talent and desire to do extraordinary things. The Sabres' coach is also mindful that Girgensons is a 19-year-old rookie. Nolan wants to let him grow at a casual pace, one that isn't weighed down by demands or expectations.

Girgensons sees things differently. He wants to be relied upon by Buffalo. He thinks he can be a difference maker on a team that's in desperate need of them.

Girgensons made an impact on the Sabres' last game, something that was long overdue, in his opinion.

The forward scored a highlight-reel goal early in the third period in Montreal, pulling the Sabres within one during their 3-2 loss. It was just the second goal in 29 games for Girgensons, but the way he scored it showed he's getting more comfortable at the NHL level.

"I've been hard on myself about that," Girgensons said. "I definitely can do better, and I just hope I get more."

Girgensons has points in two straight and three of four heading into Tuesday's home game against Ottawa. He scored by putting the puck between the legs of P.K. Subban, skipping past the Canadiens defenseman and slipping around goaltender Carey Price. Girgensons had an assist Thursday against the Rangers right after a 10-minute, third-period benching.

"I was low energy that game," said the man known as the Latvian Locomotive. "I totally understood that. I didn't get mad or anything. I thought it was the right move to do."

Girgensons' self-awareness and work ethic have made him a favorite of Nolan and the fans.

"I'm not sure about the expectation that we should put too much on the young kid, but he played well," said Nolan, who coaches Girgensons in the Latvian national program. "I've known the kid for about three years now and have watched him play. He does this all the time. It's one of those things with maturity and his body matures, he's going to get better. The one thing you can't teach somebody is to give them that work ethic that he has.

"Those are the building blocks in which we're going to turn this organization around and turn this team around. It's through people like that with some strong character and a will to get better.

“The young guys are not our problem. We’ve just got to get more production from the people who are supposed to give us production. We have to be better overall.”

While Girgensons and linemate Tyler Ennis (goals in two straight) have found some offense, it’s lacking in a major way elsewhere. Ville Leino hasn’t put a puck in the net in 17 games this season. Captain Steve Ott has no points in nine games. Drew Stafford has gone 13 games without a goal. Cody Hodgson has one goal in 10 games. Tyler Myers has a goal and four points in the last 14 outings.

The droughts are why Nolan’s plan to slowly groom Girgensons could speed up at some point.

Girgensons, selected 14th overall in the 2012 NHL draft, has offensive potential underneath the grind-line exterior. He totaled 45 goals during his two seasons in the United States Hockey League. He found the net three times in Rochester’s three playoff games last season.

Now he has a spectacular NHL goal, one that could push him to work even harder.

“I think every day I’m getting more comfortable,” Girgensons said. “It’s just keeping it moving and improving.”

Senators, Sabres begin home-and-home series

By Brian Hunter

NHL.com

December 10, 2013

SENATORS (12-14-5) at SABRES (6-22-2)

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

Last 10: Ottawa 4-5-1; Buffalo 2-7-1

Season series: This is the second of four games this season between the Ottawa Senators and Buffalo Sabres. Erik Karlsson scored the only goal and Craig Anderson stopped 35 shots in a 1-0 win against the Sabres on Oct. 4 at First Niagara Center.

Big story: Half of Buffalo's wins this season have come in the shootout. Prior to Monday night, Ottawa was not only 0-4 in shootouts, but hadn't even registered a goal in the penalty-shot tiebreaker. Captain Jason Spezza finally got them on the board to spark a 5-4 win against the Philadelphia Flyers that gives the Senators some momentum entering this home-and-home series.

Team Scope:

Senators: Clarke MacArthur knows how to make the most of new surroundings. In his first season with the Toronto Maple Leafs in 2010-11, he posted career highs of 21 goals and 62 points. Signed by Ottawa as a free agent last summer, MacArthur is on pace to surpass those totals and has been one of the Senators' most reliable forwards.

MacArthur scored twice against the Flyers to erase one-goal deficits in a back-and-forth affair. He was denied in the shootout, extending the Senators futile streak this season to 12 straight attempts, but Spezza used a nice deke to score in the third round and it proved decisive.

"It was a big two points for us," Anderson said. "We had some struggles all year this year with winning in the shootout, getting goals and making saves, on my end, but tonight kind of everything fell into place and I guess the stars were all lined up and we found a way to get that second point."

Sabres: The story remains the same in Buffalo: The goaltending is giving the Sabres a chance to win on most nights, but the offense remains 30th in the NHL by a wide margin at 1.60 goals per game.

Leading scorer Cody Hodgson was dropped to the third line at practice Monday, centering Luke Adam and Matt D'Agostini. The new first line has Tyler Ennis

between Matt Moulson and Zemgus Girgensons. Other units included Steve Ott with Marcus Foligno and Drew Stafford, and Ville Leino or Cody McCormick with John Scott and Brian Flynn.

"When you're not getting wins, sometimes things have to change," Moulson said in the Buffalo News. "You've got to perform and produce to keep going. Coach is looking for some different combinations to get things going, and hopefully everyone jells together."

Who's hot: MacArthur has eight goals and five assists in his past 11 games for the Senators. Patrick Wiercioch has two goals in the past three games. ... Ennis has goals in consecutive games for the Sabres.

Injury report: Buffalo defenseman Alexander Sulzer (undisclosed) is on injured reserve.

Top NHL prospects dot Finland's WJC camp roster

By Mike G. Morreale

NHL.com

December 9, 2013

The Finnish National Junior Team on Monday announced the selection camp roster of players hoping to represent their country at the 2014 IIHF World Junior Championship in Malmö, Sweden.

Finland, which placed seventh at the 2013 WJC, is seeking its first medal since winning bronze in 2006. The camp features 27 players, including six who participated in last year's tournament -- goalie Janne Juvonen of Pelicans Lahti in Finland, defensemen Ville Pokka of Karpat Oulu (FIN), Rasmus Ristolainen of the Rochester Americans (AHL) and Juuso Vainio of HPK (FIN) and forwards Artturi Lehkonen of KalPa (FIN) and Teuvo Teravainen of Jokerit (FIN).

There also are 10 players on the roster drafted by NHL teams, including Ristolainen, taken by the Buffalo Sabres with the eighth pick of the 2013 NHL Draft, and Teravainen selected the by Chicago Blackhawks with the 18th pick of the 2012 draft.

Ristolainen had one goal in 19 games with the Sabres earlier this season, but Sabres interim coach Ted Nolan told reporters that Ristolainen would be available for Finland for the tournament. That's assuming the rookie defenseman is healthy -- he sustained an upper-body injury Nov. 29 while playing in the AHL. He has two goals and two assists in five AHL games.

Finland also will be without a pair of eligible players currently skating in major roles for their NHL teams -- defenseman Olli Maatta of the Pittsburgh Penguins and Florida Panthers center Aleksander Barkov.

The Nashville Predators have four draft picks on the roster, including goalies Janne Juvonen (2013, No. 203) and Juuse Saros (2013, No. 99).

The camp will also have two skaters who earned A ratings and a third who earned a B rating on NHL Central Scouting's November players to watch list for the 2014 NHL Draft. The A-rated skaters, or those considered to be potential first-round candidates, are Kasperii Kapanen of Kalpa (FIN) and Julius Honka of the Swift Current Broncos of the Western Hockey League.

Kapanen led Finland to a bronze medal in the 2013 World Under-18 Championship with five goals and eight points in seven games. In 21 games with KalPa he has two goals and two assists.

"I like to play a physical game and play a lot with the puck," Kapanen told NHL.com. "I love to shoot, pass the puck and score goals. I guess you can call it an offensive type of game."

Kapanen is the son of former NHL forward Sami Kapanen, who spent 12 seasons in the NHL with the Hartford Whalers, Carolina Hurricanes and Philadelphia Flyers, and recorded 189 goals and 458 points in 831 games. The elder Kapanen represented his country at two World Junior Championships, in 1992 and 1993.

"Kasper is at present the number-one European prospect," NHL Director of European Scouting Goran Stubb told NHL.com. "He's a sniper who will play for Finland at the 2014 World Junior Championship. He possesses excellent vision and has great skills ... he's a star in the making."

Honka was taken by the Broncos with the 34th pick of the 2013 Canadian Hockey League Import Draft. He's second among WHL defensemen and WHL rookies with 34 points in 32 games.

"Julius Honka is smallish but an excellent skater with great balance," Stubb said. "He's an offensive-minded defenseman with good vision and a high skill level. Quick moves, reads the game very well and loves to join the offensive rush. Used in all game situations."

The only B-rated player in camp is goalie Ville Husso of HIFK (FIN). In 17 games the 6-foot-2, 192-pounder has a 1.94 goals-against average and .923 save percentage.

There also are five C-rated prospects, or potential fourth-, fifth- or sixth-round candidates, playing with Finnish clubs -- defensemen Atte Makinen of Tappara and forwards Juuso Ikonen of JYP, Saku Kinnunen of KalPa, Aleksi Mustonen of Jokerit and Joni Nikko of Lukko Rauma.

Finland coach Karri Kivi, who likely will pare his roster to 22 players on Dec. 23, will conduct camp Dec. 16-18 in Vierumaki, Finland, before moving his team to Malmo from Dec. 19-22.

The 2014 WJC will run from Dec. 26 to Jan. 5, 2014. Finland, which opens preliminary-round play against Norway on Dec. 27, will compete in Group B with Sweden, Russia, Switzerland and Norway.

Despite losses, Sabres feeling good again, believe they're on right path

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 10, 2013

BUFFALO – The end result hasn't changed much yet. On paper, at least, the Sabres are still a terrible hockey team.

They've lost eight of their 10 games under interim coach Ted Nolan, scoring just 15 goals, a pathetic 1.5 a contest.

At their current pace, the 6-22-2 Sabres, who have 48 goals, would finish with the fewest points in the shootout era and score the fewest goals in NHL history.

But talk to players and they'll tell you about the renewed sense of belief Nolan has created inside the dressing room and the improvements they feel they're making each game.

"It's not like we're flat-lined," center Cody McCormick said Monday after the Sabres prepared for tonight's tilt against the Ottawa Senators inside the First Niagara Center. "We're moving up right now."

Sabres center Tyler Ennis added: "(Nolan) understands that hard work and compete can win games on a lot of nights. Compete level has increased. He's just a motivating guy."

If the Sabres continue down their current path, they're confident they'll start winning.

"I definitely think it's getting better," Sabres defenseman Tyler Myers said. "We're not getting absolutely abominated like we were in previous games. We're starting to play as a team, and not only play as a team, but play simple as a team."

"There's still a lot of work to be done, but we're definitely heading in the right direction."

Ennis added: "We know it's a process, but we're close."

McCormick believes the Sabres "have a hockey team in this dressing room, and everybody knows it."

"We're working for each other," he said. "We see everybody kind of working out there. There's no passengers. You'll see it in the games, if somebody's not moving, somebody's going to tell them. Everybody's going to be held accountable."

Players, Nolan said, feel they're getting better each day.

“If you haven’t got that belief, you’re in the wrong sport and the wrong business,” he said. “You have to do it.”

Saturday’s 3-2 loss in Montreal illustrated the Sabres’ progress. Inside the Bell Centre, arguably the NHL’s toughest rink, the Sabres outplayed the first-place Canadiens, limiting them to 19 shots.

Ultimately, a few rough minutes at the end of the second period burned them.

“We put in a good fight there,” McCormick said.

But in a disastrous season, that’s a sign of moving forward.

Right now, the Sabres are “taking it in little baby steps,” McCormick said.

“We’re building toward the next game,” he said. “That’s what we can focus on. We can even break down even more than that. We can put it toward the next shift. Then when we accomplish (that) we go to the next thing and the next thing, and at the end of the day hopefully we have two points.”

What exactly has changed since Nolan replaced Ron Rolston on Nov. 13?

Perhaps most importantly, the team’s mindset is shifting.

“It’s not a light switch. We’re still in the process,” Myers said. “It’s going to be a process for a while until we start developing habits, each and every guy developing those simple habits and figuring out how we need to play each game and play it for the full game.”

The Sabres’ starts have improved dramatically, although they’re still being outscored 34-6 during the first period and outshot 373-207. They’ve also cut down the shots against, holding opponents to 24 or fewer three times in the last four games.

Their focus on “simplifying things” has buoyed them, Myers said.

“There’s still times where I think we get back into old habits,” he said. “But you definitely see a lot more simple plays being made, and I think it’s ultimately helping our team game, simple things just even getting pucks out and getting pucks in at the blue lines.”

McCormick added: “We’re not giving up as many bad shots. We’re not taking as many bad penalties. A couple things we’ve cleaned up have helped our games. As soon as we can eliminate more and strive for perfection in a game, we’re going to start winning.”

Of course, the Sabres won't start winning until they score more goals. They can't let their offensive woes overwhelm them, winger Drew Stafford said.

"We can't be thinking about it, can't be thinking every game, 'Oh my God, we're the lowest-scoring (team),' he said.

Instead, players are thinking about more positive things.

"Guys are excited to come to the rink," Stafford said.

Sabres to use new lines against Senators; Brayden McNabb back in lineup

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 10, 2013

BUFFALO – Ted Nolan wanted to give his lines a long look. The interim Sabres coach figured he couldn't ask his players for consistency if he kept shuffling the trios.

But after a string of losses and more meager offensive production, Nolan switched up his combinations Monday.

“Our top line is having a little bit of trouble, maybe the chemistry wasn't quite right,” Nolan said following practice inside the First Niagara Center. “We talked to (them) and decided instead of trying to have one, we'd try to have three. So we have get this thing turning around together. It's not going to be one or two individuals; it's going to be a collective response, so hopefully this works.”

The new lines, which the Sabres will probably use for tonight's home game against the Ottawa Senators from left to right:

- Matt Moulson, Tyler Ennis and Zemgus Girgensons.
- Luke Adam, Cody Hodgson and Matt D'Agostini.
- Marcus Foligno, Steve Ott and Drew Stafford.
- John Scott, Ville Leino, Cody McCormick and Brian Flynn.

The top line had been Moulson, Hodgson and Stafford. Scott was scratched last game.

“The goals haven't been coming in bunches like it would be nice to be,” Ennis said. “I think a little shakeup was necessary.”

Leino, whose ice time dropped about six minutes Saturday, has skated on the fourth line occasionally this season.

“We got to get certain people playing better,” Nolan said. “Playing OK is not good enough.”

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The Sabres will make at least one lineup change tonight, inserting defenseman Brayden McNabb, a healthy scratch the last four games.

“He’s right there at the cusp of being a permanent NHL player,” Nolan said.

McNabb manned a point on the power play during Monday’s practice.

Defenseman Alexander Sulzer also practiced Monday for the first time since injuring himself Nov. 30. Nolan said he’s out tonight.

“Just a little lower body issue going on,” Sulzer said.

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Nolan also said 19-year-old Rochester defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen will likely be playing for Finland soon at the world junior championship.

“I imagine he is,” Nolan said. “One thing with the American Hockey League, you have to get permission more so than junior teams. They just automatically go. So I’m quite sure we’ll have to give him permission to play there.”

Sabres rookie Zemgus Girgensons ends goal drought, knows he needs to score more

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 9, 2013

MONTREAL – It was here, Sept. 15 inside the Bell Centre, that Buffalo Sabres rookie Zemgus Girgensons first sent notice he wouldn't be leaving the NHL.

The ferocious Latvian winger scored twice in the Sabres' first exhibition game, a 5-4 shootout win against the Canadiens. Of course, preseason openers are often filled with junior and AHL players with little or no chance of making the big club.

Still, Girgensons' performance impressed the Sabres.

"That was a big game, definitely," Girgensons said Saturday prior to scoring in the Sabres' 3-2 loss to the Canadiens, his first goal since opening night. "I scored two goals last time here."

The 19-year-old had been mired in a 27-game goal drought. He was hoping his return to Montreal would buoy him.

"I need to bury some chances," Girgensons said before the game. "So I hope it could be a turnaround with what I had here, just kind of flash back."

About eight hours later, Girgensons scored one of the Sabres' niftiest goals this season, undressing star P.K. Subban high in the slot before roaring in on Habs goalie Carey Price and stuffing it in 4:04 into the third period.

"He was a little surprised because, I think, the puck just stopped and I pushed it through him," Girgensons said about Subban.

Girgensons, the 14th overall pick in 2012, scored 45 goals during his last two junior seasons and ended last year with three goals in three AHL playoff games.

Why hasn't he busted through in the NHL yet?

"It's a jump," he said. "Every year I've made a jump. I've been getting chances. Against Detroit (Nov. 24) I had two chances. It's just about starting getting those chances in the net, behind the line. It'll come."

He added: "I've been hard on myself, too. I definitely need to score more than two goals."

Girgensons lost some shifts in Thursday's 3-1 loss to the New York Rangers, although he assisted on Tyler Ennis' goal.

“I didn’t think I played good at all,” said Girgensons, who had been sick.

He added: “I had zero energy, just felt really empty. So I think the coach did the right thing with doing that.”

That coach, Ted Nolan, has known Girgensons since taking over the Latvian national team in 2011. Nolan believes Girgensons possesses “building blocks” – strong character and the will to improve, he said – that should help the youngster’s development.

“I’ve known the kid now for three years and watched him play,” the interim coach said. “He does this all the time. It’s one of those things with maturity and when his body matures, he’s going to be better and better. One thing you can’t teach somebody is that work ethic he has.”

Foligno Moved (Back) Up To Scoring Line

By Matthew Coller

WGR 550

December 9, 2013

The first thing you do before sitting down to write an article about a player is pull up their official NHL player page. Monday afternoon, after a five minute chat with Buffalo Sabres' forward Marcus Foligno about his promotion from the fourth line to a scoring line, I clicked on the winger's player page only to be taken aback.

Wait a minute. Marcus Foligno is only 22?

Must be a mistake. Hold on. Aug. 10, 1991 minus...what's today? Oh, so, carry the one...he IS only 22.

Marcus Foligno feels a lot older to Sabres fans than he really is because of his quick rise from juniors to the AHL to the NHL during the 2011-12 season. He set the Earth ablaze scoring 13 points in 14 games and posting 44 hits in 14 games.

And from that point on, he was expected to be Buffalo's version of Cam Neely. He was labeled a big-time scorer, who would eventually wear the "C."

While both of those things might eventually come true, it wasn't all that fair to the former fourth-round pick to put that much on his shoulders before we'd seen him for a full season.

Since that hot stretch in '11-'12, it's been wild.

Foligno was forced to play in the American Hockey League with the Rochester Americans for the first half of 2012-13 season due to the NHL lockout. There, the son of former Sabres captain Mike Foligno, dominated with 27 points in 33 games.

When the work stoppage ended, he was zapped into a top six role where he was expected to re-create his end-of-2012 chemistry with Drew Stafford and Tyler Ennis and provide a chunk of the team's goal scoring.

It didn't exactly happen that way and he pin-balled from line to line during the remainder of Ruff's tenure – with little offensive success.

When Ron Rolston was bumped up from Rochester, Foligno was reunited with the coach he'd worked so well in Rochester with. It's hard to say whether they were tight or not, but the 6-foot-3 winger grew and improved massively under Rolston from the time he arrived in Rochester to the time he left.

Things didn't go as swimmingly in the NHL as they did in the AHL. Foligno was benched for a game late in the season, then was used as an experiment at center.

Now he's on coach No. 3, at age 22 and in under 100 NHL games played.

"I haven't really had a permanent coach yet," Foligno said after Monday's practice. "So you're not getting comfortable or being able to be honest with one person.

"At the same time, I look at like I've been coached by three great coaches in Lindy, Ron and now Ted. They've all brought something to my game and helped me out a lot."

He has eight points in 27 games – only two of which have come since Ted Nolan's arrival. Under the new interim head coach, Foligno's spent zero time on the power play and has mostly been on the fourth line.

But Nolan has decided to change that. On Monday, Foligno was skating with Steve Ott and Drew Stafford. It's a spot the coach says he earned over the past few games.

"When I got here, I saw a big guy but I didn't see a powerful guy," Nolan said. "He wasn't using his attributes to his benefit. He's a big man and needed to be more physical. He's been doing that lately."

Nolan provided Foligno with more ice time against Montreal, playing 15:21 – by far his most since Rolston's firing.

There's still plenty of reason to be high on Foligno as part of the long-term plan. For instance, in his first 82 NHL games, he scored 39 points. Not too bad for a guy who's had limited power play time and three different coaches.

He's also exhibited a skill that few on the Sabres have: Puck possession. Last season, he was Buffalo's best possession player and the only player on the team with a full season to post an over 50% Corsi percentage (on-ice shot attempts vs. opponents shot attempts.) This season he's sitting at a mediocre 44.5%. But when he's played with Drew Stafford, that number is 53.2% in 91 minutes of ice time.

You might call that a small sample, but Foligno posted a 51.8% Corsi percentage in 234 minutes with Stafford last season.

The power winger has shown versatility and the ability to win faceoffs (a 50.7% rate career) – which is another skill Buffalo's middle men struggle with.

Still, he has to take it to the next level to be part of the plan. Foligno could take after a rugged forward like Ott, who has made a darn good NHL career out of playing tough, chipping in offensively and being good in the circle.

“He's consistent,” Foligno said of the Sabres' captain. “I'm learning to get that consistency in my game. I talk to him a lot about it. It comes with playing the game and getting experience. Looking at the way he plays, it's helped me a lot.”

We'll see how Foligno performs this time with a scoring line. If it doesn't click right away, though, remember to subtract 1991 from 2013 and give it some time.

HARD WORK PAYS OFF FOR GIRGENSONS

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

December 9, 2013

Zemgus Girgensons always appears to be on a mission to prove something. The 19-year-old rookie forward scored a highlight-reel goal against the Montreal Canadiens on Saturday, his first since the season opener, taking two Habs defensemen with him as he drove to the net and beat goaltender Carey Price.

After practice at First Niagara Center on Monday, he tried to downplay the personal significance of that early third-period goal, which put Buffalo back in the game. Ultimately, however, they lost to the Canadiens 3-2.

“Probably the best confidence booster for all of us would be a win,” he said. “[It was] definitely nice to get a goal and the whole team is struggling with them, so it’s definitely nice to get one.”

Sabres interim coach Ted Nolan switched up the lines at practice Monday and moved Girgensons up with center Tyler Ennis and left wing Matt Moulson. Girgensons knows that he’s going to have to keep going to the blue paint while playing a hard-nosed style in order to have continued success.

“Every game, I can’t let my work ethic go down because that’s pretty much why I’m here,” Girgensons said. “When I do something like that, it just shows people that I can be here.”

Nolan has been vocally supportive of Girgensons’ play since he took over behind the bench last month. He also serves at the Latvian national coach and had the opportunity to work with Girgensons during the IIHF World Championship in the spring, so he’s quite familiar with Girgensons and his style.

“One thing you can’t teach him is the ability to work,” Nolan said. “He competes on a daily basis and it’s great to see him getting rewarded for his work lately.”

Nolan completely broke up the Sabres’ top line of Moulson, center Cody Hodgson and right wing Drew Stafford. Hodgson found himself with Luke Adam and Matt D’Agostini. Stafford skated with Steve Ott and Marcus Foligno. Nolan said he would like to try Ott at center.

“Our top line had a little trouble, maybe the chemistry wasn’t quite right so we talked to them and we decided that instead of having one [scoring line], we’ll try to have three,” Nolan said. “We have to get this thing turned around together. It’s not going to be one or two individuals, it’s going to have to be a collective response. Hopefully this works.”

Hodgson said he played with Adam when both were with the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League last season. With Adam's penchant for going to the net, Hodgson thinks he can create a strong connection with him and D'Agostini.

"Chemistry's just a huge part of this game. Sometimes it's instant, sometimes it takes a little while to develop," Hodgson said. "It doesn't matter which line you're playing with, you've got to play your game and maybe we'll adapt or mesh and hopefully it does."

Each line wears a different colored jersey at practice and Ville Leino was one of four forwards skating in yellow Monday morning. Brian Flynn, Cody McCormick and John Scott were the others.

"We need to get certain people playing better," Nolan said. "Playing OK is not good enough. We have to play better."

Defenseman Alexander Sulzer skated with the team for the first time since sustaining an upper-body injury against the New Jersey Devils on Nov. 30. He's been on injured reserve and Nolan said that Sulzer would not be available for the team's home game against the Ottawa Senators on Tuesday.

Brayden McNabb will return to the lineup, according to Nolan. McNabb's been a healthy scratch for the Sabres the past four games. In one game with the Amerks during that stretch, he recorded a goal and two assists.

Amerks defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen was named to the selection camp roster of the Finnish National Junior Team on Monday. He would need to get the green light from the Sabres in order to participate.

"I'm quite sure we'll give [him] permission to play there," Nolan said.

Granted, he would also need to be healthy enough to go. He's been out of the Amerks lineup since sustaining what the team is calling an upper-body injury on Nov. 29.

The 2014 IIHF World Junior Championship will take place from Dec. 26 to Jan. 5 in Malmo, Sweden. Sabres center Mikhail Grigorenko is currently in Russia's selection camp with defenseman Nikita Zadorov. J.T. Compher has been named to Team USA's preliminary roster and Gustav Possler has been named to the preliminary roster for Sweden.

26 Matt Moulson – 63 Tyler Ennis – 28 Zemgus Girgensons
82 Marcus Foligno – 9 Steve Ott – 21 Drew Stafford
72 Luke Adam – 19 Cody Hodgson – 27 Matt D'Agostini
32 John Scott – 8 Cody McCormick – 23 Ville Leino – 65 Brian Flynn

Defensemen: 3 Mark Pysyk, 4 Jamie McBain, 6 Mike Weber, 10 Christian Ehrhoff, 20 Henrik Tallinder, 44 Brayden McNabb, 57 Tyler Myers

30 Ryan Miller
1 Jhonas Enroth

Power Play
First Unit
Moulson – Hodgson – Ennis
McBain / Ehrhoff

Second Unit
Foligno – Ott – Stafford
McNabb / Myers

SABRES PROSPECTS REPORT

By Kris Baker – SabresProspects.com

Sabres.com

December 9, 2013

With December in full gear, the Sabres' NCAA prospects were hard at work last week producing offense as semester break quickly approaches.

J.T. Compher (2013, second round) pounced on a pair of rebounds Monday for the first two-goal game of his collegiate career as Michigan won an exciting 5-4 decision over Ohio State. The putbacks give the freshman pivot points in five consecutive contests, and multi-point efforts in five of his 13 collegiate games. It's all added up to a team-leading point total of 14 (5+9) heading into Wednesday's tilt with Ferris State. Compher will then depart on Sunday for USA's World Junior selection camp in Minneapolis.

Anthony Florentino (2013, fifth round) buried a slap shot Friday to snap a five-game point slumber as No. 4 Providence clawed back with three third-period goals to earn a 3-3 tie at No. 19 Northeastern. The power play strike gives the freshman defender three goals and eight points to ride along with a sparkling plus-15 rating through 14 games in a Friars uniform.

On Saturday, Christian Isackson (2010, seventh round) straddled the goal line and tucked in a forehand for his first goal of the year as No. 1 Minnesota edged Michigan State 3-2 to earn the B1G series sweep. Sparingly used this season, Isackson later added an assist to give him the fourth multi-point outing of his 59-game NCAA career.

Jake McCabe (2012, second round) logged a plus-two rating Friday but saw his three-game point streak come to a halt as No. 17 Wisconsin pasted Penn State 7-1. The standout defender resumed his productive ways Saturday by posting an assist as the Badgers earned the conference sweep with a 4-3 triumph.

Wisconsin winger Brad Navin (2011, seventh round) scored his second goal of the year Friday in the Badgers' scorching of the Nittany Lions. The third-year man has been grinding away in a fourth-line role for Wisconsin, recording two goals and 12 shots through the first dozen games.

Freshman center Sean Malone (2013, sixth round) contributed three shots on goal over the weekend as Harvard lost 2-1 at Brown, and played to a 2-2 tie with No. 8 Yale. Malone's offensive instincts have produced six points in 13 games, with his five helpers and 35 shots on goals both tied for second-most among Crimson skaters.

WHL

In Tuesday action, Logan Nelson (2012, fifth round) connected for a goal and an assist to earn the game's number two star as Victoria blanked Kootenay 3-0. Nelson, who ended the week with an assist in Saturday's loss to Vancouver, has produced multiple points eight times this season to earn a team-leading total of 32 (12+20) through 33 games.

OHL

On Saturday, Justin Kea (2012, third round) scored his 12th goal of the year and added an assist as Saginaw lost 5-4 in overtime to Sault Ste. Marie. The goal, which ended Kea's five-game goal drought, gives the grinding centerman 28 points through 31 games.

Saginaw captain Eric Locke (2013, seventh round) remained out of action while recovering from a shoulder injury. Locke has missed the Spirit's last 10 contests after awkwardly going into the boards back on Nov. 15.

Nicholas Baptiste (2013, third round) extended his point streak to five games Saturday with an assist as Sudbury routed Mississauga 8-1. Baptiste, who has gone scoreless in his last four, has collected 19 goals and 40 points (20th in OHL) in 30 contests this year. A season ago, Baptiste had scored just five goals and 15 points at the 30- game mark.

Nikita Zadorov (2013, first round) posted one assist as London won all three of the week's games to extend their winning streak to five. The big rearguard capped things off with a plus-two rating Saturday versus Owen Sound before departing the following day for Russia's World Junior Camp.

London defenseman Brady Austin (2012, seventh round) failed to get on the scoresheet as the Knights continued their winning ways. The fifth-year defender has nine points and a plus-12 rating since arriving in an early season trade with Belleville, and will likely be relied on for a larger role with Zadorov gone for the next month of action.

Justin Bailey (2013, second round) went without a point for the fourth-straight game Saturday as Kitchener dropped a 2-1 decision at Windsor. Despite the results, Bailey's 19 points (9+10) are tied for second-most for the struggling Rangers, who remain at the bottom of the Western Conference standings with the halfway point approaching.

USHL

Connor Hurley (2013, second round) ended a four-game funk by accumulating three assists in the week's two games as Muskegon lost to Indiana 4-3 on Friday,

and defeated Chicago the following night by the same score. The Notre Dame commit has 14 points (3+11) this season, but has gone without a goal in his last 12 league contests.

Cal Petersen (2013, fifth round) made 28 saves as Waterloo dropped a 6-5 shootout decision to Dubuque. The reigning USHL Goaltender of the Week, Petersen has won 11 of his 14 starts this season while amassing a 2.61 GAA and .915 save%.

Judd Peterson (2012, seventh round) notched an assist as Cedar Rapids was tripped up 6-3 by Tri-City. Connecting on 30 percent of his shots this season, Peterson's nine goals are currently tied for the RoughRiders' team lead with Buffalo Jr. Sabres product Andrew Poturalski.

Swedish Hockey League (SHL)

On Wednesday, Gustav Possler (2013, fifth round) returned from his eight-game absence and picked up an assist off a cross-ice feed as MODO dropped a 3-2 decision to Frolunda HC. The quick-shooting winger would play again Friday before sitting out Saturday's contest. The 19-year old is scheduled to report to Sweden's World Junior training camp on Dec. 16.

MODO goaltender Linus Ullmark (2012, sixth round) made 27 saves in the Wednesday loss to Frolunda HC, and followed up with another 27 stops Friday in a 3-2 loss at Leksands IF. Ullmark, who on Saturday stopped six of seven shots in relief duty in a loss to Farjestads BK, has hung tough through his 15 starts with an efficient .938 save% (1st in league) and 1.87 GAA (3rd). The year-to-date performance earned the 20-year old a spot on Team Sweden at the Channel One Cup from Dec. 19-22 in Sochi, Russia.

For more on all the youngsters in the Sabres pipeline, check out Kris Baker's web site - sabresprospects.com. You can also follow him on Twitter @sabresprospects for in-game updates throughout the week on any Buffalo prospects that are in action.

Buffalo Sabres players decorate cookies with Camp Good Days kids

By Anna Hoffmann

YNN

December 8, 2013

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- Some Buffalo Sabres players put their icing skills to the test Sunday, only this time they were nowhere near the ice.

The players helped kids from Camp Good Days decorate more than 800 holiday cookies. The cookies will be given as gifts to Camp Good Days donors.

Sabres center Brian Flynn, defenseman Brayden McNabb and defenseman Mark Pysyk donned T-shirts and aprons for the event, and they didn't mind when they got a surprise flour-dusting from the campers.

"Just being around them, sort of taking their mind off of what's really happening and what's actually going on. If that's what we can do for an afternoon on Sunday, then that's all we can really hope for," Pysyk said.

Camp Good Days provides free summer camps and year-round activities for children and families affected by cancer.