



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

December 5, 2013

Rangers-Sabres Preview

Associated Press

December 4, 2013

If there was the slightest bit of doubt that Henrik Lundqvist was the clear-cut No. 1 goaltender for the New York Rangers, it has been eliminated this week.

A day after agreeing to a seven-year contract extension, Lundqvist is likely to return to the ice after a rare two-game stretch on the bench as New York desperately tries to get some momentum going Thursday night against the Buffalo Sabres.

"It was never an option for me to leave this club," Lundqvist said after the new deal was announced. "I really want to win the Cup here in New York."

This trip to Buffalo precedes a nine-game homestand which will take the Rangers (14-14-0) through Christmas, a stretch Lundqvist would surely welcome. He has a 1.69 goals-against average at Madison Square Garden compared to 3.28 on the road.

He hasn't been in net at MSG since Nov. 19 because New York's only two home games since then - also its two most recent games - were started by Cam Talbot even though Lundqvist was healthy. Talbot had been outplaying Lundqvist, going 6-1-0 with a 1.49 GAA through November while the five-time Vezina Trophy finalist was 8-11-0 with a career-worst 2.51 GAA.

However, Talbot came back down to Earth on Monday, giving up four goals on 29 shots in a 5-2 loss to Winnipeg. Two days later, the team announced it had agreed to terms on the new deal with Lundqvist worth a reported \$59.5 million.

"Since his arrival in New York in 2005, Henrik has consistently been one of the elite goaltenders in the NHL," team president Glen Sather said. "... We are excited to have him remain as a cornerstone of the franchise."

Lundqvist's 47 shutouts are two shy of Ed Giacomin for the franchise record, but he hasn't had one since making 29 saves in a 2-0 home win over the Sabres on Oct. 31 in the teams' only meeting.

He could be primed for a repeat performance considering Buffalo averages a league-low 1.61 goals and was blanked for the fifth time Saturday, 1-0 in overtime at New Jersey.

A four-day break since that game, though, has given the Sabres (6-20-2) a chance to better acquaint themselves with coach Ted Nolan - who's been behind the bench for eight games - and his system. Buffalo's NHL-worst record includes a 1-5-1 mark since Nolan was re-hired.

"I think everybody is on the same page here," center Cody McCormick told the team's official website. "Everybody is bringing their work ethic to the rink every day. You come to the rink excited."

Rangers coach Alain Vigneault hasn't been excited by his club's effort. New York has gone 5-6-0 in its last 11 games, not winning or losing more than two straight, and has scored fewer than three goals eight times in that span.

"We're definitely not getting the traction that I know we want," Vigneault said. "The only way we're going to get traction and get better is by playing more consistent hockey. Is this team a .500 hockey club? We're certainly playing like one."

New York has won six of the past eight matchups with Buffalo, though it's hard to blame Ryan Miller for the Sabres' struggles in the series. He's 8-3-3 with a 1.96 GAA against the Rangers, including a 44-save effort Oct. 31.

Miller has a league-high 15 losses and a career-worst 3.05 GAA.

Rick Nash, who had a three-game goal streak snapped Monday, has scored four in his last four matchups with Buffalo.

Cody Hodgson tops the Sabres with 17 points but has gone a season-high three straight games without one and has only two in six career matchups with the Rangers.

Sabres notebook: Nolan wants to build around Miller

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

December 4, 2013

When Henrik Lundqvist leads his New York Rangers team onto the ice at First Niagara Center tonight, he'll do so with a new sense of stability.

The goaltender signed a seven-year, \$59.5 million contract extension on Wednesday. And that leads to questions around the Buffalo Sabres about the future of Ryan Miller.

Miller is set to become an unrestricted free agent this summer. Do the Sabres want to use him as an asset (see: trade bait) or build the franchise around him?

As far as interim head coach Ted Nolan is concerned, you build your future around Miller.

"You look at all the championship teams and it starts from goaltending out. ... I prefer you build around him rather than use him as a pawn to try and get something to make you better," Nolan said. "You learn to deal with the now as a coach and we've got one of the better goaltenders in the world here and I'd like to build around him myself."

Nolan said he doesn't discuss contracts with players but has spoken with President of Hockey Operations Pat LaFontaine about creating a culture that draws in the best players.

"I talked to Pat about this and I said the one thing we want to do is create an environment where people want to come here and stay here," Nolan said. "Hopefully he likes what we're doing. You never know."

Miller was not available to the media after Wednesday's practice as he had a previously scheduled personal appointment.

With Lundqvist signing an extension, that leaves Miller, Jaroslav Halak (Blues), Ben Scrivens (Kings) and Jonas Hiller (Ducks) as the top unrestricted free agent goalies.

Nolan certainly sang the praises of Miller.

"You look at all the top guys, our top guy Ryan Miller, he's consistent all the time," Nolan said. "That's why Lundqvist gets a big contract. There are those guys and there's the rest of us."

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Sabres center Mikhail Grigorenko posted on Facebook late Wednesday afternoon that he was flying to Russia on Sunday to join his national team – and former Buffalo teammate Nikita Zadorov – for the World Junior Championships that open later this month in Sweden.

Grigorenko told reporters for the second straight day Wednesday that he had heard nothing about the tournament from the Russian Hockey Federation but that he remained interested in playing.

The Sabres said they had no information on the post or Grigorenko's potential status but a source close to the situation told The News the process was moving forward and the team is expected to approve lending the 19-year-old so he can play in the tournament.

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Speaking of goalies and attention, Jhonas Enroth played a solid game in Saturday's 1-0 overtime loss at New Jersey, responding to criticism that Nolan had for him after his previous start in Toronto.

"What I say is how I feel. It wasn't a good game for him, that game," Nolan said of Enroth's performance on Nov. 16 in a 4-2 loss at Toronto. Enroth gave up four goals on 22 shots.

He didn't start again until Saturday, where he made 24 saves before giving up the game-winner late in overtime to Steve Bernier.

"He's a good goalie," Nolan said. "But certain nights you have to push buttons to get these guys to do it on a consistent basis. And that's what we're here for. I'm not here to make everybody like everything I say but we have to perform better and we have to play better."

...

Cody McCormick will return to the lineup tonight after missing four games with an upper body injury.

The center hasn't played since Nov. 21 in Philadelphia and has one goal and four assists in 20 games this season. After sitting out with the injury and four days in between games, McCormick is itching to get back in.

"I think everybody in the room is ready," McCormick said. "These long breaks between games really gets you excited for the next game. We've practiced. We practiced hard. Everybody worked hard. We're going to carry it into the next game. Just ready to play. It's been too long."

“When you’re missing time and then we have a couple of hard practices, you’re not falling behind with that. You’re keeping up your cardio and your timing with the puck. It was beneficial for a guy like me.”

How will the Sabres make room on the roster? It’s possible that Alexander Sulzer moves to the injured reserve. He has missed the last three practices with an undisclosed injury. He’s not expected to play tonight.

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Brayden McNabb was assigned to Rochester but most likely only so he could get some action as the Amerks hosted the Utica Comets on Wednesday night. Look for McNabb to be recalled today. ... Matt D’Agostini missed practice with flu-like symptoms but is expected to play tonight. ... Sabres draft pick J.T. Compher was named to the preliminary Team USA roster for the World Junior Championships. A freshman center at Michigan, he was the Sabres second-round pick (35th overall) last June. Compher leads all Big 10 freshman in scoring with 14 points (five goals, nine assists).

Sabres aim to get competitive juices flowing

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

December 4, 2013

The New York Rangers will be on the other bench tonight in First Niagara Center. No sign of the Toronto Maple Leafs – or their lathered-up fans – anywhere in the vicinity. Too bad really.

The Sabres have been at their best this year against the Leafs. Their next task is to find a way to summon that emotion against everybody else.

“The atmosphere with Toronto is more like a playoff game. Everything gets built up, even in here,” Sabres defenseman Henrik Tallinder said Wednesday in the dressing room after practice. “When you come out there and it’s dead quiet and we’re not playing well as a team, it’s tough to get that little extra drive. When you have that audience out there, you build off that.”

Against the Leafs, the Sabres are 2-1 and have outscored Toronto, 8-7, in three games, all of which came since Ted Nolan took over as interim coach. In Nolan’s other five games, however, Buffalo is 0-4-1 and has been outscored, 15-4.

The Sabres and Leafs meet just twice more in the final 53 games of the season, both in the Air Canada Centre. So the Sabres had better find a way to get those same competitive juices flowing against other opponents.

“We want to have a consistent style to our game and it doesn’t matter if we play the Rangers or the Leafs or whoever it may be,” Nolan said. “We have to play a certain style all the time. You can’t manufacture feelings. It’s something you go out and do. Get involved with the game.”

“You’re playing in the NHL so it shouldn’t be a problem,” said captain Steve Ott. “If it is a problem, than that’s individual. You need to make sure you’re ready to go. That’s one thing about being a good pro: Bringing your consistency every night.”

Sabres winger Matt Moulson knows all about rivalry hatred from his days with the New York Islanders. Dueling fan bases are a staple of Islanders-Rangers games, especially at Nassau Coliseum. Moulson said it’s been a similar feeling here against the Leafs.

“For some reason, we’ve matched up pretty well with Toronto and obviously it’s an exciting game to play in,” he said. “But being ready for every game is important. Part of Ted’s MO is having his teams working hard and we want to be that kind of team. We’ve used these practices the last three days to solidify that, to make sure we’re really skating and moving.”

Nolan said Wednesday he has been pleased with the week the team has been having in its longest break of the season other than the Olympic period in February.

The Sabres went through a 50-minute power skating session before practice on Monday and went hard for about an hour Tuesday before tapering things down Wednesday.

They got three out of four points last weekend by splitting overtime decisions against Toronto and New Jersey and can earn points in three straight games for the first time this season tonight.

“It’s been good for us but I don’t know if it was actually a great thing to stop playing,” said a smiling Tallinder. “We’ve started to play pretty well against the Leafs, weren’t very good in the first period against New Jersey but got better.”

The Rangers have split their first 28 games after starting the season 3-7. They’re 11-7 since but have lost two of the last three as backup goaltender Cam Talbot split two decisions. Starter Henrik Lundqvist, who signed a seven-year contract extension worth \$59.5 million Wednesday, is expected to be in goal tonight.

The Rangers handed the Sabres a 2-0 loss on Halloween in Madison Square Garden, a game that saw them outshoot Buffalo, 46-29.

It was a non-Toronto game and the Sabres basically slept through that one. That’s a trend that has to stop.

“We’re all in the same boat together but you have to be accountable to your teammates and make sure you’re ready to go,” Ott said. “If I’m a physical player, I better be physical every single night or if I’m an offensive player. Those consistencies in your game ... have to be effective.”

Rangers hoping to find consistency in play

By Jon Lane

NHL.com

December 4, 2013

RANGERS (14-14-0) vs. SABRES (6-20-2)

TV: MSG, MSG-B, BELL TV

Last 10: New York 5-5-0; Buffalo 3-6-1

Season series: The New York Rangers and Buffalo Sabres play for the second time this season. Henrik Lundqvist stopped all 29 shots in the Rangers' 2-0 win against the Sabres on Oct. 31.

Big story: The Rangers and Lundqvist agreed to a seven-year contract extension Wednesday. Lundqvist, 8-11-0 with a 2.51 goals-against average and .917 save percentage in 20 games, was scheduled to become an unrestricted free agent after the season. Instead he remains what general manager Glen Sather called "a cornerstone of the franchise."

"To picture myself anywhere else was just wrong," Lundqvist said. "In my heart it was never an option to play anywhere else. The opportunity to get to play with one club throughout your career is very special. I hope from here, personally, I can just raise my game."

After sitting out the Rangers' past two games, Lundqvist will start against the Sabres.

Team Scope:

Rangers: Coach Alain Vigneault wants consistency from his team, which hasn't won at least three straight games since Nov. 6-10 and dropped to .500 after a 5-2 loss to the Winnipeg Jets on Monday at Madison Square Garden.

Vigneault's message: "Put it together."

"If we are going to get some traction and get past that .500 level we need our top players to play consistently like top players," Vigneault said Tuesday. "We need that core group, the leaders of this room, to perform accordingly. And we have not done that on a consistent basis.

"We are all being tested now."

Sabres: Buffalo has had trouble generating offense. Their 45 non-shootout goals and minus-40 goal differential each ranks last in the League. They have scored one goal or fewer in 14 of 28 games and, according to the Buffalo News, are on

pace for 132 goals, which would be the fewest in a season since the League expanded in 1967.

Coach Ted Nolan talked about developing the habit of getting in front of the net more often, and the Sabres used the four days between games to try and create a new mindset.

"They came to work this week," Nolan said after practice Wednesday. "We worked on a few things and we skated them pretty hard. There's no complaints. We needed the time. This was a great time for us to work on a few things, especially in the defensive zone and communication, and talking and getting to know each other. It was a good week."

Who's hot: Rangers defenseman Ryan McDonagh has points in five of his past six games. Forward Rick Nash has four goals and two assists in eight games since returning from a concussion. ... Sabres forward Matt Moulson has goals in two of his past three games.

Injury report: The Rangers have no reported injuries ... Sabres center Cody McCormick (upper body) has been cleared to play after missing four games. "I'm ready. Let's go," McCormick said. "Too long in between games." Alexander Sulzer (undisclosed) will be reevaluated Thursday. Matt D'Agostini (illness) missed practice Wednesday and Nolan said he's hoping he'll be ready for the Rangers.

Fighting the goon fight

By Seth Wickersham

ESPN.com

December 4, 2013

The ceiling. He remembers staring at the ceiling. That's about it. Wait -- he also remembers how it all started. Opening night, Oct. 1. Toronto at Montreal. It's his first game as a Canadien, and already once he has done what the team traded for him this summer to do: fight. He is a tough guy, George Parros, and in the third period he realizes that he must fight again. In front of the net, Colton Orr, the Maple Leafs enforcer and Parros' earlier foe, takes a few whacks at P.K. Subban, the Canadiens' All-Star defenseman. Parros can't allow that to happen, so he skates to Subban's defense, and the gloves drop.

Almost immediately, Parros grabs the front of Orr's jersey and pulls hard, forcing Orr to bend at the waist. It's one of Parros' signature moves, a way to quickly neuter his opponent. He has a lot of tricks like that. At age 33, Parros is an elder statesman among tough guys, respected for many reasons: for his Princeton degree; for his significant hand in negotiating with the owners during last season's lockout; for the Stanley Cup he won with the Ducks in 2007. But Parros is admired most because in his nine-year career, he has been able to execute the most savage act in major North American sports -- hockey is the only game in which bare-knuckle fighting is permissible -- with a wisdom that to this point has spared him from a major head injury.

In the middle of a precarious time in violent sports, when players and parents and fans are re-evaluating everything, Parros seems to have it figured out. His face tells a story of punches avoided rather than punches absorbed. His eye sockets aren't pregnant with scar tissue. His teeth are his own, perfectly lined. His nose is narrow and sloped and doesn't even have the trademark flattened bump on the bridge. He entered opening night with 160 career NHL fights -- and not a single NHL concussion.

Parros lands a right to Orr's head. Then he rears back for the decisive blow, an uppercut. It is a favorite punch, and if he lands it squarely on his opponent's nose, it produces an effect akin to a perfect golf swing, with power that seems to be effortless and painless. "It's like butter," he likes to say.

But as Parros swings, Orr throws a wild punch. Then something unforeseen happens. Parros misses. Orr misses. The combined momentum sends both of them hurtling down in a sort of heavyweight death spiral. Parros' legs are in the air, above his head. Moments like this usually slow for him. All of the stories about concussions and CTE and painkiller addictions -- images of retired goons all but drooling on themselves -- flash in his mind. So he usually tries to twist to land on his shoulder and avoid, as he says, "risking the brain cells."

But this time, Parros is locked in a weird centripetal acceleration, too fast to adjust, and he lands squarely on his chin. The crowd roars, then quiets. Parros is crumpled like laundry, motionless. His eyes are closed. Blood begins to emanate from his face,

like oil from a leaky engine. Orr stands up and motions for medical personnel. Teammates surround Parros in a mass of concerned solidarity.

Moments pass. With assistance, Parros stumbles to his knees. But his eyes are still closed, and his head wobbles, then he slips back toward the ice, like a drunk on a barroom floor. Medical personnel roll him onto his back, and it's then that he opens his eyes and comes to and sees the ceiling of the Bell Centre, its banners and steel grids and lights.

Parros feels a dull panic. He knows something happened, but he's not sure what. He is carried away on a stretcher and catches sight of his worried wife, Tiffany, as medical staff load him into an ambulance. He feels the panic again. In this moment, he is not worried that he has suffered a serious head injury. He is not worried about the blood on his face. He is not worrying about when he might play again. He is worried that Orr knocked him out, a tough guy's greatest indignity. Tiffany grew up in a hockey family -- they met when her brother, Josh, played in juniors with Parros -- and she seems to know what's on her husband's mind. So she reassures him. "You didn't get knocked out!" she says.

As the ambulance moves, Parros is relieved.

When Parros is released from the hospital a day later with a concussion, he returns to his home in Montreal and realizes that he has unwittingly become something that he has spent his whole career striving not to be: the poster boy for the anti-fighting lobby. Almost as soon as Parros' jaw hits the ice, hockey icons Steve Yzerman, Scotty Bowman and Ken Dryden call for a ban on fighting. During a Mayo Clinic hockey concussions summit in mid-October, researchers use the stark image of Parros lying in blood as their most recent evidence of the dire health risks. Suddenly, debate rages on airwaves and online, and to many Parros is no longer just a hockey player. He is a CTE case waiting to happen, an Ivy Leaguer who needs to be saved from himself.

Parros feels pissed off and powerless. He is not in denial about head injuries, but he has seen them as a potential cost of his job that he's been smart enough to avoid. That has brought him a strange peace. But now he has headaches and pressure in his skull, as if his brain is swelling, which it is. He has toddler twins, Lola and Jagger, who don't know and don't care and want to play with their daddy, now and forever. Parros often thinks about 2011, when he read the reports that surfaced after Boston University scientists studied Derek Boogaard's brain and found CTE, the tire tracks of perhaps 20 concussions. Like Parros, Boogaard was a tough guy. He was also a friend. After suffering from depression, dementia and memory loss, Boogaard overdosed at 28. "It was scary," Parros says.

Parros knows he could easily call it a career. He's made almost \$1 million annually for the past few years and is financially comfortable. He could work in the front office of an NHL team or retire to his Hermosa Beach, Calif., home. Texts and voice mails pile up on his phone, including one from Orr, who says, "I hope you're doing okay." But all Parros keeps coming back to is how this fight was a freak thing. He wasn't knocked out by a punch. No matter. He has tests to take, symptoms to document, and for a witty guy with an endearing ability to find the irony in most situations, he

tries not to dwell too much on this surreal one: The enforcer who turned fighting safer into an art form is now the symbol of why fighting should be abolished.

Just a few months before the season began, in July, the specter of a concussion still seemed to Parros as it always did: an existential threat. As the sun sets over the Pacific Ocean, he is downing beers at a Hermosa Beach bar with Tiffany and his buddy Matt Greene of the Kings. Parros is happy. Days earlier, the Canadiens traded for him because they needed muscle, and that gives him a sense of triumph. For several years, he's been conditioned to believe that his livelihood was dying. Now he leans over a pint feeling as if he's beaten the system. "All of a sudden teams are gearing up with their warheads," he says.

When Parros entered the league in 2005, every team had an enforcer. He fit right in, fighting 140 times in his first six years, brawling the Ducks to a Cup. But then the NHL, under pressure from anti-fighting groups, slowly transitioned to a less brazen, more family-friendly form of violence. Teams opted for smaller scrappers -- "rats," as Parros calls them -- not only because they could score goals but also because they could lure old-school enforcers, desperate to earn their keep, into fights and draw five-minute major penalties. Rule changes such as a two-minute penalty for simply removing your helmet before a fight were enacted to deter -- or appear to deter -- the heavyweight goon. As Parros says, "I don't think the NHL wants fighting gone. But I think it's very concerned about how people perceive fighting, and it has to cover its ass."

All of this seemed to further empower those who want fighting gone. The research about repeated blows to the head in hockey is much like it is for football: that they can cause serious, lasting harm. But what's unknown -- what Parros and other tough guys often bring up -- is whether it's fighting, specifically, that leads to brain damage. "If a study came out tomorrow that said that fighting gives you a 100 percent chance of CTE, I'd probably stop," Parros says. "But it's probably not the fighting. It's the other hits. Most fights end in a draw, without serious injury."

So in a sense it's not shocking that fighting was up in the NHL last season after dropping for three straight years. The Bruins advanced to the 2013 Stanley Cup Finals with a big, physical team that fought a lot. The Canadiens were just one of many teams that acquired a heavyweight over the summer.

Before the season, Parros' main concern wasn't his head but his surgically repaired right rotator cuff. It was torn in a fight, of course -- a skirmish in March that bore an eerie resemblance to the later one in October. Parros was tangled with Islanders left winger Eric Boulton, and they slipped. Parros' legs shot into the air, above his head. Falling face-first, Parros braced himself with his right arm. Boulton crashed onto him. In the penalty box, Boulton yelled to Parros, "You land on that funny?"

With many fighters, Parros wouldn't disclose an injury, knowing that they would use it against him. But Boulton, Parros says, "is a stand-up guy." So Parros replied, "Yeah, it's f---ed up."

It was a quintessential Parros fight. Once again, he had avoided an injury that could cost him later in life. Brain injuries scare him only enough to reinforce a goal that seems impossible: to fight in a way that allows him to live well when his fighting days are done.

He has his own tough-guy methodology, a science of its own, and as he explains it over beers, it's sensible enough to almost make you believe it will work. Parros fights primarily to protect teammates. He fights to pump up his team and to calm it down. Parros usually fights on his first shift if he's outsized -- if, for instance, he's facing Buffalo's John Scott, a 6'8" missile. Parros fights after he misses a goal, as penance, and after he scores, striving for the Gordie Howe hat trick -- a goal, an assist and a fight. And Parros sometimes fights as a favor to other fighters. As Scott says, "In one of my first fights, my team was down three goals in the third. I said to George, 'You wanna go?' George said, 'Not really. But you'll owe me one.' Now anytime he wants to fight me, I will."

But the reasons Parros doesn't fight are more essential to his long-term health. For one, he doesn't fight if he's angry; that would lead him to take wild swings and leave his body exposed. For another, he doesn't fight because he needs to, as if satisfying a barbaric urge. "If I didn't have to fight, I wouldn't," he says. "If I could score goals for a living, I would. It's a lot more fun, and I'd make a lot more money."

Strangest of all, he doesn't fight to win. He wants to win. He definitely does not want to be knocked out. But he won't fight until the bloody end. Former NHL enforcer Ryan Flinn, Parros' mentor, once told him, "As long as you show up and do your job, it's good enough."

Parros has always showed up. He grew up in Morristown, N.J., wanting to be a physical scorer like Eric Lindros. But his size -- he's now 6'5", 224 pounds -- made him a target in juniors, where fighting is allowed, so he saw that he needed to learn how to scrap. Problem was, he had never been in so much as a playground scuffle. So he practiced basic moves -- grabbing the collar, jabbing the chin -- with Jeff, his younger brother. In juniors, Parros suffered his only other concussion. It was in 1999, and it wasn't in a fight. His head hit the crossbar. "Back then," he says, "concussions didn't really matter." There was no protocol. Nobody worried that he puked and suffered splitting headaches and felt nauseated. And nobody worried that he returned to the ice too fast.

That year, Parros left juniors for Princeton and the fighting-free college game. He graduated in 2003 with an economics degree, and the Kings, who had drafted him in 1999, assigned him to the AHL. Overmatched from a skills standpoint, Parros realized that his only hope of playing in the NHL was to fight. So he watched fights on film and took boxing lessons but realized that what worked in gym shoes -- a simple head fake, for example -- caused him to lose balance on skates. He had to learn his craft the scary way: by fighting. "You're bare-knuckled fighting, and it's nerve-racking," he says. That fear led him to develop his rules, a stab at wisdom in mayhem. Those rules became prescient as the dangers of fighting settled into public consciousness, and Parros made a name for himself as not only the smartest enforcer

but also a lovable one, with long black hair and a Kouros Yaghmaei mustache that he shaves each November to raise money to kill cancer.

He embraces the cartoonish aspect of his job. A few years ago, Greene, one of his best friends, checked one of Parros' teammates too hard. Parros got in Greene's face. "We're having a talk right now!" he said. "You know that we're having a talk right now!"

"Oh, we're having a talk?" Greene said.

"Yeah, you better make it look like we're having a talk!" Parros said as the crowd stirred. "Cause we're having a talk! And I'm gonna slash ya!"

So Parros slashed Greene. Gloves dropped. Parros decked Greene in front of the bench. That night, they downed beers as disbelieving fans looked on. "They think it's fake," Greene says. "Oh, you're probably pulling punches.' No. We're trying to knock each other out."

Of course, Parros has knocked guys out. He has likely inflicted pain that his opponents will contend with later in life. "The fights where I have hurt someone, I feel really bad about it," he says. Yet he strongly believes that fighting has a rightful place in hockey and is "a means to an end" that he'll likely keep doing as long as he can. "I've never been one to say either he's going down or I am," Parros says over his pint. "That's not my style. I want to keep fighting, and it doesn't do anyone any good if I'm knocked out and gone with a concussion for three months."

But then something unforeseen happened: He was knocked out.

On a late October morning, Parros is at Madison Square Garden for the Canadiens' skate-around. This is his first road trip since his concussion 28 days ago. Every Canadiens player wears a red practice jersey -- except him. His sweater is blue. That means he's not to be touched, and he's scratched for tonight. Parros participates in a few drills but mostly watches from the boards. He stays on the ice after the team leaves, working on his shot. Though he's scored only 18 career goals, he's proud of his shot; he says he won the Ducks' accuracy competition back in the day. Then he skates to an assistant coach, stops hard and drops his gloves ... to help pick up the pucks off the ice.

After practice, Parros sits on the bench and tries to make sense of the past month. Unlike his first concussion, "there was a lot more song and dance involved" with this one, he says. Every twinge of pain, every abnormal sensation was documented. Curiously, the symptoms were less painful. He didn't puke. He didn't lose balance. He had pounding headaches rather than debilitating ones. And, as Parros says with a laugh, "I couldn't tell if the headache was from the concussion or from being around the kids."

After a week, the headaches stopped. He was allowed to exercise lightly, then to skate. If the symptoms had returned, he would have had to go back a step. They never did.

Of course, the biggest difference is that after his first concussion, nobody used it as a rationale for changing hockey. That he has become the face for a movement he disagrees with seems to frustrate him more than the concussion itself. He has no intention of changing how he plays. But he also knows that he's more likely to suffer another concussion now that he's had one. He knows that later in life he might be added, with an invisible disease in his brain. But he's wired to fight, and if he stops, he would lose his job. "It's a choice I make," he says.

A neuroscientist might see that as denial. But Parros is tired of defending himself and his trade, tired of reminding people he wasn't knocked out by a punch. "I'll have that fight a thousand times and not have that happen," he says. But no matter how smart of a fighter he is, it's still a fight, still beyond anyone's control, still the target of the Mayo Clinic and Boston University, still an issue that Gary Bettman will probably decide on long after Parros is retired, living with the choices he makes today.

Parros returns to the lineup in early November. Five minutes into his second game, against the Avalanche, there's a collision along the boards. A few elbows are thrown. Parros sees this from across the ice and knows he's being called to duty. He drops his gloves and cruises toward Patrick Bordeleau, Colorado's goon. Fists are raised. Parros tries to grab Bordeleau's jersey, his old trick. But he's rusty. Instead, Bordeleau grabs Parros' sweater, turning the tables on him, and whacks the back of his head, then the side, then his cheek. Reeling, Parros tries to return fire, without luck. They spin in circles, a blur of punches landed and missed.

The crowd gets rowdy. It's a long fight, over 20 seconds, and Bordeleau seems to want it over. He tackles Parros around the neck and throws him toward the ice. Parros is hurtling face-first, the one-in-a-thousand long shot again. His legs are in the air, above his head. Parros manages to twist himself and land on his shoulder. He flops on the ice but rises quickly to his feet, a subtle act of defiance and resilience. He fist-bumps a teammate and settles into the penalty box, still a symbol, he insists, of nothing.

Struggling Tyler Ennis refreshed by Sabres' new regime, excited about Ted Nolan's style

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 5, 2013

BUFFALO – Ted Nolan noticed a difference immediately after talking to Tyler Ennis. It looked like a huge weight had been lifted off the slick speedster, the interim Sabres coach said.

Nolan told the center to stop playing so robotically and start utilizing his natural instincts. The 24-year-old's game possessed too much hesitancy when he replaced Ron Rolston on Nov. 13.

Ennis knows he's at his best freewheeling around the ice.

"I think he could tell I was too focused before on playing a certain type of game a particular way, always be in the right spot," Ennis said Wednesday inside the First Niagara Center. "He came in and just said, 'Just go out, play and have fun. Don't worry about the Xs and Os too much. Just take the puck and make plays again.' That was refreshing in itself. I really like that part."

But Ennis, like the rest of his struggling teammates, hasn't been making many plays. He's pointless in the last four tilts following a season-long three-game streak that began one game into Nolan's tenure.

"Last couple games I really liked him," Nolan said. "He's starting to come. The bottom line is I just want him to play."

Ennis has only four goals and nine points in 28 games. That's a 12-goal, 26-point pace entering tonight's home game against the New York Rangers.

For some perspective, consider Ennis compiled eight goals and 19 points during a rollicking 12-game stretch late in 2011-12. He had nine points in his first 10 NHL contests and 20 goals as a rookie three years ago.

His meager production is a big reason why the hapless Sabres have only 45 goals, just 1.6 game. Their pathetic offense could make them the NHL's lowest-scoring team ever.

This has quickly become the toughest stretch of Ennis' career.

"I've never really been through a spell like this," Ennis said. "I've always kind of been a guy that can throw the puck in the net. It's been hard not putting up the goals, how it's all gone. It's been mentally a battle and a grind."

How has Ennis gotten through this grind?

“Good parents, good coaching staff now that’s helping me along the way,” he said. “I just got to stay confident in all that. Your abilities can’t change overnight. You just got to keep grinding.”

The likable Ennis is never cocky, but he’s always confident he’ll bust any slump.

“It’s not like I’m not getting chances,” said Ennis, who’s been pivoting Luke Adam and Zemgus Girgensons. “It’s not like we’re not making plays. We are. It’s just it hasn’t gone our way, and that’s going to happen.”

He added: “If something hasn’t gone your way, forget about it, just keep going. There’s another shift, another period. It’s been tough. We haven’t scored a lot of goals this year. They’re tough to come by.”

Perspective, something Ennis said every player must possess, has been helping him.

“If you’re having a bad game or a bad day or a bad season, I’m one of the luckiest people in the world to be playing hockey for a living,” he said. “You might as well work your (butt) off to stay here and continue to have fun. I’m very lucky to be where I am.”

Ennis said he’s “definitely having more fun” under the Sabres’ new regime.

“Definitely feels, like we keep saying, refreshing,” he said. “It feels like I’m having fun again. I just want to score goals.”

Ennis also wants to impress Nolan and Pat LaFontaine, the president of hockey operations. He clearly respects both men greatly.

“He has a presence about him,” Ennis said about Nolan. “You can tell he’s a good person ... knows the game, understands players, understands the makeup of a player. That in itself has been refreshing, as well as Pat’s influence. His demeanor and everything around the team has just been great.

“That’s why we just want to win for them so bad because we know how awesome they are and (how) good of a future it could be.”

Ennis has been bouncing from wing to center and back for almost a year now. He’s played all three forward positions this season. For now, the Sabres will “utilize his skill set at center ice,” Nolan said.

Ted Nolan wants Sabres goalie Ryan Miller to stay; Brayden McNabb assigned to Amerks for single game

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 5, 2013

BUFFALO – In Ted Nolan’s mind, franchise goalie Ryan Miller, an unrestricted free agent following the season, is more of a building block for the struggling Sabres than an asset.

“You build around him versus as a pawn to try to get something to make you better,” the interim coach said Wednesday. “You learn to deal with the now as a coach, and we got one of the better goaltenders in the world here. I’d like to build around him, myself.”

Is Miller open to that?

“I’m not too sure,” Nolan said after the Sabres prepared for tonight’s game against the New York Rangers inside the First Niagara Center.

Nolan has said he’s talked to Pat LaFontaine, the president of hockey operations, about creating “an environment where people want to come here and stay.”

“So hopefully he likes what we’re doing, and you never know,” Nolan said.

He added: “You look at all the championship teams, it starts from the goaltending up.”

Trade rumors have been swirling around Miller for months.

Nolan isn’t surprised Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist signed a seven-year, \$59.5 million extension Wednesday.

“You look at all the top guys, our top guy, Ryan Miller, he’s consistent all the time,” he said. “You look at Jonathan Quick, he gets a big contract, Lundqvist. There’s those guys and the rest of them.”

xxx

Sabres defenseman Brayden McNabb, a healthy scratch the last two games, played for the Rochester Americans on Wednesday before returning to the NHL.

Sitting long isn’t good for the 22-year-old, Nolan said.

“The greatest thing about having the Rochester Americans so close he can go down and play,” Nolan said. “He sat out almost five days now. We can give him some game action. We’ll recall him right after the game.”

In other lineup news, defenseman Alexander Sulzer (undisclosed injury) missed practice again Wednesday, meaning he's likely out tonight.

"It's going to be day-to-day," Nolan said.

To make room on the roster for forward Cody McCormick, who's ready to return from a four-game absence, the Sabres could place Sulzer on injured reserve, Nolan said.

"It's never fun sitting there," said McCormick, whose injury has been described as either upper or lower. "I've done it too many times in my career. So I'm just looking forward to this game right now."

Meanwhile, illness kept winger Matt D'Agostini from practicing Wednesday.

D'Agostini could play tonight, Nolan said.

xxx

Sabres prospect J.T. Compher has been named to Team USA's world junior championship training camp roster. The Sabres selected the Michigan winger 35th overall in June.

Sabres prospect Mikhail Grigorenko to represent Russia at world junior championship

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 5, 2013

BUFFALO – Center Mikhail Grigorenko will be leaving the Sabres on Sunday to play for his native Russia at the upcoming world junior championship.

The 19-year-old, a healthy scratch the last two games and five of the last eight under interim coach Ted Nolan, posted a message to a Facebook account this afternoon that read, “Flying to Russia Sunday with my brother Zadorov!”

That’s the Nikita Zadorov, the 18-year-old defenseman the Sabres recently sent back to junior.

Jay Grossman, Grigorenko’s agent, told the Times Herald the Facebook account belongs to Grigorenko and he’ll be playing for Russia.

The Sabres have been exploring options so Grigorenko can play. A training camp roster Russia released Tuesday didn’t have his name.

Sabres Grigorenko wants to play for Team Russia

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 4, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Countries are putting out their rosters for this year's World Junior Tournament.

Nikita Zadorov is on Russia's list, but what about Mikhail Grigorenko. He has not yet been contacted by the Russian Federation. He said, "Personally nobody has talked to me, I just know what you know from the internet stuff, but there's still some time." The forward said, "I'm always happy to represent my country and I would be happy to go there and have the opportunity to play. I had two good experiences last year and the year before and I really liked it, you know playing for your own country, it's really awesome. I'd get to play with my friends and just putting on the Team Russia jersey is a good thing."

The Sabres of course would have to approve him playing. He said, "If they want me to play there, then I'll have to discuss it with Pat and Ted and we'll see, so I don't know. I guess we'll see what's best for me and if they think it's going to be a really good experience for me, then I'll go there and give 100-percent."

Grigorenko was supposed to miss just the Toronto game Friday and then play Saturday in New Jersey. The team played so well against the Leafs, Ted Nolan didn't think it would be fair to sit anybody. Grigorenko understood the whole thing, "When the team's winning, there's no reason for coach to change anything, we won the game so I understand his decision, but I wish I played this game against Toronto so I would've been in the lineup."

Since Nolan's arrived, Grigorenko's played three of eight games averaging about 12 minutes of ice time. The question I'm wondering is if he's learning anything from Nolan, "Ted arrived and the compete level's been a little bit higher on the team. Under Ron I thought I was really working hard, but I think there's always something you can work on harder and harder, even if you think you work hard, you can always go harder." Folks, you always hear me say that Grigorenko seems to be in denial about his play. The statement he just made shows me that maybe he's starting to get it.

Sabres Nolan wants Miller to stay

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 4, 2013

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- With the Rangers giving Henrik Lundqvist a contract extension on Wednesday, of course the conversation turns to Ryan Miller.

The Sabres goalie becomes an unrestricted free agent at the end of the season, but if Ted Nolan stays, he wants Miller here too. Nolan said, "You look at all championship teams, it starts from the goaltending out. You build around him versus using him as a pawn to try get something to make you better. We've got one of the better goaltenders in the world here and I talked to Pat about this and I said, 'The one thing we want to do is create an environment where people want to come here and stay here', so hopefully he likes what we're doing and you never know."

Lundqvist will count \$8.5-million per season on the Rangers cap. Miller currently counts \$6.25-million on the Sabres cap.

The Sabres sent Brayden McNabb down to Rochester to play a game Wednesday night. Nolan said the defenseman will be recalled after the game.

Matt D'Agostini missed practice with the flu, while Alex Sulzer is still injured.

Cody McCormick used these three days of practice to get back to 100 percent. He said, "It's unlikely that you get a break like this, but it helps to get your wind back and your cardio back and it's beneficial for a guy coming off an injury, so I'm ready let's go. It's been too long in between games." McCormick missed four games with a hand injury.

It took the Devils until overtime to finally push a goal past Jhonas Enroth on Saturday. Enroth had given up four in Toronto which was the only game he had played under Nolan. Three of the four goals were deflected and after the game on Saturday, Enroth expressed his displeasure with Nolan's comments that he wasn't very good in Toronto. Nolan said, "What I say is how I feel and it wasn't a good game for him that game. I had nothing to say personally about his skillset, he's a good goalie, but certain nights you have to push buttons to get these guys to do it on a consistent basis and that's what we're here for. I'm not here to make everybody like exactly everything I say, but we have to perform better and we have to play better and he had to and last game he did that."

Sabres have another GM candidate

By Howard Simon

WGR 550

December 4, 2013

Add another name to the list of candidates for the job of Buffalo Sabres General Manager. According to the Ottawa Sun, the Sabres have received permission from the Ottawa Senators to interview Senators Assistant General Manager Tim Murray.

The 50 year old Murray, who is the nephew of Senators G-M Bryan Murray, has been in Ottawa since 2007. He is also the General Manager of Ottawa's American Hockey League affiliate in Binghamton.

Murray's NHL resume goes back to the 1993-94 season when he was hired as an amateur scout by the Detroit Red Wings. He joined the Florida Panthers the following season and moved up to the Director of Amateur Scouting before leaving in 2002.

Murray also worked for three years with Anaheim and served as Director of Player Personnel. He spent two years with the New York Rangers before taking the job in Ottawa.

McNABB TO ROCHESTER, FOLIGNO'S PLAY TRENDING UPWARD

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

December 4, 2013

The Buffalo Sabres assigned defenseman Brayden McNabb to the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League on Wednesday, but Sabres interim coach Ted Nolan said not to expect him there for very long.

McNabb's been a healthy scratch for Buffalo the past two games and with the Amerks hosting Utica on Wednesday, he'll have an opportunity to log some big minutes right away.

"The greatest thing about having the Rochester Americans so close [is that] he can go down and play," Nolan said after practice at First Niagara Center. "He's sat out almost five days now, so right now we can get him some game action and we'll recall him right after the game."

Right wing Matt D'Agostini and defenseman Alexander Sulzer did not practice. Nolan said that D'Agostini is fighting the flu and hopes that he'll be available Thursday night when the Sabres host the New York Rangers. Sulzer, meanwhile, has not taken the ice all week as he deals with an undisclosed injury.

"We thought he was going to be better today. He's gotten a lot better today, but not to the point where he could play yet or practice, so it's going to be day-to-day," Nolan said.

It's possible that Buffalo could put him on injured reserve so that they can activate center Cody McCormick, who is ready to return to the lineup. However, Nolan said they'll wait to see how Sulzer feels Thursday morning before making that move.

Wednesday marked the third practice day in a row for the team. They focused on special teams play toward the second half of the session.

Marcus Foligno has been active on the penalty kill this season and talked a lot on the ice with assistant coach Joe Sacco on Wednesday.

"P.K. in this League is huge. It's a game-changer, for sure. For myself, playing minutes, you want to be counted on to be out there and be able to shut down top lines and top power plays," Foligno said. "He's just trying to teach me about the penalty kill right now and getting used to it. It's been going pretty well."

Foligno has been on the fourth line the past few games where Nolan wants him to be more of a force in the physical game. He's skated with John Scott and Brian

Flynn and the line has had their share of offensive opportunities recently. Foligno is trying to make the most of his ice time and feels that his game has improved as of late.

“I think the last couple games have been better. Just the work ethic and consistency have been there and things like that. I think [Nolan] just wants physicality from me every shift, just being simple,” he said.

“...It’s up to me. When I move my feet and am hard on pucks and protect the puck, I’m noticeable out there. And when I don’t, I’m not noticeable, so he just wants me to be noticeable every night and be a player that has an impact.”

Nolan talked about Foligno’s play on Tuesday and has liked the adjustments that the 6-foot-3, 223-pound wing has made.

“Marcus is a big powerful forward and I told him he’s just big. He wasn’t powerful. He wasn’t hitting anybody. He wasn’t using his size to his advantage. I told him we needed that,” Nolan said. “We needed him to be more aggressive on the first, on the forecheck, needed him to cause some havoc for the opposition and I thought the last couple games, he started doing that.”

Foligno’s ice time has increased in each of the past four games. On Saturday in New Jersey, he played 11:31 with 1:53 coming on the penalty kill.

“I also told him that if he continues to do it, those guys on the top three lines better be watching out because he’s coming,” Nolan said.

Nolan and president of hockey operations Pat LaFontaine have discussed the possibility of loaning rookie center Mikhail Grigorenko to the Ice Hockey Federation of Russia for the IIHF World Junior Championship later this month.

Grigorenko said Wednesday that he has not talked to anyone yet about it, but he would welcome the chance to play for Team Russia in the tournament, which will be held in Sweden.

“Nobody has spoken with me yet and there’s still some time. I’m always happy to represent my country and I would be happy to go there and have the opportunity to play there,” he said. “If they want me to play there, I guess we’ll discuss it with Pat and with Ted and we’ll see what’s going to happen.”

Grigorenko has played on the Russian national team the past two years and believes they have a good chance to win gold this year.

Defenseman Nikita Zadorov, a first-round selection of the Sabres in this year's draft, will take part in Russia's selection camp. Forward J.T. Compher, a second-round pick in 2013, has been named to Team USA's preliminary roster.

26 Matt Moulson – 19 Cody Hodgson – 21 Drew Stafford

9 Steve Ott – 23 Ville Leino

72 Luke Adam – 63 Tyler Ennis / 25 Mikhail Grigorenko – 28 Zemgus Girgensons

32 John Scott – 8 Cody McCormick / 65 Brian Flynn – 82 Marcus Foligno

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

30 Ryan Miller

1 Jhonas Enroth

Power Play

First Unit

Moulson – Hodgson – Ennis

Stafford – Ehrhoff

Second Unit

Adam – Ott – Leino

Myers – McBain

ZADOROV AND COMPHER NAMED TO WORLD JR. ROSTERS

By Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

December 4, 2013

Buffalo Sabres draft pick J.T. Compher (University of Michigan) was among 26 players named today to the preliminary roster for the defending-champion United States team that will compete at the 2014 IIHF World Junior Championship. This year's tournament takes place from Dec. 26 through Jan. 5 in Malmo, Sweden.

The 26 players will participate in a training camp Dec. 15-18 at the University of Minnesota's Mariucci Arena in Minneapolis, with preparations continuing in Angelholm, Sweden, before the final 23-man roster is announced on Dec. 23. The U.S. will play three games before the start of the tournament, including Dec. 17 against Minnesota State University in Mankato, Minn., and contests in Angelholm vs. Finland on Dec. 20 and Sweden on Dec. 22.

Compher joins defenseman Nikita Zadorov as the only two Sabres prospects currently on their country's official preliminary World Junior roster. Zadorov, currently playing with the OHL's London Knights, was one of 29 players announced on Tuesday for Russia's roster. With five points in five games since being returned to junior on November 19, the hulking Zadorov should be a lock to anchor the Russian blueline in Sweden.

Rochester defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen is eligible to play for Finland, but a recent injury could deter his participation. Ristolainen was sucker-punched in the head by Lake Erie's Mitchell Heard in the Amerks' 5-3 win last Friday, and has already been ruled out of the team's next three games with what head coach Chadd Cassidy has termed as an "upper body injury." On Tuesday, Ristolainen told Kevin Oklobzija of the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle the Sabres have asked if he would like to play in the World Juniors, and his answer was yes.

There are also question marks surrounding Buffalo's two remaining tournament-eligible prospects. Mikhail Grigorenko wasn't included on Russia's 29-man preliminary roster, but he could play if the Sabres decide to release him for the event. Gustav Possler appeared to be a lock for Team Sweden early in the season, however he's now missed eight straight games with a knee injury. Possler is playing for MODO of the Swedish Hockey League, and is tied for the team lead in scoring with 13 points (8+5) in 18 games.

Penn Hills native moves from Penn State to Sabres front office

By Patrick Varine
Pittsburgh Tribune Review
December 4, 2013

Joe Battista has come a long way since his days playing hockey on a frozen pond near the 17th hole of what was then the Alcoma Country Club.

“We'd play there, we'd play at the old Monroeville Ice Palace. That was where I really got my start,” Battista said. “My parents would go and shop, and they'd drop my brother and me off.”

Battista's lifelong love of hockey has carried him through high school and college, coaching and front-office stints at Penn State University and now, a front-office job with the Buffalo Sabres hockey team.

Battista, 53 and a Penn Hills native, was hired as vice president of hockey operations in early November, and his rise has paralleled the ascension of the sport he has nurtured in his stops along the way.

After three years as the assistant marketing director for the Pens — where Battista's boss was current voice of the Penguins, Paul Steigerwald — Battista said he “really got bit by the coaching bug and was helping with USA Hockey camps and coaching clinics.”

He left the Penguins in 1985 to coach at Kent State in Ohio, then at Culver Academy, one of the country's top hockey prep schools at the time. Then in 1987, he came to Penn State to become the assistant director of their ice rink and the head hockey coach for what was, at the time, a club team.

“I told my parents, who still live in Penn Hills, ‘Well, I'm going to give this thing at Penn State five years. If I can get this team established and get an arena built, I'll stick around. If not, I'll move on to the next phase of my life.’”

It took a little longer than five years.

Battista had success coaching the Penn State hockey team, capturing six American Collegiate Hockey Association championships and reaching the ACHA tournament every year since 1993.

His final year coaching the team was 2005, after which he went to work for the Nittany Lion Club, raising money for the university. It was there that he got to know western Pennsylvania native and billionaire hockey fan Terry Pegula.

In 2010, Pegula sold his natural-gas drilling company, East Resources, for more than \$4 billion, and shortly afterward announced that he would be donating \$88 million to Penn State for the construction of a fully equipped ice arena. The team

would also be moving to compete as an NCAA Division I team. Having helped facilitate Pegula's gift, Battista assumed the role of associate athletic director.

But Pegula wasn't finished yet.

“Just a couple weeks after he announced the donation, he started talking seriously about buying the Buffalo Sabres,” Battista said. “East Resources was originally started in Olean, N.Y., and he lived south of Buffalo and was an avid Sabres fan.”

In February 2011, Pegula bought the team, and began talking with Battista about possibly making the move to Buffalo.

“He and I had talked often about me coming to work with the Sabres in some capacity; we weren't sure what it would be,” Battista said.

After posting the league's worst record through 20 games this season, change came rapidly to the Sabres with the firing of both their coach and general manager. Battista left Penn State after three decades to join Pegula's East Management Services on Nov. 11.

“We hired Pat LaFontaine to be head of hockey operations, and he's my boss now,” Battista said. “Working alongside a quality person and hockey mind like that, every day is exciting and every day we're making progress.”

Battista acknowledge that success won't happen overnight.

“There's no easy fix. My new dream is to see Terry Pegula hoisting the Stanley Cup, and there's people who will chuckle and laugh at that — but they're probably the same people who chuckled and laughed about building a massive ice arena and taking the Penn State hockey program to full NCAA status.”

Battista said growing up in Penn Hills provided him with the work ethic to dedicate himself to his new job.

“It instilled in me the type of do-what-it-takes attitude and never-settle-for-less belief,” he said. “I was very blessed to have grown up around a lot of great coaches and athletes who helped me become competitive, and I'm hoping to bring that same level of enthusiasm to the NHL.”

LIVING LIFE 140 CHARACTERS AT A TIME

By Craig Kanalley

Sabres.com

December 4, 2013

It's real-time. It allows us to keep up with the latest news for whatever we're interested in, including the Buffalo Sabres, of course. It helps us stay in close contact with those we care about the most.

Twitter's usefulness is clear to a lot of people. It's no different for professional hockey players.

“For me personally, I love the news side of it,” Sabres captain Steve Ott (@OtterN9ne) said. “The updates of instant news and in a quick format, too. I love how you can read a few words – almost a sentence – and know what's going on, updates around the NHL or even in world news.”

Though he's 12 years younger than Ott, Sabres rookie forward Zemgus Girgensons (@zemgus94) gravitates toward the same part of Twitter.

“News, first of all,” Girgensons said.

But there's also a social side.

“Listening to what people say. Messing around, killing some time. Letting people know when something happens in my life,” Girgensons added.

When he was traded to Buffalo in October, Matt Moulson (@MMoulson) brought 55,000 Twitter followers and an active account with him. He now has over 64,000 followers.

“I think it's a great way to get information right away. Get news from exact moments as they happen,” Moulson said.

Sabres goaltender Jhonas Enroth (@JEnroth125) had a short-and-sweet response fit for Twitter when asked what he finds most useful about the social network.

“Keep myself updated,” he said.

Not every Buffalo Sabre is on Twitter. But every now and then, another player joins the service. That was the case in September when Ryan Miller signed up (@RyanMiller3039).

“I kind of caved in, just to participate in something that's been popular,” Miller said. “I started thinking about how it could help my career, my cause; I've had a

foundation for a number of years. I felt I probably wasn't doing enough on the grand scale.”

Miller has come a long way since his first tweet on Sept. 3. He passed the 30,000-follower milestone this past week.

“I'm just trying to have some fun with it,” he said. “Mainly hockey stuff. I've done a few things that touch on my life a little bit, but don't want to get too deep into it. I try to have a little bit of fun but not go too far.”

Who To Follow

One of the greatest questions for anyone on Twitter is who to follow. It dictates your experience and the usefulness of Twitter itself.

You might follow hundreds of accounts. Or maybe you opt for just a few dozen. The players on Twitter have different approaches.

Moulson follows more than 300 accounts, more than any other Sabre. His strategy when thinking about hitting the “follow” button?

“Whatever I find interesting,” he said. “I follow some funny people, news stations, sports. All different things.”

Ott follows 274 accounts.

“I have a little bit of a realm of who I follow,” he said. “Obviously my teammates, and other guys around the League that I've played with before. But also if an account is about facts of life or just fun or interesting stuff that you'd never think of or know.”

For some, Twitter is more personal. Girgensons falls in that category, hinting that there has to be some kind of reciprocal relationship to start following someone.

“You've got to be really close,” he said. “Don't give out follows just like that ...You've got to do something for me.”

Enroth had a similar take, saying he'll follow someone “if I'm interested in that person or if I know them.” His highest priority?

“My friends and family,” he said.

Miller keeps his stream simple.

“It's just mainly guys on the team, guys I'm buddies with throughout the league,” he said.

Favorite Follows

If you use Twitter enough, you'll likely find yourself enjoying some accounts more than others.

Ott's favorite account is @HockeyFights.

"It's the easiest way without using your computer to watch fights around the League," he said. "It's quick and easy."

Girgensons had trouble naming just one account, but he said he's a fan of "those funny ones, those comedy ones."

"@OMGFacts is probably my favorite right now," Moulson said without hesitation. "A lot of interesting stuff on there I like to read."

Enroth gave mention to teammate Christian Ehrhoff (@TheRealHoff10).

"[He's] pretty funny on Twitter," Enroth said. "He's fun to follow."

Miller chose a comedian.

"That Rob Delaney guy is pretty funny. I don't follow him anymore, but I did in the past," Miller said. "He can be a little crude, not-safe-for-work kind of guy, but he's pretty funny."

Twitter Time

The big question is how often are you on Twitter?

"My wife would say too much," Ott confessed. "But daily."

Girgensons didn't shy away from his answer either.

"Every day. Multiple times. Every time I have a chance, I'll check out what's new," he said.

For Moulson, it's also become a part of his routine.

"A lot," he said. "Whenever I'm not looking after my kids, I'm probably on there looking at news and interesting things."

Enroth? "I'm on it every day."

Only the newest member of the Sabres Twitter family had a different take.

"Here and there," Miller said.

Is there an ideal time to check Twitter?

“After practice,” Moulson said. “I feel like a lot of things happen while we're practicing. It's nice to see what's going on in the world after you're on the ice, maybe not too reliant on technology.”

Girgensons finds Twitter the perfect way to unwind. “Probably before bed; before I go to sleep.”

Enroth opts for downtime. “Probably during lunch or during relaxing time,” he said.

“I don't think there's much of a pattern” Miller says about when he uses Twitter. He'll hop on now and then.

While Miller may check Twitter more sporadically, for Ott, it's a part of his morning and night rituals.

“I like to go through it all at nighttime before going to bed or in the morning when I wake up, I kind of go through a quick scroll as well,” he said.

Here's an updated list of current Buffalo Sabres players on Twitter:

Luke Adam
Christian Ehrhoff
Jhonas Enroth
Zemgus Girgensons
Jamie McBain
Brayden McNabb
Ryan Miller
Matt Moulson
Steve Ott
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