



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

January 21, 2014

Panthers-Sabres Preview

By Nicolino DiBenedetto

Associated Press

January 21, 2014

The Florida Panthers are looking to build on perhaps their best performance of the season.

Another meeting with the NHL-worst Buffalo Sabres should help.

A day after taking down one of the league's top teams, the Panthers will try to avoid a letdown and beat the Sabres for the third straight time in Buffalo on Tuesday night.

Florida (19-23-7) scored the first three goals en route to a 5-1 win at Eastern Conference-leading Pittsburgh on Monday, ending the Penguins' team-record 13-game home winning streak. It was also the Panthers' largest margin of victory this season, and just the third regulation win during a 5-6-2 stretch after compiling a season-high five-game winning streak.

"I don't think we got lucky," said Scott Clemmensen, who had 35 saves. "I think we just willed it a little bit. It doesn't always go your way obviously. You stick with it and nights like (Monday) happen."

Now, Florida is looking to conclude this three-game trip with back-to-back wins by beating the Sabres (13-27-7) again.

The Panthers are 3-0-1 in their last four visits to Buffalo, winning the most recent 2-1 in a shootout Jan. 9. Brad Boyes keyed the victory, tying the game midway through the third period before scoring the only goal in the tiebreaker.

The right wing, though, hasn't scored in five games since, but leads the team with 12 goals.

Drew Shore scored twice Monday for his first career multi-goal game. He has three goals in four games, matching his production from all of last season as a rookie.

Tim Thomas may be in net since he has a 1.91 goals-against average while winning five straight starts against the Sabres. He had 23 saves through overtime before turning aside all three attempts in the shootout Jan. 9.

The two-time Vezina Trophy winner, though, has allowed six goals on 78 shots while losing his last two starts.

The Sabres have followed a season-high five-game home winning streak with a three-game slide there, falling 4-3 in a shootout to Columbus on Saturday.

Tyler Myers is giving Buffalo an unexpected scoring source, getting three goals in four games. The defenseman had two goals Saturday, forcing overtime and the subsequent shootout by scoring with 24.9 seconds left in regulation.

He has six goals and nine assists on the season, and he's managed two and 10 in 14 career meetings with the Panthers.

Cody Hodgson has five points during a four-game streak since missing eight games with an upper-body injury, including the latest meeting with Florida.

The center had one goal and two assists in a 4-3 home loss to the Panthers on Feb. 3.

He may have a new linemate, as interim coach Ted Nolan seeks to spark the team with the fewest points in the NHL.

Linus Omark may join Hodgson and captain Steve Ott on the second line. He has one assist in nine games this season, but seems likely to replace Ville Leino, who has six assists.

"We're looking for people that want to compete and want to work. It doesn't matter what your skill level. Skill is nothing with no will," Nolan told the team's official website. "So we have to get (Leino) competing at a certain level and some days he shows it and some days he doesn't."

Tortorella gets 15 days without pay for fight

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

January 20, 2014

The NHL suspended Vancouver coach John Tortorella for 15 days without pay Monday night for his part in a chaotic meeting with Calgary.

The former Sabres assistant and Rochester head coach confronted the Flames at their dressing room during the first intermission Saturday. He was incensed after Calgary coach Bob Hartley loaded the starting lineup with tough guys, which resulted in a 10-player brawl as soon as the puck dropped.

“Mr. Tortorella’s actions in attempting to enter the Calgary Flames’ locker room after the first period were both dangerous and an embarrassment to the league,” said Colin Campbell, the NHL’s senior executive vice president of hockey operations. “Coaches in the NHL bear the responsibility of providing leadership, even when emotions run high, and Mr. Tortorella failed in his responsibility to the game.”

Tortorella, who will miss six games, is not allowed to have any interaction with the Canucks prior to, during or after the games. While working for the Sabres in 1995, Tortorella was suspended for three games for an altercation with a fan.

The NHL fined Hartley \$25,000.

“We are holding Mr. Hartley responsible for the actions of Flames right wing Kevin Westgarth, who took the game’s opening faceoff and attempted to instigate a premeditated fight with an unwilling opponent – the Canucks’ Kevin Bieksa,” Campbell said.

After seeing the lineup of the visiting Flames, Tortorella started his tough guys.

“It’s easy for people to say put the Sedins out there and it’s deflated,” Tortorella said Saturday, referring to star players Daniel and Henrik Sedin. “I can’t put our players at risk that way. With the lineup he had, I am not going to put those type of players at risk, and that’s what ensues.

“I’m not proud of it. I have apologized to every one of the players involved in it. I don’t feel great about it at all.”

Sabres coach Ted Nolan said Monday he wouldn’t have countered Hartley’s moves.

“I think in 1964 maybe you respond a certain way,” Nolan said. “Now we’re trying to sell this game, and you don’t sell it like that. ... We’re in the hockey business, not in the fighting business.”

...

The Sabres will have at least one lineup change tonight when they host the Florida Panthers. Penalty-taking Zenon Konopka will sit, with Linus Omark likely taking the forward's roster spot.

Konopka has four penalties in his six games with the Sabres, and opponents have scored power-play goals three times with Konopka in the box. The center has been whistled three times for goaltender interference and once for holding.

"Those penalties, they could be avoided," Nolan said. "We can't afford to take bad penalties, we can't afford to take too many turnovers in a game. They're going to kill us every time."

"It's a fine line," Konopka said. "I can't put myself in a position where a so-so, 50-50 call can go against me."

Omark, meanwhile, was scratched for the previous two games. The right winger practiced on the second line with center Cody Hodgson and left wing Steve Ott.

"It's an opportunity if I play with those guys," said Omark, who has no goals and one assist in nine games. "I have to produce."

Defenseman Henrik Tallinder, who has missed eight games, will be a game-time decision.

...

Ville Leino's struggles landed him on the fourth line Monday. The center, who has no goals and six assists in 30 games, skated alongside Scott and Matt Ellis. Leino has taken just 22 shots.

"We're looking for people that want to compete and want to work," Nolan said. "It doesn't matter what your skill level is. It's nothing with no will. We have to get him competing at a certain level. Some days he shows it. Some days he doesn't."

Sabres cut it close for cancer fundraiser

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

January 20, 2014

As a child, family night for Anthony George often meant sitting around the television with his parents and sister to watch the Sabres. They'd talk and bond while rooting for Gilbert Perreault and the French Connection.

Cancer ruined that. George's father and sister succumbed to the disease, putting an end to the meaningful get-togethers.

A good thing came from the terrible ordeal, however. George founded "Goin' Bald for Bucks" during his sister's third fight with cancer, and the fundraiser has generated more than \$2.1 million for Roswell Park Cancer Institute. More than \$13,000 came in Monday courtesy of George's favorite hockey team and its fans.

Five Buffalo players – Cody Hodgson, Mike Weber, Alex Sulzer, Mark Pysyk and Brayden McNabb – had their heads shaved in the First Niagara Center atrium. They all eclipsed their goal of bringing in \$1,000 in donations, and Hodgson has pledged to match the grand total.

"The Sabres have really been part of my family growing up," George said. "Unfortunately, my sister and father both passed away due to cancer, but it's good to know the Sabres are part of the family still, and they're there supporting us in our fight."

While the funds are great and needed, George says the attention the Sabres will bring to the cause is more important. Fans can get a look at the haircuts tonight when the Sabres host the Florida Panthers.

"Unfortunately, the diseases are my best recruiter," said George, a Lake Shore High School history teacher. "But with the Sabres on board, who knows where it can go from here. They're a big part of our community. They mean a great deal to Western New York, and here they are helping to support Western New York's premier hospital."

The players are offering solidarity to patients suffering from cancer. Chemotherapy causes them to lose their hair, and now they know they aren't alone. More than 50 people joined George in watching the Sabres' locks flutter to the ground.

"We appreciate your donations, we appreciate your support and we appreciate you guys being here," Weber said.

The barbers – teammates Ryan Miller, Steve Ott, John Scott, Drew Stafford and Brian Flynn – created funky looks and a little pain with their electric clippers.

Miller went straight down the middle of Hodgson's head. It was sort of a reverse Mohawk cut that reminded the goaltender of Krusty the Clown from "The Simpsons."

"We need a better hair cutter than Brian," Pysyk said. "I think I'm bleeding."

The defenseman also said his head was cold, but a child from the program helped that by handing out ballcaps that read "Believe" with the letters "l-i-v-e" in bold.

"It's not just about getting a haircut," Hodgson said. "It's about raising awareness and finally getting rid of this disease."

"Do it," was the center's advice to anyone thinking of joining the cause: "Get your relatives, get your family, get your friends. Everybody get behind you and make it fun. It's fun for us, and it would be fun for you guys."

George knows from experience that the head shaving can make a difference. His sister, Cathleen, was in her early 30s when she battled cancer. She was self-conscious about her hair loss and usually covered her head with a hat or scarf. That changed after Anthony shaved his head to match hers.

"When they give you chemo, they usually give you steroids beforehand to boost your immune system, so she'd have a period of maybe a day where she had a lot of energy," George said. "We'd go shopping. She was cheap, so we'd always go to the dollar store in Hamburg. I remember we walked in, and I took my hat off and was bald, and she took her hat off. She had never done that before."

"She was not uncomfortable being bald in public because I was bald in public. That right there told me that I need to keep doing this, and I've got to get other people to do it."

"Thankfully, I don't know what it's like to have to struggle for your life with a disease like that. But having to struggle for your life on top of everyone looking at you and feeling like you're the oddball, to at least make them not feel like the oddball is a major accomplishment. That's what got it going, and that's what keeps driving me to keep doing it."

Sabres aim to end skid against Panthers

NHL.com

January 20, 2014

PANTHERS (19-23-7) at SABRES (13-27-7)

TV: FS-F, MSG-B, BELL TV

Last 10: Florida 5-3-2; Buffalo 3-3-4

Season series: This is the third of four games between the Florida Panthers and Buffalo Sabres. The Sabres won 3-1 in Sunrise, Fla., on Oct. 25 and the Panthers earned a 2-1 shootout win in Buffalo on Jan. 9. Jhonas Enroth started each game for the Sabres, allowing two goals on 80 shots.

Big story: The Sabres hope to avoid losing four straight games for the first time since November. They have also lost three in a row at First Niagara Center since a five-game home winning streak. The Panthers look for back-to-back wins for the first time since Dec. 17 and 19.

Team Scope:

Panthers: Florida beat the Eastern Conference-leading Penguins 5-1 in Pittsburgh on Monday. Drew Shore, who had one goal in 11 games this season, had two, and Scott Clemmensen, making his first start in nine games, made 35 saves. Florida earned its ninth road win of the season and handed the Penguins their first loss at Consol Energy Center since Nov. 13, a span of 13 games.

"The harder you work, the luckier you get. It doesn't always go your way, but you stick with it and nights like tonight happen," said Clemmensen, who also picked up an assist. "But we have to move on. We have a game [Tuesday]."

Jonathan Huberdeau had a goal and assisted on the eventual game-winner in the second period.

"We know we can beat the best teams in the League and that's what we're doing ... we just have to keep going on a little streak to get back into playoff position," Huberdeau said. "We gotta go out [to Buffalo] -- it's back-to-back -- there's no excuses and we gotta go out there and play a hard game and get the two points."

Sabres: Buffalo has lost three games in a row -- all by one goal -- with the past two occurring in the shootout. The Sabres have been involved in one-goal games in each of their past six games, and have a 2-1-3 record.

"We are going to have to play extremely hard again," Steve Ott said Monday after practice. "Tim Thomas has been playing great. He's a good old goaltender, and we're gonna have to try and find a way to sneak some by him."

Linus Omark, who has been a healthy scratch the past two games, could be in the lineup Tuesday. He practiced on the second line with Cody Hodgson and Steve Ott. In nine games this season, he has one assist.

"It's an opportunity if I am going to play with those guys," Omark said. "I know [the goals are] going to come if I keep going. I've had some good chances, too. If you play good, it's going to come sooner or later."

Who's hot: Panthers defenseman Dmitry Kulikov has goals in back-to-back games. Jesse Winchester, who returned to the lineup Monday after missing five weeks with a broken hand, had three assists. ... Sabres wing Tyler Ennis has a four-game point streak (two goals, three assists). Defenseman Tyler Myers has three goals -- half of his season total -- in the past four games.

Injury report: Panthers defensemen Dylan Olsen (lower body) and Alex Petrovic (upper body) are on injured reserve. ... Sabres forwards Cody McCormick (upper body) and Kevin Porter (lower body) and defenseman Henrik Tallinder (upper body) are on IR. Marcus Foligno did not play Saturday (upper body).

Sabres' Zenon Konopka likely benched tonight; Henrik Tallinder nearing return

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

January 21, 2014

BUFFALO – Sabres center Zenon Konopka said he had spoken to interim coach Ted Nolan twice about his knack for picking up goaltender interference penalties.

“I made a conscious effort,” Konopka said Monday after the Sabres prepared for tonight’s contest against the Florida Panthers inside the First Niagara Center.

Still, Konopka, who had two calls early last week, earned a third Saturday, which led to Brandon Dubinsky’s go-ahead power-play goal in Columbus’ 4-3 shootout win.

Three strikes and you’re likely out of the lineup. Konopka skated as a spare forward Monday and almost certainly will be scratched tonight. Nolan benched him Saturday following the penalty.

“Obviously, I put myself in a 50-50 predicament where the referee could make a call,” Konopka said. “It was a bad decision on my part to myself in that. Do I agree with the call? I don’t know. I can’t put myself in that situation. I understand that everybody’s got to be held accountable. That’s up and down the lineup.”

Nolan said Konopka’s “going to have to wait.”

“If we’re going to change things, it can’t just be for a chosen few; it has to be for everybody,” he said. “Those penalties, they could be avoided. We can’t afford to take too many bad penalties. We can’t afford to take too many turnovers. They’re going to kill us every time. We’re forced to show the young guys to try to win on a consistent basis. Those are the type of things we have to do.”

Konopka’s goaltender interference call Tuesday led to a Philadelphia goal.

Winger Linus Omark practiced beside Cody Hodgson and Steve Ott on Monday and will likely return after two healthy scratches.

“We’ll give it another day to think about,” Nolan said about Omark.

In other lineup news, defenseman Henrik Tallinder (hand, eight games) is “pretty close” and will be a game-time decision, Nolan said.

Forward Kevin Porter (lower body, 11 games) practiced fully Monday and is getting closer, Nolan said.

Porter hasn't played since Boston's Johnny Boychuk hit him into the boards Dec. 21. At first, it seemed like he might've suffered a severe hip injury.

"I didn't think it was that bad," Porter said. "I got hit, I knew something was wrong when I tried to take my next stride."

He added: "I don't think it was a dirty hit, just kind of the wrong place."

Meanwhile, forward Cody McCormick (hand, 14 games) is practicing but didn't receive clearance from the doctor Friday, he said.

Sabres' Ville Leino struggling to score, reach Ted Nolan's expectations

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

January 21, 2014

BUFFALO – Ville Leino said he doesn't mind battling or working hard, two aspects of his game interim Sabres coach Ted Nolan has questioned. Getting hit "or getting into stuff," well, the struggling forward doesn't mind that, either.

"I like battling," Leino said Monday following practice inside the First Niagara Center. "Sometimes in a game it's hard to get into the game, to get inside of the game to go battle hard. So somehow you just have to find a way to get in there."

So far, Leino hasn't found a way. The Finn has zero goals in 30 games this season entering tonight's home tilt against the Florida Panthers.

Clearly, Nolan's patience is wearing thin. He already benched him Dec. 10, making Leino wonder "what he wants out of me." Leino lost ice time late in Saturday's 4-3 shootout loss to Columbus and skated on the fourth line beside Matt Ellis and John Scott during Monday's practice.

In his own calm, controlled way Nolan has been ripping Leino. He questioned his will to compete, battle and "get dirty once in a while" Saturday morning. Following the game, Nolan said Ellis replaced Leino on a line beside Cody Hodgson and Steve Ott because the Sabres needed energy.

"We're looking for people that want to compete and want to work," Nolan said Monday. "It doesn't matter what your skill level is. There's nothing with no will. So we have to get him competing at a certain level. Some days he shows it, some days he doesn't."

Nolan also said: "You get frustrated with most people who don't do it on a consistent basis. But he's showed some signs lately."

Leino, three seasons into a six-year, \$27 million contract, said he's been talking with Nolan about his style.

"Obviously, I want to do that, too," he said. "You want to battle. You want to get dirty."

This is, of course, the roughest stretch of Leino's career.

"I haven't had a slump like this, that's for sure," said Leino, who noted he likes the team and has nothing bad to say.

Despite averaging 14:49 on the ice each game, the 30-year-old has just six assists. He hasn't scored since tallying twice March 30, his final appearance of 2012-13. Those are his only two goals in his last 39 games.

"Some days more, some days less," Leino said about his frustration. "But of course it's frustrating. There's no way around that."

Still, Leino, a strong puck carrier, has been generating some chances.

"There was a time period there, say 10 games ago, where we created," Leino said. "Our line was creating chances every game, five, six chances. But it just didn't go in. But there's still a couple of chances a game. I'd love to capitalize on some of those and get some numbers."

To capitalize, Leino has to start shooting. He has 22 shots all season, including zero in the last three games and one in five. He didn't record his first shot until his seventh appearance.

Plenty of players possess a pass-first mentality. But Leino's infamous for dishing when he's in prime scoring position.

"I should have more shooting," Leino said. "You know what? You have to have that if you want to score. Sometimes I'm lacking that a little bit. But when you're scoring, you're shooting. You see the puck go in. You want to shoot because you feel like you're going to score."

"But then if you're not scoring, you feel like you have to make a perfect play or a perfect pass to make something happen because it's just not going in. But then you're just going to have to simplify, shoot."

Does Leino, who went back to the wing last week following a two-month stint at center, sometimes kick himself after passing up a great chance?

"I do," he said. "Those are the annoying parts you feel after a game because you should've made a different decision. Those are the ones that every game, when the game starts, they haunt you a little bit."

Preview: Panthers at Buffalo Sabres; 7 p.m., Tuesday

By Harvey Fialkov
South Florida Sun Sentinel
January 20, 2014

Panthers at Sabres

When/Where: 7 p.m., First Niagara Center, Buffalo, N.Y.

TV: FSN; Radio: 560-WQAM

Scouting report: The Panthers played the Penguins Monday night and are 3-3-2 in second games of back-to-backs. The Panthers are 1-1 against the NHL-worst Sabres, winning 2-1 in Buffalo on Brad Boyes' shootout tally earlier this month, but losing 3-1 in Sunrise on Oct. 25 on Steve Ott's game-winner and Jhonas Enroth's 44 saves. Buffalo is 6-1-3 in their last 10 at home. The Sabres have lost two straight shootouts, including 4-3 to Columbus on Saturday. Buffalo has scored a league-low 86 goals. G Tim Thomas (ill) is expected to start against Ryan Miller. D Alex Petrovic (upper body), D Mike Mottau (leg) and D Dylan Olsen (ankle) are out. F Tomas Kopecky (upper body) is questionable.

Sabres Konopka understands Nolan's message

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 20, 2014

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Zenon Konopka has made a living out of playing hockey on the edge. It's a fine line in what he does and it has put him in the penalty box since coming to Buffalo and now into Ted Nolan's doghouse.

In six games with Buffalo, Konopka's taken four minor penalties. Three of the four penalties have been for goaltender interference and three of the four penalties have resulted in goals for the opposition. Nolan was upset about it after the Columbus game and he hadn't cooled down about it by Monday. Nolan said Konopka's going to have to wait his turn, "He's going to have to wait. If we're going to change things it can't be just for a chosen few, it has to be for everybody and those penalties could be avoided. We can't afford to take bad penalties in a game as they're going to kill us every time, so in order for us to show the young guys what it takes to win on a consistent basis, that's the type of thing we have to do."

Konopka has argued all three of his goaltender interference penalties, but he now knows he has to back off, "It's a fine line and I understand it being around this long (329 NHL games). I can't put myself in a position where maybe a so-so call or a 50-50 call can go against me. Do I totally agree with the call, no, but I shouldn't have put myself in a position where I they can call a penalty on me, especially in the offensive zone." Konopka added, "I've got to continue to go to the net, but I've got to be smarter with it."

You always hear hockey people talking about getting pucks and bodies to the net. How can Konopka get to where he wants to be, yet stop hitting the goalies? Does he have to pull up a stride shorter? He said, "Yes, it really is. I have to find that half a foot before you get there and make sure your momentum's not going in the net, it's going to the side of the net."

Konopka's been known as an agitator and a fighter throughout his career. He says this is new to him, "I've had a lot of penalty minutes throughout my career (he averages 263 minutes every 82 games played), but not a lot of minors, so hopefully we'll just learn from this and get passed it. I understand we have to set an example for all players up and down the lineup and we can't be taking penalties. We're not the most offensive team so message was loud and clear from the coach, I totally understand it and I'll learn from it."

Konopka has had a hand or wrist injury and I've wondered since he's been here if it's the reason why he hasn't dropped the mitts. He said, "It's not going to hinder my game in any way. The next morning it might feel a little sore, but you find a way as a veteran to get through situations where you do have an injury."

As far as having to keep the gloves on Konopka said, “Not necessarily, if something happens out there, I’m ready to roll, but we’ve talked about it in the dressing room and with the coaches to stay on the ice unless something happens to one of our skill players or if one of our players doesn’t feel fully comfortable out there, we’ll take care of it. My gloves are never glued on and always willing to come off.”

Konopka practiced on a fifth line Monday with two injured forwards Kevin Porter and Cody McCormick.

Sabres may insert two guys into Tuesday's lineup

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 20, 2014

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Sabres are getting healthier by the day. According to Ted Nolan, one of his defensemen could be back soon, "Tallinder is pretty close so it's probably going to be a game time decision."

Kevin Porter hopes to be back by the end of the week. Nolan said, "I'm not sure on him yet, but he's almost there." Porter has missed 11 games, but he says he's kept himself in pretty good shape, "It's pretty good, they've been skating us pretty good, so I feel pretty good, get some confidence back."

Linus Omark was back on a regular line after being a healthy scratch for two games. He took Ville Leino's place with Cody Hodgson and Steve Ott during Monday's practice. Nolan said, "We put him with that line combination and we'll see. We get another day to think about it, but I liked the way he practiced today."

All along Nolan has said that Omark had done nothing wrong to sit, it's just he didn't want to put him on a fourth line. Omark knew he had to wait his turn, "Of course you always want to play, but we'll see what happens. I've tried to work hard in practice, so I'm prepared if I'm going to play."

Omark likes his new lines, but he knows he has to hold up his end of things, "Cody and Ott are really good players, but I have to produce so it's an opportunity."

Omark is a very good passer, but he doesn't shoot much. Omark knows to play in this league, he has to pull the trigger, "Of course, everybody has to shoot more, but especially me. I try to find my teammate and set them up, but I need to get more shots on net." Omark only has three shots in nine games.

Most fans are at the end of their rope with Leino and Nolan hasn't liked a lot of what he's seen either, "I've sat down with every other player and Ville's no different. We're looking for people that want to compete and want to work. It doesn't matter what your skill level is, skill is nothing with no will. We have to get him competing at a certain level and some days he does it and some days he doesn't." Nolan added, "You're frustrated with most people that don't do it on a consistent basis, but he's shown some signs lately."

The Sabres welcome Florida back to town on Tuesday night.

What stats say the Sabres should do about....everyone? Part 3

By Matthew Collier

WGR 550

January 20, 2014

The Buffalo Sabres have new life. With the firing of Darcy Regier and hiring of Tim Murray, every player is being evaluated. Murray says he already has an idea of what he thinks of each player. Do you know what you'd like to see the Sabres do with each guy?

Well, what do the stats say? In Part 3 of 4, we explore what the numbers (and skill sets, contracts and intangibles) hint about what the Sabres should and will do with their young defenseman.

Mark Pysyk

What the stats say:

Considering Pysyk had only played a hand full of games in the NHL before this season and is only 22-years-old, it's pretty impressive that he's been able to step into No. 2 D-man minutes. He's been paired with Buffalo's top defenseman Christian Ehrhoff most and has performed fairly well.

Pysyk has faced the second toughest Quality of Competition (only to Ehrhoff) and a very low number of Offensive Zone starts for a rookie at 43.3, yet he's posted a +5.6 Relative Corsi (Plus-Minus of shot attempts compared to teammates) – second again to only Ehrhoff.

You might say the German defender is carrying his rookie partner, but last season while playing most with fringe D-man Adam Pardy, Pysyk had a very strong +7.4 Relative Corsi.

In terms of scoring, you won't see him putting up Erik Karlsson numbers any time soon, but more power play minutes in the future (and a better scoring set of forwards) might improve his goal and assist totals.

On the ice:

The band Bush did a song called Little Things that could have been about Mark Pysyk. He does so many of the little things correctly that he frustrates opponents and impresses those with a trained eye.

In his own zone, he has phenomenal footwork, play on-coming wingers like a cornerback in football. He positions his body and stick perfectly to force puck carriers to the outside and does not over react to the offensive player's dekes, hesitations or head loves.

Along the wall, he's nifty with the stick. He wins battles with his stick and has an uncanny ability to separate opponents from the puck. Creative own-zone passes are another strength. Pysyk has tremendous vision and a bag of tricks with his stick that include no look and backhand passes to his partner.

Not only is he a solid defensive player, but Pysyk is sneaky tough and a quiet leader type. He's a bright person on and off the ice – the type any team would like to have in their locker room.

The downside on the Sabres' first-round pick is that he isn't physically imposing and doesn't have a high scoring ceiling. He's conservative on the offensive end, preferring to keep the play in front of him.

Contract: RFA 2016

Verdict:

Projects to a quality second pairing defenseman on a good team. Will probably always go under the radar but is absolutely a player you want on the Sabres long term.

Brayden McNabb

What the stats say:

For a guy who's been flipped up and down between Buffalo and Rochester, McNabb has performed well. He's faced second-pairing Quality of Competition, a low Offensive Zone Start percentage (42.2%) and has come away with an above team average possession figure at +2.5 Relative Corsi.

Of course, it's still a very small sample. McNabb has only spent 148 minutes on ice at 5v5 for Buffalo this year, which is less than Rasmus Ristolainen and Alex Sulzer. So we could see those possession stats change.

McNabb hasn't added offense as of yet this season, but has had AHL success on the scoreboard. He posted 81 points in 127 AHL games – mostly as the No. 1 D-man and point man on the power play.

Back in 2011-12, the 6-foot-5 defenseman had 8 points in 25 games.

On the ice:

Since being called up for the third (?) time, McNabb has played a more conservative game. He hasn't been stepping up into the rush and pinching as much as he does in Rochester and did during his first stint this year with the Sabres. Playing it safe has had better results thus far.

Because he is a below average skater, he needs to be careful about taking chances. But McNabb does have offensive upside with good hands and the AHL's hardest shot. Unfortunately, he has trouble at times deciding when to turn on the offensive game and when to stay back. Getting the shot through traffic via an extra stride or quick snap has also been a problem at times with his shots getting blocked too often.

McNabb's physical play has been inconsistent at both levels. He's made some hard checks from time to time, but hasn't been intimidating.

What we need to keep in mind with the former third-round pick is that he's only 22 and needs time before he'll reach his ceiling. Decision making, physical play, skating – all areas in need of improvement, but ones where he has not reached maximum potential.

Contract: RFA 2015

Verdict:

McNabb's success or failure depends entirely on how hard he works to improve. Maybe you could say that about any prospect, but in his case, if he improves his skating he can be a very, very good defenseman. If he doesn't become a better skater, he will probably be a 5th or 6th defenseman who can chip in on the power play and add occasional physical presence. If he does take major steps forward with his feet, maybe there's more there. McNabb is part of the promising group of young defenseman that the Sabres probably would rather not part with.

Rasmus Ristolainen

What the stats say:

In 277 minutes as an NHL player, the Sabres' first-round pick did not perform at a level that justified keeping him in The Show. When he was on the ice, the Sabres only controlled 38.9% of the shot attempts. Ron Rolston used him properly with sheltered minutes against easy competition, but he still finished his NHL time with a -12.1 Relative Corsi. Offensively speaking, he took only about one shot on goal per game and scored one goal.

Since being sent to the AHL, Ristolainen has only played eight games and has scored 5 points and taken 21 shots.

On the ice:

The Sabres selected Ristolainen with the 9th overall pick for a reason. For a player his size – 6-foot-4, 220-pounds, the Finnish defender is a great skater with an explosive first step. He can carry the puck at an extremely high level, with the

ability stick handle through traffic and hold the puck until he can find open teammates with a pass or fire a slap shot.

Defensively, he offers both the ability to stick with the top players in the league with his speed or intimidate with his physical presence. Ristolainen is not afraid to slam an opponent into the wall, hip check a player at the blue line or use his body to win 1-on-1 battles. From a makeup standpoint, he comes off as having a good attitude and willingness to learn.

Overall, he's an all-around talent who projects as a Top 2 defenseman who can log huge minutes at even strength against the toughest competition. His combo of offense and defensive ability makes him a strong candidate for playing both power play and penalty kill.

That said, he needs plenty of work to get to NHL level. In Rochester, Ristolainen will be learning when to carry the puck through center ice and when to make simple plays, when to step up into a big hit and when to back off and when to pinch in the offensive zone.

Contract: RFA 2017

Verdict:

We'll want to rush him because we've received a sneak peak of his talent in the NHL, AHL and at the World Juniors, but we have to be patient. Defensemen take longer to progress to NHL level than most forwards. It's a position that takes a mature mind to be great as well as the ability to get over mistakes and overcome pressure. He'll get there. Pencil him into the lineup in two years and as a top pairing defenseman thereafter if things go as expected.

Nikita Zadorov

What the stats say:

The Sabres' 16th overall draft pick only received seven games in the NHL before being sent back to juniors. In that very, very small sample, he performed better than Ristolainen, facing slightly harder competition and a 39.7% Offensive Zone Start percentage and posting a decent -1.1 Relative Corsi.

Hits are a pretty debatable statistic, but Zadorov's figure stands out. The rookie posted 25 hits in just seven games, living up to his draft-day billing as a physical player.

In junior and in the World Juniors, the 6-foot-5 D-man is a +38 and has 34 points in 77 games.

On the ice:

While he was pumped up at the draft for being a physical and fearless, Zadorov is surprisingly mobile and offensively savvy. He is a very good skater for his size with some explosiveness and the ability to turn and pivot quickly.

While he may not quite have the hands and vision of Ristolainen, Zadorov is a confident passer who can move the puck well in his own zone especially. He also has a strong shot, as was demonstrated with several goals in the World Juniors. You could see him playing power play minutes long term.

In terms of makeup, the young D-man is very confident in himself, hopefully not too much to continue to learn.

Contract: RFA 2017

Verdict:

Kevin Devine has said the Sabres have been extremely impressed with Zadorov's progression and surprised by his growth offensively. He may be slightly less of a "sure thing" than Ristolainen, but his ceiling is that of a true franchise defenseman who can do it all and be a dominating physical presence who plays huge, difficult minutes.

Like Ristolainen, he may need more time before he can play every night in the NHL, but he's a major part of the long-term plan.

Amerks One Liners

Chad Ruhwedel – Has been solid for Rochester. Lack of height or high end offensive skill may prevent him from play in the NHL nightly. Projects as an AHL defenseman who can provide solid depth when injuries hit

Drew Bagnall – One of the smartest players you'll ever meet. A stand up leader, currently the Amerks captain. Doesn't have foot speed or puck moving skills to play full-time in the NHL, but a great guy to have in the organization.

Matt McKenzie – Has some mobility and puck handling skill, but is a ways away from being ready for the NHL.

Jerome Gauthier-Leduc – With some quality offensive skills, JGL could become a puck-moving defenseman. However, he's light on the puck and isn't an elite skater. He's got years of progression and hard work to go if he's ever going to play in the NHL

OMARK SKATES WITH HODGSON, OTT

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

January 20, 2014

Linus Omark has been waiting for his opportunity to get back into the Buffalo Sabres lineup. It may come Tuesday night against the Florida Panthers.

Omark skated on the second line with center Cody Hodgson and left wing Steve Ott at practice Monday morning. He's been a healthy scratch the past two games and is looking for his first goal of the season. In nine games with the Sabres, he has one assist.

"Both Cody and Ott are really good players, so then I have to produce," he said after practice at First Niagara Center. "It's an opportunity if I'm going to play with those guys."

He wasn't sure if he'll be in the lineup against Panthers but is working with the mindset that he will be.

"Of course you always want to play but we'll see what happens now if I'm going to play next game or not. I have tried to work hard in practice and off-ice, so I'm prepared if I play."

Sabres interim coach Ted Nolan said he'll make a decision on the roster after the team's morning skate on Tuesday.

"We'll give it another day to think about but I liked the way [Omark] practiced today," he said.

GREAT SEATS STILL AVAILABLE FOR TUESDAY VS. FLORIDA

Ville Leino, who played with Hodgson and Ott on Saturday, practiced at right wing on the fourth line with John Scott and Matt Ellis.

"We're looking for people that want to compete and want to work. It doesn't matter what your skill level [is]. Skill is nothing with no will," Nolan said. "So we have to get [Leino] competing at a certain level and some days he shows it and some days he doesn't."

Henrik Tallinder and Kevin Porter are closer to returning. Tallinder's been out since New Year's Eve with an upper-body injury while Porter has missed 11 games with a lower-body injury.

"Tallidner is pretty close so he'll probably be a game-time decision," Nolan said.

Porter said he's feeling better every day and didn't rule out the possibility of being ready for Florida.

"Hopefully in the next couple days," he said. "I'm not sure. I still need to talk to the training staff and the coaches and see what they say."

The practice on Monday marked his first time skating with the team in a regular jersey. He'd been skating in a red jersey, signaling no contact.

Porter practiced with Zenon Konopka as extra forwards. Konopka has committed three minor penalties in the past three games and the opposing power play has scored each time Konopka has been in the box. He'll likely be a healthy scratch against the Panthers.

WATCH: TED NOLAN PRESS CONFERENCE

"He's going to have to wait. If you're going to change things, it can't just be for a chosen few. It has to be for everybody and those penalties, they could be avoided," Nolan said. "We can't afford to take bad penalties. We can't afford to [make] too many turnovers in a game. They're going to kill us every time."

So in order for us to show the young guys what it takes to try to win on a consistent basis, those are the types of things we have to do."

Five Sabres players had their heads shaved after practice in the First Niagara Center atrium as part of the "Goin' Bald For Bucks" campaign. The players are raising money to support critical research and cancer care programs at Roswell Park Cancer Institute. They were surrounded by students from several schools in the area.

Cody Hodgson, who had his head shaved by goaltender Ryan Miller, will match every dollar donated to the Sabres "Goin' Bald For Bucks" page. He also grew his hair out for about a month in anticipation of the event.

"I was going to get it cut within that week and then they asked, and I was like, 'It would be much better if I let it grow a little bit,'" he said afterward. "That's actually the longest my hair's ever been. It feels kind of weird, really airy without it. It'll probably look better though than that big afro."

Hodgson said that Mike Weber was the first player to commit to shaving his head and he agreed soon after. Mark Pysyk, Brayden McNabb and Alexander Sulzer also had their heads shaved. Miller, Steve Ott, Brian Flynn, Drew Stafford and John Scott played the role of barbers.

Donations can be made at BaldForBucks.org. The Sabres donation page can be found here. Donations will be accepted through the website through Friday.

26 Matt Moulson – 63 Tyler Ennis – 21 Drew Stafford
9 Steve Ott – 19 Cody Hodgson – 17 Linus Omark
82 Marcus Foligno – 65 Brian Flynn – 28 Zemgus Girgensons
32 John Scott – 37 Matt Ellis – 23 Ville Leino
12 Kevin Porter – 24 Zenon Konopka
Red Non-Contact: 8 Cody McCormick

10 Christian Ehrhoff – 3 Mark Pysyk
6 Mike Weber – 57 Tyler Myers
44 Brayden McNabb – 4 Jamie McBain
20 Henrik Tallinder – 52 Alexander Sulzer .

30 Ryan Miller
1 Jhonas Enroth

SABRES PROSPECTS REPORT

By Kris Baker

Sabres.com

January 20, 2014

Linus Ullmark (2012, sixth round) continued his stellar goaltending last week, highlighted by a 45-save performance Friday as MODO knocked off SHL front-runner Skelleftea AIK 2-1. Prior to the big win, Ullmark stopped 24 of 25 shots Wednesday to guide MODO to a 4-1 victory over Orebro HK.

A bulky, flexible backstop, Ullmark has continued his steady rise among Swedish goaltending prospects while playing his first full SHL (Swedish Hockey League) season. The 20-year old has racked up 12 wins while amassing a 1.96 GAA (3rd in SHL) and league-best .936 save%, and will likely garner strong consideration for SHL Rookie of the Year honors at season's end.

QMJHL

Mikhail Grigorenko (2012, first round) posted a successful return to the QMJHL Saturday, notching the game-winning goal with 7:30 left to play as Quebec defeated Rouyn-Noranda 5-3. Grigorenko, who parked in front and connected with his only shot on goal of the night, rounded out the first-star effort with a pair of assists and an 83.9 percent efficiency (26/31) at the faceoff circle.

OHL

Nicholas Baptiste (2013, third round) scored the only goal of the game Friday as Sudbury edged Plymouth 1-0. The next night, Baptiste scored his 25th goal of the year as the Wolves lost at Saginaw 4-3. Baptiste has scored in five of eight January starts, and has collected eight points (4+4) in six games since Radek Faksa (DAL) joined the team via trade with Kitchener.

Justin Bailey (2013, second round) opened the game's scoring with his 18th goal Thursday, but Kitchener came up short in a 6-2 loss to London. The big winger, who was blanked in the Rangers' Friday and Saturday losses, has been using his size more of late en route to scoring nine goals in his last 15 games. The upward trend comes after potting nine through the season's first 30 contests. Bailey is currently second on the Rangers in scoring with 33 points (18+15) through 45 games.

Saginaw captain Eric Locke (2013, seventh round) posted a goal and an assist Saturday to earn the game's number one star as the Spirit skated to their sixth-straight victory, 4-3 over Sudbury. Locke, who is riding an eight-game point streak, is currently fifth in team scoring with 34 points (15+19) despite missing six weeks with a shoulder injury.

In Friday action, Justin Kea (2012, third round) scored two goals as Saginaw edged London 3-1. The two-goal night, his third such performance of the year, was capped off with an empty-netter in the game's final minute. Kea has 17 goals and 36 points this season while taking key draws and providing stout defensive zone play.

Nikita Zadorov (2013, first round) picked up a pair of assists Thursday in London's 6-2 win over Kitchener. The big defender has three assists in six games since returning from the 2014 IIHF World Junior Championship.

London defenseman Brady Austin (2012, seventh round) was kept off the scoresheet in the week's three games. The left-handed rearguard has 18 points (6+12) and a plus-25 rating through 45 games.

WHL

Logan Nelson (2012, fifth round) went without a point Friday as Victoria got past Kelowna 3-1. The Minnesota native had played in just two of the Royals' previous 13 games while nursing an upper body injury. Nelson returned to work Saturday, earning an assist as the Royals were defeated by the league's top club Kelowna 5-3. The helper was Nelson's first point since Dec. 7.

NCAA

Sean Malone (2013, sixth round) notched a goal and an assist Friday as Harvard was defeated by No. 12 Cornell 3-2. Malone was blanked the next night in a 4-2 loss to Colgate. Malone's third multi-point game of the year gives the speedy freshman four goals and 11 points in 18 games.

Christian Isackson (2012, seventh round) contributed three shots on goal over the weekend as No. 1 Minnesota swept Ohio State. Isackson has appeared in 11 of the Gophers' 22 games this season, recording a goal and three assists.

Providence defensemen Anthony Florentino (2013, fifth round) and Mark Adams (2009, fifth round) both remained out of action with injuries as No. 7 Providence earned a tie and a win at Colorado College.

Freshman centerman J.T. Compher (2013, second round) had the week off as No. 13 Michigan prepared for a B1G set with rival Michigan State beginning Thursday at Joe Louis Arena in Detroit. Compher ranks second in team points with 15 (6+9) after 18 games.

Defenseman Jake McCabe (2012, second round) and winger Brad Navin (2011, seventh round) were idle as No. 9 Wisconsin looks ahead to hosting Ohio State

for a pair of games this weekend. McCabe leads all Badgers defender with 16 points (5+11), while Navin's play has seen him net six points (3+3), a plus-nine rating, and an increased role for coach Mike Eaves.

USHL

In Friday action, Cal Petersen (2013, fifth round) made 17 saves to earn his ninth-consecutive win as Waterloo held on for a 4-3 victory at Youngstown. The Phantoms appeared to tie the game late in the third period, but the goal was disallowed after it was ruled that it was tipped past Petersen with a high stick. Petersen improves to 20-2-1 on the year, with a 2.48 GAA and .916 save%. His 20 wins are most in the USHL.

Judd Peterson (2012, seventh round) snapped his five-game goal drought with his 13th of the year and added a helper as Cedar Rapids downed Chicago 4-1. The second-year forward, who has connected on 25 percent of his 52 shots this season, ranks second on the RoughRiders in points with 23 (13+10) through 32 contests.

Connor Hurley (2013, second round) picked up a goal and an assist Friday as Green Bay lost to Cedar Rapids 4-3. Hurley added another helper Saturday to extend his point streak to six games as Green Bay dropped a 4-1 decision to Sioux City. Hurley has eight points in eight games since being traded to the Gamblers for a cumulative season total of 22 (7+15).

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.