



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

February 3, 2014

Oilers-Sabres Preview

By Alan Ferguson

Associated Press

February 2, 2014

The Edmonton Oilers and Buffalo Sabres are at the bottom of their respective conferences, but one team has been decidedly more successful this week.

The Oilers seek their fourth win in five games Monday night when they visit the Sabres, losers of six straight at home but winners of six in a row in the series.

Edmonton (18-33-6) has allowed a league-worst 194 goals but gave up three total during a three-game winning streak. The Oilers couldn't earn a season-high fourth straight victory Saturday, falling 4-0 to Boston.

Ben Scrivens gave up three third-period goals, one game after making 59 saves in a 3-0 win over San Jose on Wednesday. That established a regular-season NHL record for saves in a shutout.

"We've got to take what we can from it," he said of the defeat to the Bruins. "We went into the third period in a one-goal game in a tough environment."

Edmonton will try to get back in the win column by sending Buffalo (15-31-8) to its ninth loss in 11 games. While they rank last in the league with 105 goals, defense has been the main culprit in the Sabres' recent struggles.

Buffalo has allowed 40 goals during its 2-5-3 stretch and gave up its highest total of the season in a 7-1 loss at Colorado on Saturday.

"It's obviously a hard game for us. A very tough game for us," said Ryan Miller, who was pulled after the second period. "We have to come to compete from the start."

Backup Jhonas Enroth will reportedly start Monday instead of Miller. Enroth has never faced Edmonton.

Scrivens has gone 1-1-1 with a 1.51 goals-against average in his last three appearances against the Sabres.

The Sabres had recorded seven goals in two games before Saturday's lopsided defeat, and they've scored three or more in eight of the last 10, including a 3-2 win in Phoenix on Thursday.

Tyler Ennis has four goals and seven assists in his past 11 games, while Cody Hodgson has six goals and three assists in his last 10.

The Sabres are 0-3-3 in their last six at home and have given up 22 goals in the last five of those. Five of the six defeats have come by one goal.

Buffalo has outscored Edmonton 26-10 in its six consecutive wins in the series. Edmonton has gone 2-10-2 in its last 14 road games.

The Sabres are expected to get forward Drew Stafford back Monday after he missed four games due to an upper-body ailment. Stafford had three goals and two assists in the four games before suffering his injury Jan. 25.

Avalanche pound Sabres 7-1

Associated Press

February 1, 2014

DENVER (AP) -- The Colorado Avalanche took a chance when they drafted Nathan MacKinnon first overall last June.

The rookie is rewarding their faith with a stellar first season.

MacKinnon had a goal and two assists, Jamie McGinn had two goals and an assist, and Colorado beat the Buffalo Sabres 7-1 on Saturday.

Gabriel Landeskog also had two goals and Semyon Varlamov had 27 saves for the Avalanche, who have won three straight.

Varlamov also had his second assist of the season.

Colorado is having a bounce-back season after finishing at the bottom of the Western Conference last year.

The rebound started with earning the top pick in the draft, and the Avalanche opted for the speedy MacKinnon instead of homegrown defenseman Seth Jones.

The decision has paid off. MacKinnon has 20 goals and 40 points to lead all rookies in scoring.

"I've been feeling more comfortable. I think I was a little snake-bit at the beginning and could've score more than I did," said the 18-year-old MacKinnon, who had his first three-point game. "Thankfully things are clicking, I've developed chemistry with guys on the team."

The Avalanche were playing their final home game before going on a four-game East Coast road trip ahead of the Olympic break. They have won eight of 10 and are 35-14-5. It's their best start to a season since 2000-01 when they won the Stanley Cup.

Marc-Andre Cliche scored his first NHL goal and Tyson Barrie also scored for the Avalanche.

Colorado continued its mastery over the Sabres. The Avalanche have won seven straight against Buffalo.

"We weren't ready to go from the get go," Buffalo coach Ted Nolan said. "We never laid a body on anyone. It was a very ugly game to watch."

The Avalanche jumped ahead early and didn't need to sweat out the end as they did against Minnesota on Thursday.

They scored three quick goals on Olympian Ryan Miller in the first. Barrie started the flurry with his seventh of the season at 7:37, and McGinn and Landeskog had goals 58 seconds apart later in the period.

MacKinnon feathered a pass through the defense to Landeskog, who tapped it into the empty net.

"He's a special player," Avalanche coach Patrick Roy said of MacKinnon. "The third goal, the speed he put on on the ice was magic. Landy ended up with an open net. It was such a nice play. I see huge improvement in his game."

Cliche made it 4-0 early in the second.

"I just said, 'finally,'" Cliche said. "So much weight off my shoulder. I know maybe I'm not supposed to score, but when you score one like that it feels unbelievable, especially in a 7-1 win like this."

Were his teammates happy to see him get his first goal? Indeed.

After all, he's been doing the dirty work for Colorado all season.

"We wanted him to score that for so long and he's had so many chances lately, it was great to see him score that one," Landeskog said. "The whole bench erupted. He's such an awesome team guy, he doesn't complain, he goes out there and does his job. Tonight he finally got rewarded for his hard work."

Miller is headed to his third Olympics for Team USA, but he didn't look sharp against Colorado. He allowed three goals on his first 11 shots and finished with 22 saves. He was pulled in favor of Jhonas Enroth to start the third period.

Enroth had 10 saves.

"It's obviously a hard game for us. A very tough game for us," Miller said. "We have to come to compete from the start. That's where we lost the game."

Miller didn't receive much offensive support from his teammates, who had just 10 shots on goal midway through the second. The Sabres finally broke through when Matt D'Agostini scored on the power play at 11:45 of the second.

MacKinnon answered on a power play later in the period to make it 5-1.

Landeskog and McGinn scored 2:31 apart in the third to make it 7-1.

NOTES: Colorado D Erik Johnson had three assists. ... Avalanche C Paul Stastny (ankle) and RW Alex Tanguay (knee) were scratched. ... Buffalo D Christian Ehrhoff was back in the lineup after missing Thursday's game due to an illness. ... Colorado RW P.A. Parenteau returned to action after being a healthy scratch for two games. He assisted on Landeskog's goal.

Avs' young, impressive skaters bury Sabres

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 1, 2014

DENVER — When the Sabres started their rebuild talk, they brought up Pittsburgh and Chicago as clubs to emulate. Sure, those teams are great role models, but it would be just as wise to mimic Colorado.

The Avalanche showed more talent Saturday than any opponent Buffalo has faced this season. The Sabres didn't stand a chance.

The speedy, slick-passing Avs did whatever they wanted in a 7-1 victory in Pepsi Center. The crowd of 16,649 ate it up, creating a fun-filled afternoon for everyone except the players in white, blue and gold.

"It just seemed when goals were going in for them it never really stopped," Sabres left wing Marcus Foligno said. "We took a step back."

The Avs tried – and, more impressively, completed – the type of plays kids dream up in video games. They had spin moves, rushes and passes that usually show up only in freewheeling All-Star Games.

"That's a really good group of forwards, really skilled, really fast, and they're going to kill you in transition," right wing Brian Flynn said. "They obviously did."

It was a harsh reminder for the Sabres and their fans of how far the organization really has to go. No matter how hard the Sabres would have worked Saturday, there was no way they could have matched the skill that was on display.

"Where they were last year is kind of where we are this year," Sabres captain Steve Ott said of last season's 29th-place finisher, which improved to 35-14-5 this year. "Hopefully, it's a good proving point to this team and a lot of our young guys going forward that when you take the right steps you can play hockey like that."

The Avs improved through the draft. Nathan MacKinnon, selected first overall in last year's selection process, looked more like a candidate for MVP than Rookie of the Year. He had a goal and three points.

He had plenty of help. Gabriel Landeskog, selected second overall in 2011, and Jamie McGinn scored two goals each. Defenseman Erik Johnson had three assists. Eleven Avs reached the score sheet, including goaltender Semyon Varlamov (one assist, 27 saves).

"Those are top-end guys that played well and played strong, and they really took it to us," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. "It was just one of those very, very ugly games you don't want to see too often."

The Avs led, 3-0, after the first period and built a 5-1 cushion after 40 minutes. Nolan put goaltender Ryan Miller out of his misery by inserting Jhonas Enroth for the third, and the Avs showed there was enough misery to go around with two more goals.

“Straight out they embarrassed us, and we embarrassed Ryan Miller,” Ott said. “There was no support at all. Ryan’s key is stopping pucks, but a lot of them were back-door tap-ins or stuff that has to be picked up by the off-side forward or the D-men.

“You get in a hole against a good, young team like this, it’s going to sting like it did.”

The seven goals were the most allowed by the Sabres, while the Avs set their season high for goals scored. They’ve scored four or more in 22 of their 54 games, which is why they rank sixth in the NHL at 3.0 goals per game.

“They’re really fast,” Foligno said. “We saw a lot of neutral-zone play how they bump pucks back to guys that are skating forward, and that’s smart. That’s just a team that has the neutral zone down pat.

“Those guys fly. If you’re standing flat-footed against those guys, you have no chance.”

The 30th-place Sabres get a team more their speed Monday as 29th-ranked Edmonton comes to First Niagara Center.

“It was a bad effort by us,” defenseman Henrik Tallinder said. “I don’t know what happened. Everything happened. What could go wrong did.”

When Sabres play Oilers, it won't be clash of titans

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 3, 2014

The game to prove who is football's best is over. The game to show who is hockey's worst is ready to face off.

The 30th-place Sabres host the 29th-place Edmonton Oilers tonight in First Niagara Center. While it hardly carries the same significance as the Super Bowl – OK, it's not even in the same stratosphere as the Super Bowl – it does have meaning.

Buffalo and Edmonton are the runaway leaders to finish last in the NHL. Whoever earns the "honor" gets the best shot at winning the draft lottery and selecting first in June.

Gentlemen, start your draft boards!

It's back to the drawing board for the Sabres. In a season full of embarrassing moments, their last game is near the top of the list, at least as far as on-ice indignities go. Colorado humiliated Buffalo, 7-1, to drop the Sabres to 15-31-8.

The Sabres are just 2-5-3 in the last 10 games.

"You look where we are," coach Ted Nolan said. "You're not going to play a consistent game all the time if you're in bottom place. That's why we're in bottom place."

Nolan was as angry after the game as he's been during his tenure. He sat in the corner of the dressing room as players tried to explain themselves, then looked to end his own chat with a brief stutter step and upraised eyebrow that showed he didn't want to talk anymore.

"Guys just don't get it," Nolan said. "Some guys are continuously making the same mistakes, and we continuously tell them. What more can you do? So we've just got to go back to the drawing board and go back at it."

The coach was back to his philosophical ways at Sunday's practice.

"The one thing I learned a long time ago is you can do too much about yesterday," Nolan said in First Niagara Center. "It's gone, but the one thing you can do is learn from it."

Forwards Drew Stafford and Linus Omark are scheduled to return to the lineup. Stafford has missed four games with an injury, and the Sabres will need to make

a roster move to clear a spot for him. Stafford had three goals and five points in four games before getting hurt Jan. 25 against Columbus.

The Sabres acquired Omark from Edmonton for a conditional sixth-round draft pick in December. He hasn't found a home, putting up two assists in 11 games. Nolan scratched the winger in six of the last eight games, including the past three.

"So far it hasn't worked out too well, but maybe this time it will," Nolan said. "We want to see what everybody thought he was capable of doing when they drafted him and he came in this league. He's a highly skilled player, but as we know skill can only get you so far.

"We want to see him play with a little more grit combined with that skill set."

Jhonas Enroth is scheduled to start in goal for the Sabres. While fans might desire a loss to improve the draft stock, Enroth needs a victory.

The netminder is 1-10-5 and hasn't won since Oct. 25 in Florida. Following a 2-1 shootout loss to Florida on Jan. 9, Enroth said, "It's tough to win with this team." He's proved it.

Enroth has allowed 13 goals in three starts since the comment, going 0-2-1 with a 4.33 goals-against average and .870 save percentage.

"Last game, a couple got by him real quick and how he responded was a really good sign," Nolan said of a 5-4 overtime loss to Washington that featured 30 saves. "You see a young goaltender trying to get himself really established in this league. Obviously, he wants to be a No. 1 down the road."

Enroth needs to show he can lead a team because the Sabres' crease situation could get complicated. Factoring in the Olympic roster freeze and the March 5 trade deadline, the Sabres have just 14 working days left to deal Ryan Miller. If Buffalo's new management doesn't believe in Enroth, it could acquire another goaltender.

Edmonton, meanwhile, suffered a 4-0 setback Saturday in Boston. It ended a three-game winning streak that followed a six-game winless streak (0-5-1). The Oilers are 18-33-6. They have 42 points compared to the Sabres' 38, but they've also played three more games. Edmonton has 25 games remaining, while Buffalo has 28.

There's still time to see who gets to brag, "We're No. 29!" but today's game will have an impact.

"I expect Buffalo to be coming out hard after losing their game the way they did to Colorado," Edmonton coach Dallas Eakins said. "We're in no position to take anybody lightly where we're at in the standings."

Sabres notebook: Buffalo not showing interest in Callahan

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 2, 2014

DENVER — New York Rangers captain Ryan Callahan is on the market, but the Sabres aren't shopping for him. At least not yet.

Multiple reports say New York has given teams permission to talk with Callahan's agent about a sign-and-trade deal for the pending unrestricted free agent. The Sabres have not inquired about Callahan, a source with knowledge of the situation tells The Buffalo News.

Callahan, a Rochester native who will represent the United States at the Olympics, is finishing a three-year deal that pays \$4.275 million annually. The 28-year-old winger has nine goals and 21 points in 39 games.

"I'm not going to talk about that stuff now," Callahan told reporters Saturday in New York. "I don't think it's productive to the process, the negotiations or anything."

...

Colorado was home to Joe Sacco during the previous four seasons. The former Avalanche coach finally made it back this weekend as an assistant with the Sabres, and it was quite a feeling.

"It's a little strange," Sacco said before Saturday's 7-1 loss in Pepsi Center. "It feels good, though. It feels good to be back. This was a place that I was at for four years, and obviously you develop a lot of friendships with some people. It's just a little strange."

Sacco went 130-134-31 during his run on the Avs' bench, and the organization let him go after missing the playoffs for third straight time last season. It's not a surprise that his fondest memories are from the first year. Colorado went 43-30-9 to make an unexpected playoff appearance in 2009-10.

"Getting to the playoffs the first year after the season before it was pretty down, to get it turned around that quickly, the players did a really good job," Sacco said. "That was something you always remember."

It's been a tumultuous ride for Sacco since joining Buffalo in July. Hired by ex-coach Ron Rolston, he's worked alongside a relative stranger, Ted Nolan, since November. Though the assistants and head coach were thrown together on the fly, they've found common ground.

“It’s going well,” Sacco said. “Everybody’s starting to find their niche with Teddy now, their roles and their responsibilities and what we’re supposed to be doing as a coaching staff.”

Added Nolan: “It’s tough for anybody to get thrown in halfway through or a quarter of the way through. You haven’t had the luxury of going through training camp and getting to know the players as well as you should. Everything was brand new. It was kind of a hurdle to really get to know the players first, and then work with the coaching staff as we went along.

“We all know our roles and responsibilities. Things are going well. They prepare our team as well as anybody does, so it’s good.”

Though the Sabres fell hard Saturday, Sacco is impressed with the team’s improvement in some areas.

“The room, obviously, seems like it’s got some good energy at times even though right now we’re still struggling to find consistency in our game,” Sacco said. “It’s not from lack of effort most nights. It’s not from lack of passion, and I think those intangibles are the important things that you can instill in a club.

“Obviously, you want to do the X’s and O’s, but when the passion is there you always give yourself a chance to win.”

...

Christian Ehrhoff, who missed Thursday’s game in Phoenix due to illness, returned to the lineup. He skated in place of Alex Sulzer and had one assist and minus-1 rating in 22:37.

Thirteen of the Sabres’ 18 skaters had a minus next to their name. Tyler Myers was minus-4, while Henrik Tallinder and Matt Ellis were minus-3.

...

The tunnel vision coaches can have while preparing their team was on display in Denver. The downtown area is awash in orange as folks prepare to cheer the Broncos today in the Super Bowl.

“You know, I never even noticed,” said Nolan, whose club was staying in a Bronco-free hotel outside the city center. “We’re concentrating on what we doing here first, then I guess there’s a big game after us.”

'For Rent' sign goes up for Islanders' Vanek

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 2, 2014

DENVER — When Thomas Vanek started the season, his future residence was in doubt. We're nearing the homestretch, and his hockey home remains a major question mark.

One thing is certain: A lot of teams will have a say in where he goes.

The first of two NHL trade deadlines comes this week, and Vanek is the top name on the market. The former Sabres forward has performed well for the New York Islanders — 15 goals and 38 points in 41 games — but the team is well out of a playoff spot.

It means the pending unrestricted free agent could be on the move for the second time.

While Vanek headlines the rentals (players with expiring contracts on non-playoff teams), he's hardly alone. Buffalo fans are already well-aware of that as they prepare for the possible departures of Ryan Miller, Matt Moulson, Steve Ott and Henrik Tallinder.

Here are the names you'll hear a lot in the coming week and month as the league prepares for a pair of roster freezes. No moves will be allowed during the Olympic break, starting Friday and ending Feb. 23. The normal trade deadline is March 5, just 10 days later.

Forwards

Head of the class: Vanek. He's remained focused during his move downstate, totaling 19 goals and 47 points in 54 games. He's shown a trade won't impact his production. His playoff experience is a bonus. Vanek put up 15 goals and 20 points in 36 games with the Sabres. The postseason is what rentals are all about.

Not far behind: Ryan Callahan, Rangers; Jaromir Jagr, New Jersey; Paul Stastny, Colorado; Mike Cammalleri, Calgary, Moulson.

Jagr continues to excel nearing age 42. He leads the Devils with 17 goals and 48 points, but that's not what makes him special. This former hoister of the Stanley Cup has 78 goals and 199 points in 202 playoff games. That experience is immeasurable, but New Jersey still feels it can make a run.

Stastny makes the list despite being on a playoff squad. It's not known if he'll re-sign, and the Avalanche simply can't allow him to walk away for nothing.

Cammalleri, like Jagr and Vanek, brings playoff experience. He has 17 goals and 32 points in 32 postseason games, crunch-time stats that should make a general manager's mouth water.

New York has reportedly given teams permission to speak with Callahan's agent about a trade and contract extension. The two-way captain would dramatically improve any lineup.

Also of interest: Ott; Ray Whitney, Dallas; Devin Setoguchi, Winnipeg; Brad Boyes, Florida; Olli Jokinen, Winnipeg; Ales Hensky, Edmonton; Lee Stempniak, Calgary.

Two types of teams will be intrigued by Ott. Clubs that don't have a lot of playoff experience might want the captain for his leadership ability. Established clubs would love adding him for all-around depth, though he has just three goals and five points in 34 playoff games.

Whitney (53 points in 103 games) and Setoguchi (25 in 53) provide playoff experience.

Defense

Head of the class: Tom Gilbert, Florida. Obviously, it's not a very strong class. The 6-foot-3 defenseman has offensive abilities with 24 points in 54 games. He's also one of the Panthers' leaders in Corsi rating, so he's typically not a defensive liability. However, he's played more than 500 games (mostly with Edmonton) and has just five games of playoff experience.

Not far behind: Tallinder; Kris Russell, Calgary; Andrew MacDonald, Islanders. Tallinder can make a case for the top spot. The Swedish Olympian has more postseason games than his four colleagues combined, skating 39 times under Cup pressure while putting up 12 points.

Goaltender

Head of the class: Miller. What is there to write that you don't already know? He's backstopped the Sabres to two Eastern Conference finals and led the United States to a silver medal. Although goalies historically don't attract more than a second-round pick, he might make enough GMs salivate to drive a bidding war.

Not far behind: Jaroslav Halak, St. Louis; Anton Khudobin, Carolina, Brian Elliott, St. Louis.

The Blues are an oft-mentioned Miller suitor, which would make at least one of their goalies expendable. Despite folks saying Halak probably can't carry St. Louis to a Cup, he has a 2.42 goals-against average and .923 save percentage in 23 postseason games. Miller, by comparison, has a 2.47 and .917 in 47 games.

Khudobin is an interesting case. The 27-year-old has played well for the Hurricanes (12-4, 2.16, .927), but Carolina has Cam Ward locked up for two more years at \$6.3 million per season. It's unlikely it would be willing to commit to two big-dollar goalies, so a move is possible despite the Hurricanes' playoff hopes.

Also of interest: Evgeni Nabokov, Islanders. He's been mediocre, but his 86 postseason games are a bonus.

Dancing with words

I enjoy Ted Nolan's interviews. The Sabres' coach is insightful, forthcoming and honest (with the obvious exception of injury updates). He also talks really fast when the recorders are rolling, which can jumble the words and make for interesting comments.

When discussing meeting players' parents the other day, Nolan meant to say you learn about the players' quirks. What actually came out was, "You talk to the parents and find out some of the little twerks."

Alas, Miley Cyrus was not on the trip.

On the fly

- Flyers General Manager Paul Holmgren on the trade deadline: "It's getting to the point where we need to see what we have, see what's out there and make a move if we're going to do it. ... I firmly believe in the nucleus that we have here. That doesn't mean if something comes up now and for the future that we wouldn't think about it."
- Why are the Blue Jackets in the Eastern Conference playoff race after a slow start? Columbus is tied for seventh in scoring (2.87 goals per game) after finishing 20th or worse in 12 of the previous 13 seasons.
- During the second intermission of the Sabres and Coyotes, Phoenix showed a video of Paul Bissonnette talking about the Super Bowl with Shane Doan, who recently returned from a severe illness. Bissonnette, the resident comedian, cracked: "I'm sure you're rooting for the Denver Broncos because you have Rocky Mountain fever."

Sabres aim to bounce back vs. Oilers

NHL.com

February 2, 2014

OILERS (18-33-6) AT SABRES (15-31-8)

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

Last 10: Edmonton 3-6-1; Buffalo 2-5-3

Season series: The Buffalo Sabres and Edmonton Oilers have not played each other season. They last met over two years ago, Jan. 3 2012, when the Sabres used two third-period goals to edge the Oilers, 4-3.

Big story: The Sabres look for their first home win since Jan 4. They have dropped six games in a row at First Niagara Center. The Oilers continue a four-game road trip; they will face the New York Rangers and New Jersey Devils later in the week before the Olympic break.

Team Scope:

Oilers: Edmonton had won three games in a row before a 4-0 loss to the Boston Bruins on Saturday. It was the seventh time they were shut out this season. Despite facing a Sabres team with the fewest points in the League, the Oilers aren't expecting two points to come easy.

"We're in now position to take anyone lightly," Oilers coach Dallas Eakins said after practice Sunday. "We are at where we are at in the standings. I expect Buffalo to come out hard after losing their game the way they did against Colorado."

The game features two teams with the fewest points in the NHL, with each looking for a win after suffering losses on Saturday.

"Anytime you see a team in the standings that is near you or below you, you want to beat them to kid of validate yourself a little bit," Oilers forward Taylor Hall said Sunday.

Sabres: Buffalo suffered a 7-1 defeat to the Colorado Avalanche on Saturday afternoon, allowing three goals in the opening eight minutes of the game.

"You get beat 7-1, there's nothing good to come about from those games. You just gotta look past it and get ready for the next game," Sabres forward Marcus Foglino said after the game.

This followed an impressive 3-2 win against the Phoenix Coyotes on Thursday, something the team hoped to build off of. Buffalo has not won back-to-back games in six weeks.

"We got out played every facet of the game from start to finish. Not much to build off tonight. We have to be a lot better if we want to get some points," forward Matt D'Agostini said.

Who's hot: Sabres defenseman Tyler Ennis has a goal and three assists in his past three games. ... Oilers goalie Ben Scrivens has allowed three goals in three games and has made 118 saves on 121 shots (.975 save percentage).

Injury report: The Oilers have four forwards on injured reserve: Steve MacIntyre (knee), Ryan Hamilton (knee), Tyler Pitlick (knee) and Richard Bachman (groin). ... The Sabres' Cody McCormick (upper body), Kevin Porter (lower body) and Drew Stafford (upper body) are on IR. Matt Moulson will be out at least one week with an upper-body injury.

MacKinnon leads Avalanche past Sabres

By Rick Sadowski

NHL.com

February 1, 2014

DENVER -- Teenaged rookie Nathan MacKinnon showed again Saturday that he can more than hold his own in the NHL. The 18-year-old center collected a goal and two assists to lead the Colorado Avalanche to a 7-1 win against the Buffalo Sabres at Pepsi Center.

MacKinnon, the first pick in the 2013 NHL Draft, leads all rookies in scoring with 40 points (20 goals, 20 assists) in 54 games.

"He is a special player," Avalanche coach Patrick Roy said. "I see huge improvement in his game and it's fun to see."

The Avalanche (35-14-5) have won three in a row, are 9-2-1 in their past 12 games and have beaten the Sabres seven consecutive times since Dec. 4, 2005. It was the first time the Avalanche scored seven goals in a game since March 6, 2012, against the Minnesota Wild.

"We weren't ready to go from the get-go," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. "We should have had some energy. We should have had more energy than frustration. We never put a body on anyone. It was a very ugly game to watch. This shows where we are. There are guys that don't get it. There are guys that are continuously making mistakes."

Buffalo (15-31-8), which is last in the NHL standings, failed to win a second consecutive game for the first time since they did it Dec. 17-19. The Sabres are 2-5-3 in their past 10 games.

"We wanted to make sure that we respected that club," Roy said. "It was our last game before the Olympic break in front of our fans and our players wanted to please our fans as well. It was exciting for everybody."

MacKinnon's play more than made up for the absence of forwards Paul Stastny (ankle) and Alex Tanguay (knee). Centering a line with Gabriel Landeskog and PA Parenteau, who was a healthy scratch the previous two games, MacKinnon completed the first three-point game of his NHL career.

"Things were going well, our line was clicking," MacKinnon said of a unit that combined for three goals, three assists and nine shots. "We did a pretty good job. All three of us bring something different. Landy's one of the best players protecting the puck and PA's a great passer. I tried to back them up with my skating, but everyone on the team pitched in."

Landeskog and Jamie McGinn scored two goals apiece and Erik Johnson matched his career high for points in a game with three assists. Goalie Semyon Varlamov, who is on a 12-1-1 roll, made 27 saves.

"Hey, we played a good game," Roy said. "It's not because we're missing players or this and that. I think our guys were sharp. We were skating well, I thought we moved the puck well, we were also moving very fast, and that was the key. It was a beauty watching our guys today."

The Avalanche have had trouble protecting third-period leads, but that wasn't the case Saturday. Colorado took a 5-1 lead into the third and added to it on goals by Landeskog and McGinn.

"We didn't want to let them get back in the third period," MacKinnon said. "We wanted to finish them off."

MacKinnon, who has three goals and four assists during a four-game point-scoring streak, set up goals by Tyson Barrie and Landeskog in the first period when the Avalanche took a 3-0 lead, then scored during a power play at 16:29 of the second to make it 5-1.

McGinn and Marc-Andre Cliche, who scored his first NHL goal in 49 games, also put pucks behind Sabres goalie Ryan Miller, who was replaced by Jhonas Enroth to begin the third period.

"It was obviously a hard game for us, a very tough game for us," said Miller, who gave up five goals on 27 shots. "We have to come to compete from the start. That's where we lost the game. It's always embarrassing when you give up seven goals. We made mistakes and then the puck is in our net. It just didn't stop."

The Avalanche took their first-period lead on goals by Barrie, McGinn on a power play and Landeskog.

Barrie scored at 7:37 after MacKinnon flubbed a shot. The puck went to Barrie, who scored from a sharp angle on the right side. Barrie has two goals and three assists in a four-game point-scoring streak.

McGinn tipped in Johnson's shot at 11:49 with 14 seconds remaining on a double minor to Buffalo's Mike Weber for high-sticking Matt Duchene. McGinn was at the edge of the crease when he tipped the puck past Miller's left pad.

Landeskog scored 58 seconds later at 12:47 to cap a 3-on-2 Avalanche rush. MacKinnon skated down the right side and waited until the last moment before sliding the puck to Landeskog driving down the middle. Landeskog, who has two goals and five assists in a five-game streak, scored into a half-open net.

"The speed that he put on (to set up the goal) was magic," Roy said of MacKinnon.

Cliche, who played in one NHL game in his six seasons with the Los Angeles Kings organization, scored at 6:05 of the second period for a 4-0 lead. After taking a carom off the end boards, Patrick Bordeleau passed through the goalmouth to Cliche, who tucked the puck inside the right post.

"Even when the puck was coming, I was thinking, 'Oh, you can't miss this one,' " Cliche said. "Finally it went in and a lot of weight came off my shoulders. It felt great. I've been thinking about it for a while. The boys, they don't give me a hard time, we joke about it in the locker room. It was a nice feeling coming back to the bench. Everybody was excited for me. That was the best part of the whole thing. I forgot how good it was to score, to be honest with you."

Bordeleau made sure to retrieve the puck for Cliche, who was claimed on waivers from the Los Angeles Kings on Sept. 22.

"Everybody was pretty happy for him on the bench," Roy said. "He works hard for us and he's valuable to us. He puts hard work into the PK and blocking shots. It's nice to see someone be rewarded."

The Sabres got on the board at 11:45 on a power-play goal by Matt D'Agostini, who put in the rebound of Tyler Ennis' shot.

MacKinnon answered off a drop pass by Johnson. Varlamov made a save and got the puck to Johnson, who weaved into the Sabres end and passed the puck to MacKinnon, who scored from the high slot.

Landeskog increased the lead to 6-1 at 7:36 of the third period with a shot past Enroth from the left circle. McGinn scored into a wide-open net at 10:07 off a pass from Ryan O'Reilly.

Linus Omark to suit up against Edmonton Oilers

By Derek Van Diest

Edmonton Sun

February 2, 2014

BUFFALO — Linus Omark is not exactly lighting things up for the Buffalo Sabres.

The former Edmonton Oilers winger is finding similar struggles with his new club that he had with his old.

Before Monday, Omark has just two assists in 11 games for the Sabres. He's been shuffled in back and forth from the press box since his arrival.

"I'm trying to work hard every day and that's my focus right now," Omark said. "I'm going out there to work hard in practice and if I get an opportunity to play, I'm going to play hard."

Omark is expected to get an opportunity against the Oilers. He skated on a line with Tyler Ennis and Drew Stafford on Sunday.

"It looks like that, but we'll see," Omark said. "If that's the case, then I'm going to try to play well."

Selected by the Oilers in the fourth round – 97 overall – of the 2007 draft, Omark could never solidify a spot in the lineup.

He arrived in Edmonton with high expectations, due in part to a shootout goal scored with Sweden that showcased his offensive flair.

Omark played 51 games with the Oilers in 2010-2011, scoring five goals and adding 22 assists. He had an injury-shortened campaign the following season going between Edmonton and Oklahoma City.

He then departed for Switzerland, where he led the league in scoring, prompting the Oilers to give him another opportunity. But Omark was traded to the Sabres for a six-round draft pick.

"We want to see what everyone thought he was capable of doing when he was drafted," said Sabres head coach Ted Nolan. "He's a highly skilled player, but we know skill is only going to get you so far. It's a will and determination that is going to push you a little further."

"I want to see a little bit more grit combined with that skill set."

Going up against the Oilers for the first time, there will be plenty of motivation for Omark.

"I would be lying if I said, 'No'," Omark said. "It's going to be a fun game, I know a lot of guys on that team, so hopefully we can win."

Oilers, Sabres fight the same battle

By Derek MacKinnon

Edmonton Journal

February 2, 2014

BUFFALO, N.Y. — On a weekend in which New York State bore witness to a pair of epic sporting events, the to-do attending Monday's basement battle between the Edmonton Oilers and Buffalo Sabres was appropriately subdued.

The NCAA men's basketball game between Duke and Syracuse at the Carrier Dome on Saturday was an instant classic, and the Super Bowl across the river from Manhattan in New Jersey on Sunday night was, well ... awful.

In western New York on Monday, two NHL teams trying to construct a winning game on the ice and sustainable, successful cultures in the locker-room play for pride, for next year and, in many cases, for jobs.

Posterity is not holding its breath.

The 30th-place Sabres stumble into the game having gone 2-4-4 in their last 10 games, and having been thumped 7-1 by the Colorado Avalanche on Saturday.

The 29th-place Oilers, 3-6-1 in their last 10, flew here Saturday evening on the heels of a 4-0 loss to the Bruins in Boston.

Something, as they say, has to give.

"They're 30th, we're 29th, (it's a) game that both teams don't want to lose," said Oilers left winger Taylor Hall. "Any time you see a team in the standings that's near you or below you, you want to beat them and validate yourself a little bit, for sure."

What struck a visitor to the Sabres room on Sunday were the similarities between the two struggling franchises. In Edmonton, the locker-room messaging is all about never being "out of the fight," about "chopping wood and carrying water."

In the Sabres' elegant locker-room, the word "excellence," all-caps, underscores these key words: Belief, commitment, character, discipline, trust.

"We're trying to teach culture here every single day," said Steve Ott, Buffalo's veteran disturber, one of a number of key Sabres slated to be unrestricted free agents (UFA) at season's end.

"Right now, I think it's huge that we're trying to lay a foundation of the right way to play the game. As we continue to add pieces here, I think that's where you elevate as an organization."

Where have we heard that before?

Ott is one of a cluster of Sabres, including goalie Ryan Miller, sniper Matt Moulson and defenceman Henrik Tallinder, whose names continue to come up in pre-deadline trade chatter.

In Edmonton, the usual trade deadline suspects — Ales Hemsky, Sam Gagner, Ryan Smyth — rattle around the rumour mill.

In both places, the coaches try to assemble a consistently effective style of play, trying to do the best they can with the personnel on hand.

“It’s something that we’re hammering away to the players,” said Oilers head coach Dallas Eakins. “The simple reality is, if the other team doesn’t score, you’re not going to lose the game.

“We have to have that mentality here. It has been a process and it’s an ongoing process to get the players to totally understand that, totally buy into that and play that way.”

A swim coach would exhort his athletes to “win the race you’re in,” whether that’s a battle for the top of the podium or to avoid being dead last.

Was there something in that mentality about Monday’s game, Ott was asked.

“We’re looking at a lot of things,” Ott said. “There are nights we haven’t competed enough to win the battles and that translates into turnovers and turnovers translate into goals against.

“We’re preaching the right way to play. If you don’t play the right way, you’re going to be useless for a lot of years to come. That foundation is going to be the key here going forward and having that culture.”

Again, why does that assessment have such a grim ring of familiarity to it?

For both teams, players are auditioning for jobs, like Edmonton goalie Ben Scrivens and defenceman Mark Fraser.

In Buffalo, ex-Oilers forward Linus Omark is trying to showcase a game the Oilers did not see consistently enough — that of a scorer who can be hard on the puck and responsible defensively. As was the case in Edmonton, Omark has played some, sat some more, mostly been underwhelming.

What do the Sabres want to see from him?

“We want to see what everybody thought he was capable of doing when he was drafted and he came in this league,” said Sabres coach Ted Nolan. “He’s a highly skilled player, but as we know, skill can only get you so far.”

Still more echoes of similar messages.

If Omark is scoring, Nolan would cut him slack defensively. Since he is not producing — he has scored zero goals in 11 games with Buffalo, but has chipped in two assists — then Omark has to play a two-way game to justify his ice time.

Omark skated with Drew Stafford, who returns to the Sabres lineup after missing four games with an upper-body injury, and Edmonton native Tyler Ennis in practice on Sunday. Those two skilled players which could provide a solid opportunity for Omark.

“It looks like that, but I don’t know,” Omark said. “We’ll see (tonight).”

Omark, for one, wasn’t hiding the fact he is motivated to show the Oilers they made a mistake in cutting him loose.

“I would be lying if I said, ‘No,’ ” Omark said. “Of course, I know a lot of guys on that team, so it’s going to be a fun game.

“Hopefully, we can win.”

Sabres' Linus Omark looking to break out against Oilers; Jhonas Enroth not focused on Olympics

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 3, 2014

BUFFALO – So far, 11 games into his Sabres career, Linus Omark has been a colossal disappointment, compiling zero goals, two assists and seven healthy scratches for the NHL's worst team.

But the slick winger will return tonight against the Edmonton Oilers, his old team, after sitting the last three games. The Swede might even skate on the top line.

Clearly, interim Sabres coach Ted Nolan hopes a visit from the Oilers ignites Omark, who played 66 games over parts of three seasons in Edmonton.

Omark smiled Sunday when a reporter asked if he was looking forward to facing Edmonton, which dished him for a conditional sixth-round draft pick Dec. 19.

"I would be lying if I said no," Omark said following practice inside the First Niagara Center. "Of course, it's going to be a fun game. I know a lot of guys on the team."

Omark skated beside center Tyler Ennis and Drew Stafford on the left wing Sunday. Nolan, however, wouldn't say if he'd stay there for tonight's tilt against the Western Conference's worst team.

"It looks like that, but I don't know," Omark said about playing on the No. 1 line. "We'll see (today). If that's the thing, I'm going to try to play good."

What does Nolan want to see from the flashy Omark, who turns 27 years old Wednesday?

"We want to see what everybody thought he was capable of doing when he came into this league," Nolan said. "He's a highly skilled player. But as we know, skill can only get you so far. It's the will and determination that's going to push you further. So we want to see him play with a little more grit combined with that skill set."

Playing Omark on the fourth line hasn't worked out well, one reason Nolan has him back beside skill players.

"I think you have to put him with skill people," Nolan said. "We did it a couple times so far, and so far it hasn't worked out so well. But maybe this time it will."

Omark played once with Edmonton in 2013-14. He returned to the organization that drafted him 97th overall in 2007 this season after a year in Switzerland.

“Of course, you want to play,” said Omark, who spent most of this season in the AHL. “But I thought there was a lot of good players (in Edmonton). I understand them. I had a good time.”

xxx

The Sabres, losers of eight of the last 10 games, originally had Sunday scheduled as a day off. Of course, Saturday’s 7-1 shellacking from the Avalanche in Denver changed that.

“The one thing I learned a long time ago, you can’t do too much about yesterday, it’s gone,” Nolan said. “But the one thing you can do is learn from it, and today’s a new day. It’s an 82-game schedule. It’s a lot of hockey.

“So you can’t dwell on the losses too much. You take about 10 minutes afterwards and you got to focus on today.”

The Sabres couldn’t build off of Thursday’s 3-2 win in Phoenix.

“The weather got us in really good spirits, and then maybe the snow got us in bad spirits,” Nolan joked. “I don’t know. It wasn’t very good.”

xxx

Stafford, out the last four games, will return tonight, he said.

The 28-year-old re-aggravated his upper-body injury Jan. 25 in Columbus. He’s missed eight of the last 13 contests.

“You got to be careful, got to be sure you’re 100 percent ready to go because you don’t want to do it a third time,” Stafford said. “At the same time, too, you never know what can happen.”

Stafford tested himself against 6-foot-8 tough guy John Scott on Sunday.

“It helps your mindset a little bit, puts your mind at ease to get out there and battle against not exactly a small human being, John Scott,” Stafford said. “He was my tester. So if I can do well against him, at least somewhat well, (it’s good). He was kind of throwing me around like a rag doll a little bit.”

Stafford has been playing some of his best hockey in years over the last couple months.

“He’s starting to play the way Drew can play,” Nolan said. “He’s a big, power forward. He’s snapping the puck a little bit with authority. He seems to be finding it lately. Then, all of a sudden, the injury comes back. He looks like he’s ready to go.”

xxx

The Sabres switched up some lines Sunday, putting rookie Zemgus Girgensons at center. Phil Varone, a regular center, switched to left wing. Brian Flynn skated on the right.

“Zemgus, he’s almost like a natural center ice man,” Nolan said. “He likes to skate. With our injury count right now, it’s a great time to test him in that he’s very comfortable in that position. That’s where he grew up playing. We’ll probably put him in that position, see how he does.”

xxx

Backup goalie Jhonas Enroth, a shocking 1-10-5 this season, will start tonight. Enroth relieved Ryan Miller on Saturday, allowing two goals in the final 20 minutes.

Enroth said there’s “just so much I can do” and he can’t worry about his record. He hasn’t won since Oct. 25.

“I just need to prepare myself and get ready,” he said.

Where’s Enroth’s confidence right now?

“I feel fine,” he said.

Enroth, a member of Sweden’s Olympic squad, sported his new pads for the upcoming Sochi Games on Sunday.

He’s not thinking about the Olympics yet, however.

“Right now, I’m just trying to focus on the last couple games here,” Enroth said. “I’m trying to not drift away, if you want to say like that. ... We’ll take the Olympic experience when it happens.”

xxx

Wingers Marcus Foligno and Ville Leino appeared to be extra forwards Sunday. Foligno said he’s playing tonight, however.

MacKinnon, Avs Rip Sabres 7-1

By Dan Cave

WGR 550

February 1, 2014

Nathan MacKinnon scored a goal and added two assists, leading the Avalanche to a 7-1 rout over the Sabres at the Pepsi Center on Saturday. Jamie McGinn and Gabriel Landeskog contributed with two goals each.

The Avalanche pounced on Buffalo early, jumping out to a 3-0 lead after the first period. Tyson Barrie struck first, backhanding a MacKinnon rebound into the net for the 1-0 lead. Moments later, Mike Weber was slapped with a four-minute double minor for high sticking Matt Duchene. McGinn took advantage near the end of the long power play, sliding between Christian Ehrhoff and Jamie McBain to beat Miller. Only 58 seconds after McGinn's goal, Landeskog tapped home a beautiful feed from MacKinnon, making it 3-0.

Marc-Andre Cliche's first NHL goal gave the Avs a 4-1 lead 6:05 into the second period, but Matt D'Agostini responded on the power play with his third of the season. Parked in front of the net, D'Agostini snapped a loose puck past Semyon Varlamov to get Buffalo within three. MacKinnon made it 5-1 later in the period, ripping a shot between Miller's pads for another power play goal and his third point of the game.

Landeskog and McGinn added to the rout, each scoring their second goals of the game in the final period to put Colorado ahead 7-1. The Sabres are back home on Monday to face Edmonton. The Oilers will enter the game with 42 points, the second-fewest in the league and only four better than Buffalo's 38. The Sabres and Oilers will face off at 7 p.m. Hear the call on WGR 550 and the Buffalo Sabres Radio Network.

1st Period

Goals

7:37 - COL - Tyson Barrie (7) (Nathan MacKinnon)

11:49 - COL - Jamie McGinn (13) (PPG) (Erik Johnson, Ryan O'Reilly)

12:47 - COL - Gabriel Landeskog (15) (Nathan MacKinnon, P.A. Parenteau)

Penalties

4:48 - COL - Nick Holden (2 min., hooking)

8:02 - BUF - Mike Weber (4 min. double minor, high sticking)

16:27 - BUF - Phil Varone (2 min., high sticking)

18:28 - COL - John Mitchell (2 min., hooking)

2nd Period

Goals

6:05 - COL - Marc-Andre Cliche (1) (Patrick Bordeleau, Jamie McGinn)

11:45 - BUF - Matt D'Agostini (3) (PPG) (Tyler Ennis, Christian Ehrhoff)

16:29 - COL - Nathan MacKinnon (20) (PPG) (Erik Johnson, Semyon Varlamov)

Penalties

2:21 - COL - Gabriel Landeskog (2 min., slashing)

6:45 - BUF - Christian Ehrhoff (2 min., holding)

10:30 - COL - Jan Hejda (2 min., hooking)

15:29 - BUF - Christian Ehrhoff (2 min., tripping)

3rd Period

Goals

7:36 - COL - Gabriel Landeskog (16) (Erik Johnson)

10:07 - COL - Jamie McGinn (14) (Ryan O'Reilly, Matt Duchene)

Penalties

2:18 - BUF - Zenon Konopka (5 min., fighting)

2:18 - COL - Cody McLeod (5 min., fighting)

2:54 - BUF - John Scott (2 min., roughing)

13:14 - COL - Patrick Bordeleau (2 min., holding)

Goaltending

BUF - Ryan Miller (22 saves, 27 shots)

BUF - Jhonas Enroth (10 saves, 12 shots)

COL - Semyon Varlamov (27 saves, 28 shots)

Power Plays

BUF - 1 of 5

COL - 2 of 6

Three Stars

1.) COL - Nathan MacKinnon (1 G, 2 A)

2.) COL - Gabriel Landeskog (2 G, 0 A)

3.) COL - Marc-Andre Cliche (1 G, 0 A)

HAMILTON: Sabres not ready to play again

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 1, 2014

Denver, CO (WGR 550) -- Colorado has a bunch of skilled young forwards that totally burned the Sabres in the first 20 minutes.

Buffalo looked like an AHL team trying to keep up with the passing, skating and skill of the Avalanche. That's now both games on this road trip that the Sabres weren't ready to play in the first period.

They got away with it in Phoenix giving up two goals and 21 shots in the first period only to win 3-2. It wouldn't happen again in Colorado.

"We just weren't ready to go from the get-go," said Ted Nolan. "I'm not too sure why. We didn't practice [on Friday]. We should have had some energy at least. We didn't have energy, we didn't have concentration. We skated by, we didn't lay a body hit on anybody. Just one of those very, very ugly games you don't want to see too often."

Christian Ehrhoff played with the flu and in this elevation, it may have been a mistake. He had a very rough first period. In an early play he turned the puck over with Matt Duchene bringing the puck out from behind the net getting two cracks at it. Cody Hodgson just stood and watched him.

On Colorado's power play goal, Ehrhoff tried to get between the pass of Erik Johnson and Jamie McGinn. He totally missed it and McGinn had an easy tip in.

On the first goal, Matt Ellis came back and tied up Nathan MacKinnon, but Tyler Myers came out to meet him too and defenseman Tyson Barrie stayed behind him for another easy tap in.

The third goal made it look like men against boys. Henrik Tallinder made a good pinch and Ville Leino got back like he's supposed to. Buffalo was in great shape until MacKinnon turned on the jets and flew by Leino like he wasn't even there. Myers sprawled, but MacKinnon had the poise of a 10 year veteran and calmly slid the puck to Gabriel Landeskog who was wide open because two players including Hodgson were gliding back.

The good news is the Sabres can't play much worse than they did in the first 20 minutes.

The second period wasn't worse, but it wasn't any better. The Avalanche only scored two instead of three, but they got 16 shots on Ryan Miller.

The team's habit of giving up goals to fourth lines continued as Marc-Andre Cliche converted his first NHL goal after a McGinn shot stopped by Miller. The Sabres again became spectators and Pat Bordeleau got it over to Cliche who had a tap in.

Matt D'Agostini won one of the few battles by a Sabre on a power play and it paid off in a goal. Tyler Ennis put a nice low shot on Semyon Varlamov producing a rebound. D'Agostini out battled Andre Benoit in front and pounded home his 3rd.

The Avalanche weren't done. Johnson carried the puck up ice on a power play and Marcus Foligno just waived at him at the red line. He continued into the Buffalo zone and dropped the puck to MacKinnon as the Buffalo defense backed off and the rookie ripped home his 20th.

Jhonas Enroth came on to start the third as Miller was getting absolutely no support from his team.

Zenon Konopka had a very spirited fight with Cody McLeod, one that resulted in cuts for both. Later, Tyler Myers gave Landeskog a gift up the middle in the third period and he ripped his second of the game to the far side of Enroth. Colorado got another layup goal when Foligno failed to pick up McGinn down the slot as Enroth had no chance.

The good news is Buffalo did split the two games on this road trip. The bad news is they played four horrendous periods out of six.

"You're not going to play a consistent game all the time if you're in bottom place," said Nolan. "That's why we're in bottom place. Because the guys just don't get it. Some guys are continuously making the same mistake and you continuously tell them. What more can you do? We just gotta get back to the drawing board and go back at it."

Steve Ott didn't want to use Friday's day off as an excuse for their performance against the Avalanche.

"That's a treat, when your coach gives you a day," said Ott. "You go for a stretch, you have some team activities, you get loose, you're prepared for a 1:00 game. This is the NHL. We don't need to go out there and pass eggs like it's The Mighty Ducks anymore. This is game time, and plain and simple, we didn't show up."

SABRES SHUFFLE LINES IN PREPARATION FOR OILERS

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 2, 2014

Coming off a tough 7-1 loss Saturday night in Colorado, the Buffalo Sabres shook up some of their lines at practice at First Niagara Center on Sunday.

Drew Stafford is set to return to the lineup Monday night against the Edmonton Oilers from an upper-body injury that's kept him out for the past four games. He skated on a line with Tyler Ennis at center and Linus Omark on the left wing.

Stafford sustained an upper-body injury on Jan. 2 in Minnesota and missed four games because of it. In his first four games back, he recorded three goals and two assists. He re-aggravated the injury on Jan. 25 in Columbus and has been out ever since.

He's hoping he can pick up right where he left off.

"I felt as though I was getting going and unfortunately, a little bit of a setback and then another setback as well," he said after practice. "Dealing with those two setbacks, it's tough, but at the same time, you just have to keep at it and back now, hopefully, finish strong here before the break. And then it would be nice to get on that break as well and make sure it's totally 100-percent feeling good."

He may have been ready to go against Colorado, but the team decided to give him a few more days to make sure he was 100 percent. He took some bumps in practice Sunday afternoon from 6-foot-8, 259-pound forward John Scott.

"You never know what can happen, but at the same time, it helps your mindset a little bit, it puts your mind at ease when you battle against a not exactly small human being like John Scott," Stafford said. "He was my tester. If I can do well against him – at least somewhat well – he was kind of throwing me around like a rag doll a little bit like that, but it's feeling pretty well."

Getting back a player like Stafford who's capable of producing points should help ease the loss of leading scorer Matt Moulson, who could be out until after the Olympic break after sustaining an upper-body injury Thursday night.

"Right now we haven't got enough depth to lose a guy like Drew and Matty at the same time. At least we get one of them back," Sabres interim coach Ted Nolan said.

Omark has been a healthy scratch the past three games and Nolan said the 26-year-old forward will play against his former team on Monday. The Sabres

acquired Omark from the Oilers on Dec. 19 for a conditional sixth-round pick in the 2014 NHL Draft.

Omark is feeling a little extra motivation heading into the game.

“I would be lying if I said, ‘No.’ But of course, it’s going to be a fun game,” Omark said. “I know a lot of guys on that team, so hopefully we can win.”

Jhonas Enroth will start in goal against the Oilers. He is 1-10-5 this season, but isn’t thinking much about personal wins and losses.

“I just need to prepare myself and get ready,” he said. “Obviously I can’t score any goals or anything like that so I just need to focus on my job and that’s to try to save as many pucks as possible.”

Nolan also decided to practice with more size at the center ice position. Zemgus Girgensons practiced in the middle on a line with Philip Varone on the left and Brian Flynn on the right. All three have played center this season, but for now it looks like Girgensons will pivot that line.

“He’s almost like a natural center iceman,” Nolan said. “He likes to skate and with our injury count right now, it’s a great time to test him. He’s very comfortable in that position. That’s where he grew up playing so we’ll probably put him in that position and see how he does.”

While Girgensons will likely play center for Team Latvia under Nolan’s watch at the Winter Olympics, his move back there with only three games to go before the break only has to do with putting players in position where they can best help the Sabres succeed.

“We’re thinking about what’s going to make this team better,” Nolan said.

Enroth, who will play for Team Sweden at the Olympics, broke in some new gear at practice Sunday. He wore a new glove, a new blocker, new pads and a new mask that celebrates his native country.

“The pads and the gear are really good these days so it just needs one or two practices and then they’re ready to go so they’re fine,” he said.

Ryan Miller is also breaking in some equipment for Team USA. He’s donned his new Olympic mask and a new red, white and blue blocker for two straight practices.

He and Enroth spent some time at the end of practice comparing equipment at center ice.

Ville Leino and Marcus Foligno worked as the fourth forwards on different lines at practice. In addition to doing their own line work with Cody McCormick – who skated in a red non-contact jersey – Leino was in white with Steve Ott, Cody Hodgson and Matt D’Agostini while Foligno was in gray with Scott, Zenon Konopka and Matt Ellis.

17 Linus Omark – 63 Tyler Ennis – 21 Drew Stafford
9 Steve Ott – 19 Cody Hodgson – 27 Matt D’Agostini – Ville Leino
84 Phil Varone – 28 Zemgus Girgensons – 65 Brian Flynn
32 John Scott – 24 Zenon Konopka – 37 Matt Ellis – Marcus Foligno
Red Non-Contact: Cody McCormick

10 Christian Ehrhoff – 5 Chad Ruhwedel
20 Henrik Tallinder – 57 Tyler Myers
6 Mike Weber – 4 Jamie McBain
52 Alexander Sulzer

30 Ryan Miller
1 Jhonas Enroth

SABRES SUNK BY THREE AVALANCHE GOALS IN FIRST PERIOD

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 1, 2014

DENVER – After stringing together two good periods in their last game to earn a win, the Buffalo Sabres were unable to really generate anything Saturday afternoon against the Colorado Avalanche.

Colorado jumped out to a 3-0 lead in the first period and never looked back, skating off to a 7-1 victory at the Pepsi Center.

Gabriel Landeskog and Jamie McGinn each scored twice for Colorado while Tyson Barrie, Marc-Andre Cliche and Nathan MacKinnon tallied for the Avalanche as well.

Colorado had goals by McGinn – on the power play – and Landeskog come 58 seconds apart midway through the first period.

Cliche made it 4-0 at the 6:05 mark of the second period with his first career NHL goal.

“That was the difference tonight, I didn’t like our mindset from the get-go, let alone warmups all the way through,” Sabres captain Steve Ott said. “You can’t explain that one when it’s a game like that.”

Sabres interim coach Ted Nolan was also disappointed that his team was not able to build off its 3-2 win Thursday night in Phoenix.

“We just weren’t ready to go from the get-go. I’m not too sure why. We didn’t practice yesterday. We should’ve had some energy at least. But we didn’t have energy,” Nolan said. “We didn’t have concentration. We skated by. We didn’t lay a body hit on anybody. So it’s just one of those very, very ugly games you don’t want to see too often.”

Matt D’Agostini, playing in his second game after missing the previous six with an upper-body injury, scored his third goal of the season for Buffalo.

D’Agostini’s goal came on the power play with 8:15 to play in the second period. After giving the puck to Tyler Ennis on the halfwall, D’Agostini skated to the front of the net. A slap pass in front by Ennis was deflected down and ended up flat on the ice in front of D’Agostini, who punched it in.

Buffalo has scored a power-play goal in three consecutive games.

However, the goal, which made it 4-1, came too late.

“We got outplayed in every facet of the game from start to finish. Not much to build off tonight, We have to be a lot better if we want to be some point,” D’Agostini said. “We just have to have some pride. We have to work harder, we have to be accountable for our actions. It starts with every player in here.”

MacKinnon, who had a goal and two assists, scored Colorado’s second power-play goal of the game to put the Avalanche up 5-1 with 3:31 remaining in the second. Erik Johnson cruised into the Buffalo zone and made a drop pass to MacKinnon. The one-timer beat Miller five-hole.

MacKinnon, the top pick in the 2013 NHL Draft leads all rookies with 40 points (20+20).

Semyon Varlamov recorded the secondary assist on the MacKinnon goal and finished the day with 27 saves.

Ryan Miller faced 27 shots through two periods before being replaced by Jhonas Enroth at the start of the third period. Enroth allowed two goals on 12 shots.

Coming into the game, Miller was 0-1-3 in four career games against Colorado. The Avalanche are the only team Miller does not have a win against.

“They don’t deserve that,” Sabres forward Marcus Foligno said of Miller and Enroth. “They’re unbelievable goaltenders and highly skilled. They needed a team behind them and they don’t have one right now.”

Buffalo’s last win against the Avalanche came on Dec. 4, 2005 in Colorado. The Sabres won 6-5 with six different Sabres scoring.

In his only other appearance in relief, Enroth stopped all 12 shots he faced in Anaheim on Nov. 8.

Landeskog scored his second of the game 7:36 into the third. McGinn added his second minutes later at the 10:07 mark to make it 7-1.

The Sabres will look to move on from this game and focus on their next one. They host the Edmonton Oilers at 7 p.m. at First Niagara Center on Monday.

“It’s definitely not a good feeling. It’s really at the bottom right now I think.” Foligno said. “You get beat 7-1, there’s nothing good to come about those games. You really have to look past it now and get ready for the next. You learn from the mistakes and get ready for the next game.”

Avs dominate Sabres in final home game before Olympics

By Mike Chambers

Denver Post

February 1, 2014

Playing its final home game for 25 days, the likely playoff-bound Avalanche wanted a good send-off Saturday.

And despite playing with just 11 available forwards because of injuries to Paul Stastny and Alex Tanguay, the Avs got that and much more.

Behind two goals apiece from Gabe Landeskog and Jamie McGinn and scoring from all four lines, the Avs pounded the Buffalo Sabres 7-1, improving to 8-2 in their past 10 games and to 19-7-3 at the Pepsi Center.

"Our guys were sharp. We were skating well," said Avs coach Patrick Roy. "It was a beauty watching our guys."

The Avs won't play in Denver again until Feb. 26. Their four-game trip through New York and Philadelphia precedes the NHL's shutdown for the Sochi Olympics.

Landeskog and McGinn highlighted the rare rout and rookie Nathan MacKinnon was again extraordinary.

MacKinnon, who replaced Stastny and centered Landeskog and P.A. Parenteau, had two primary assists before scoring his 20th goal to tie Ryan O'Reilly for the team lead.

The 18-year-old forward is the seventh Avs rookie to score 20 goals, and by far the youngest. His overall goals, power-play goals (eight) and points (40) are the most among NHL rookies as he continues his assault for the Calder Trophy.

"I've been feeling better every game, I'm not going to lie," MacKinnon said. "There are some things I thought I couldn't do but I'm able to do in this league. Everybody talks about the jump from junior to the NHL, but hockey is hockey and I've been getting back to a lot of things that got me to this league."

MacKinnon, the NHL's second-youngest player (by one day), finished with a plus-3 rating in 16:48. He had four shots and was 8-4 on faceoffs.

"He is a special player," Roy said. "The third goal, the speed he put on the ice was magic. Landy (Landeskog) ends up with an open net on his pass. I see huge improvement in his game and it's fun to see."

Tyson Barrie and Marc-Andre Cliche also scored as Colorado built a 4-0 lead and led 5-1 going into the third period.

"We had the lead and didn't let them back in the game like we've kind of done in the past," said Avs defenseman Erik Johnson, who had three assists. "It's good to come in between periods, regroup and say, 'Let's not let them back in and put two more on the board.' "

Stastny (ankle) participated in the warm-up but was a late scratch for precautionary reasons. Tanguay (knee) was deemed out to begin the day.

Avs Recap

THE POST'S THREE STARS

1. Jamie McGinn. Two goals, three points, plus-3 and team-high six shots for Avs winger.
2. Nathan MacKinnon. Avs' rookie had a goal and two assists in another extraordinary performance.
3. Erik Johnson. Three assists for the big Colorado defenseman.

WHAT YOU MIGHT HAVE MISSED

Winger Ryan O'Reilly led the Avs in ice time at 20:08. No defenseman played more than 20 minutes, because the Avs used seven evenly after taking a big lead early.

UP NEXT

At New Jersey, Monday, 5:30 p.m.

Avs Score Pre-Super Bowl Touchdown in Buffalo Win

By Scott Ward

Avalanche.com

February 1, 2014

On the eve of Super Bowl XLVIII the Avalanche went out Saturday afternoon and put up a touchdown at Pepsi Center.

Five Avs had goals, including Gabriel Landeskog and Jamie McGinn with two apiece, and Colorado potted seven shots for the first time since March 2012.

Tyson Barrie started the onslaught with one of three first-period Avalanche scores, Marc-Andre Cliche scored his first career NHL goal in the second, and Nathan MacKinnon added a goal late in the second period to a game sheet that already included two assists.

Erik Johnson had a game-high and season-high three assists.

"It was our last game before the Olympic break in front of our fans," Avalanche coach Patrick Roy said, "and our players wanted to please our fans as well. It was exciting for everybody."

Roy had two messages for his team in the hours that followed Thursday's victory against Minnesota, and Saturday's result offered up some immediate evidence that Roy's message rang home.

Even though Colorado (35-14-5) is in the middle of one of its best seasons ever Roy wanted his team to have more of a killer instinct, and he also didn't want his players to look past Buffalo, which came into Saturday's game with the NHL's worst record.

Done. And done.

Colorado led the Wild 4-1 on Thursday but had to hold on for a seat-cushion-ripping 5-4 win. The same scene didn't play out Saturday. Colorado led 4-0 with just less than 34 minutes left in regulation and didn't let up, netting three more scores en route to a blowout.

And, yes, the Sabres entered a struggling bunch overall, but they had earned points in three of their past four road games, including getting a 3-2 win Thursday at Phoenix. Roy voiced his don't-take-them-lightly warning yesterday during practice and brought it up again when talking to the media afterward.

He wanted his team to be ready, and, boy, was it.

"It was not a tough message," Roy said. "It was just a good conversation we had yesterday on the ice before practice. I thought it was just a matter of between periods [trying] to say focused and have the same preparation we have at the start of the game. I thought's what the guys did."

Colorado maintained momentum throughout the game Saturday afternoon and earned a season-sweep against Buffalo. It also matched its 2000-01 and Stanley Cup-winning counterparts for most wins through 54 games in franchise history.

"... I think our guys were sharp," Roy said. "We were skating well, I thought we moved the puck well, we were also moving very fast, and that was the key. It was a beauty watching our guys today."

THIS MacKINNON KID IS GOOD

It's becoming a bit of challenge these days to feature in this postgame space any of the Avalanche players but rookie-sensation MacKinnon.

He just completed a remarkable January and started the year's second month Saturday afternoon with his best single-game effort this season, scoring a goal and passing out two assists in the Avs win.

His goal came near the end of the second period, following a no-look between-the-legs pass from Johnson. He preceded that in the first period with an assist on Barrie's seventh goal of the season, and he also assisted about five minutes later on the first of Landeskog's two goals.

MacKinnon set up the latter with some exceptionally quick skating down the right side before making a picture-perfect, last-second crossing pass to Landeskog.

"The speed that he put on [to set up the goal] was magic," Roy said. "He is a special player. I see huge improvement in his game, and it's fun to see."

MacKinnon led the Avalanche and all NHL rookies with nine goals in January, and his 13 points ranked third among the league's first-year players. His nine goals were the second most in a month by a Colorado rookie (Marek Svatos - 10, Jan. 2006).

All that's an accomplishment, for sure, but he didn't dwell or rest on it. Instead he recorded his first career three-point game and scored his 20th goal of the season, becoming the seventh rookie in Avalanche history (since 1995-96) to score at least 20 goals.

"It's a lot of fun to watch him play out there," Landeskog said. "He's certainly gaining confidence, and he's certainly on fire right now, and it's a lot of fun to be a part of."

POSTGAME NOTEBOOK

- Cliche scored his first career goal Saturday, finding the net in his 49th career game after joining the Avalanche in September off a waiver claim from the Los Angeles Kings, who had Cliche in their system for six seasons.

Cliche found the right side of the net at 6:05 of the second period after taking a cross-crease pass from Patrick Bordeleau. The score made it 4-0 Colorado, and the route was on.

“I forgot how good it felt to score a goal,” Cliche said. “And scoring like this? I mean, it could not have been a better set up from Bordeleau there. Just a tap in for me; it felt great.”

- Saturday's game was the Avalanche's final home game before the NHL's 2014 Olympic break, which starts Sunday, Feb. 9 and ends with the resumption of games Feb. 26. The Avs, who have four road contests this week before the break, will be back at Pepsi Center on Feb. 26 against Los Angeles.

- Colorado improved to 9-2-2 in its previous 13 home games and 19-7-3 overall this year at Pepsi Center (.741).

- The Avalanche improved to 35-14-5 (75 points) and tied the 2000-01 Avs team for most wins through 54 games in franchise history. That team, which had 79 points through 54 games, finished the season hoisting the Stanley Cup.

- Cody McLeod's third-period fight with Buffalo's Zenon Konopka saddled him with a five-minute major penalty for fighting. It gave him 953 career penalty minutes, which is the most in Avalanche history (since 1995). He entered the game tied with former Av Adam Foote.

- The Avs finished 2-0 this season against the Sabres and outscored Buffalo 11-3. The Avs have won seven straight games against the Sabres, with three of those victories coming in a shootout. Buffalo's last win against Colorado came Dec. 4, 2005 at Pepsi Center.

- The Avs are 14-5-1 against Eastern Conference teams this year and 8-3-1 against them at home. Colorado is 27-9-2 against Eastern Conference opponents since the start of the 2011-12 season.

- Johnson notched assists in each period, giving him a season-high and career high-tying three assists. He helped on the first of McGinn's goals in the first, MacKinnon's blast in the second, and Landeskog's second goal in the third. He's now had three assists in a game five times in his career.

- Bordeleau skated Saturday in his 100th career NHL game. He's the 17th active player for Colorado to reach the 100-games mark. Andre Benoit (94 games) is six shy of becoming the 18th.

- Ryan O'Reilly's assist on McGinn's first-period power-play goal was the 100th of his career.

- Alex Tanguay (knee) and Paul Stastny (ankle) were Colorado's scratches. Both suffered their injuries Thursday against Minnesota, and Roy considered them day-to-day during Friday's post-practice news conference.

LIVING LIFE IN THE "CULT" OF HOCKEY

By Craig Kanalley

Sabres.com

February 1, 2014

DENVER -- On day three of the Parent's Trip, the Buffalo Sabres and their parents gathered for dinner in the Mile High City on Friday night. Hockey was inevitably on the big screens in the room.

Teresa Miller, Ryan's mother, reacted as you'd expect, with a big smile, her hands in the air, as Drew Miller was seen scoring a goal for the Detroit Red Wings. Cheers went up across the room. "Millsy's brother!" one player shouted. The Sabres goaltender himself cracked a smile.

Hockey is life for NHL mothers, and Teresa was in a familiar place, watching another hockey game.

The mother of two NHL players says she often has one game on her television and the other on her laptop to keep up with both sons. She never misses a game.

They may be seen on screens and may get a good deal of attention, but Teresa Miller says, "They're your kids. And you don't really think of them as being any more than that."

Drew Stafford's mother, Debra, agreed.

"They're real people," she said. "I've had so many people over the years come up to me and say, 'you must be so proud of your son.' I'm like, 'I'm not any prouder of my son than you are of your kids.'"

Diane Ennis, Tyler's mother, said she could relate: "They're just your kids. Jordan, Ty's older brother, is an electrician. We always say that we're just as proud of him as we are of Ty. They both worked hard to do what they're doing."

Working hard, and often, was a requirement to reach the highest level in the hockey world. For these families, it meant hockey was a way of life, and the mothers were always in the thick of it.

"We didn't have a choice," Ennis said. "With the kids in hockey, we were always at the rink, constantly, 24 hours. If you weren't at the rink, you were fundraising to be at the rink. All you knew was hockey."

"Your vacations ... hockey tournaments," she added. "Your whole life, when your kids play hockey, that's your whole life."

Stafford recalled going to tournaments overseas, to Russia and Paris, when Drew played at Shattuck-St. Mary's. "We were immersed in that."

Miller said when her kids played youth hockey, it was like they were in a cult. Ryan got to play with the same group of guys for a long time. “The team manager was like the cult leader; he’d tell us where to go, what to do and where to eat,” Teresa explained.

But was it all worth it in the end? Of course it was.

Miller, Ennis and Stafford all said they watch every single game their son plays in. “And they’re taped as well,” Ennis said.

One of the toughest parts of the game for the mothers is injuries.

As if it isn’t enough to see your loved one get hurt, Stafford pointed out, “Then they show it in slow-motion, and you hate that! We feel the pain at the same time.”

“It’s nerve-racking and scary. Every time Ty is on the ice, I’m petrified,” Ennis said.

While agreeing with that sentiment, Miller said she’s learned over the years, “It is what it is. I can’t control anything.”

As for this year? The mothers believe the Sabres are turning things around.

“They’re competing,” Miller said. “And they’re competing throughout the game. They’re not always winning, but they’re right there, and at least they’re competing.”

Ennis said of a recent loss to Pittsburgh, “It didn’t feel like a loss because they were in it. A couple mistakes and that was it. But it was entertaining to watch. I think they’re turning a corner, they’re working harder.”

Hard work got them to the NHL, and hard work will keep them there too. And their mothers, as always, will be watching.