



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Sabres-Canucks Preview

Associated Press

March 22, 2014

While the Vancouver Canucks hope to have two of their top three scorers back Sunday night, they might be without their hottest player as they host the lowly Buffalo Sabres.

Daniel Sedin has missed nine straight games with a hamstring injury and Ryan Kesler the last four with a sprained knee, but both practiced this week and could possibly return to the Vancouver lineup. Each has 40 points, six fewer than team leader Henrik Sedin.

Daniel Sedin, however, has gone 12 consecutive games without a point and 22 straight without a goal. Kesler, meanwhile, has a team-high 22 goals but only one in his last six for the Canucks (32-30-10).

Regardless, their collective presence could provide a boost for a team that's in danger of missing the playoffs for the first time in six seasons and hasn't won two in a row since Jan. 18-21.

"I have lineups both ways, I've always been prepared," said coach John Tortorella, whose team has won four of seven following a 1-10-1 stretch.

"I thought they looked good (in practice)."

The news might not be as optimistic for winger Alexandre Burrows, who was slashed on the hand during Wednesday's 2-0 win over Nashville.

Limited to 40 games because of foot and jaw injuries, the four-time 25-goal scorer has only five this season, but all of them came in the Canucks' five games prior to facing the Predators. Burrows' nine points since March 10 are three more than any teammate.

"It's just been one of those years for him," Tortorella said. "He finds his game and this happens. I'm not sure whether he misses (games), or if he does how many, but it has been a very difficult time for him."

Tortorella continues to get production from forward Nicklas Jensen, who recorded his first three NHL goals and an assist over the last four games.

"It's huge," said Jensen, the team's first-round pick in 2011 who has played seven of his nine NHL games this season. "It's tough to know what to expect when you get up here."

Vancouver rookie Eddie Lack made 30 saves Wednesday for his fourth shutout after allowing 19 goals in his previous five games.

With former star Roberto Luongo in net, the Canucks won 3-0 at Buffalo on Oct. 17.

Already eliminated from playoff contention, the Sabres (20-42-8) snapped a seven-game skid with a 3-1 win at Edmonton on Thursday. Cory Conacher had two goals with an assist for Buffalo, which had totaled six goals in the previous seven games.

"The way that this year has gone and the challenges we have gone through, we will take any win at this point, regardless of who it is against," said forward Drew Stafford, who has a goal in two straight games and five of seven.

Conacher snapped a 27-game goal drought in his seventh since the Sabres claimed him off waivers from Ottawa.

"Maybe this was the game I needed to open the flood gates a bit," he said. "The most important part was getting the win, though."

Henrik Sedin has five assists in Vancouver's last three games and seven points in his last five versus Buffalo. Daniel Sedin has a goal with five assists in his last four against the Sabres.

Sabres giving Lieuwen a ‘home’ start in Vancouver

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

March 23, 2014

VANCOUVER — Buffalo Sabres goaltender Nathan Lieuwen knew what the schedule said when the team summoned him last Sunday from Rochester and told him to pack a suitcase for a long road trip.

Lieuwen is from Abbotsford, British Columbia, about 45 miles from Vancouver. He went to many games as a kid in Rogers Arena, even had one of those old black and orange Vancouver Canucks jerseys with the abstract skate on the front.

But he also knew Michal Neuvirth was on the trip and practicing. As of Wednesday’s workout in Edmonton, Neuvirth’s undisclosed lower-body injury was improving and he was likely to get the start tonight against the Canucks.

But Neuvirth has had some setbacks. He didn’t practice here Saturday and coach Ted Nolan gave Lieuwen the word he wanted to hear: Tonight’s game against his hometown team is his.

“It’s incredible,” Lieuwen said. “Obviously the past week has been a whirlwind for me but this is pretty special. They were my team growing up so it will be cool to play in this building.”

Lieuwen got his first NHL start Tuesday in Calgary and played well in a 3-1 defeat that saw him shut out the Flames for 38 minutes. When he spoke to reporters here Saturday, he had yet to speak to his family – including three brothers – about who will take over the ticket-seeking duties. Someone needs to do that for the folks in Abbotsford, a city of about 123,000 that’s the home of the Flames’ AHL affiliate.

Especially since Lieuwen will be otherwise occupied by the likes of Vancouver veterans Henrik and Daniel Sedin tonight.

“There’s obviously gonna be a lot of emotions and a lot of extra stuff that could creep into my head,” Lieuwen said. “But I’ve got to stay focused on my process and what I need to do on the ice.

“I’ll do my best to not look at the back of their jerseys and just know what team they’re on. One puck at a time. That’s what I keep telling you guys and I’ll keep saying that because when I focus on that, that’s when I’m at my best.”

Nolan said that with Lieuwen, the Western Canada native, getting tonight’s game, Easterner Matt Hackett will go Tuesday in Montreal. So that rules Neuvirth out until at least Thursday in Nashville.

“It will be great for Nathan to play in front of his family and friends and his home province,” Nolan said. “He’s a nice young man, well-mannered. He works on his trade. That’s how you win in this game, I believe. You win with good people, and he seems to be one of the finest.”

The Sabres have been pleased with the work of both Lieuwen and Hackett on their emergency recalls. Hackett won his first Buffalo start Thursday in Edmonton, making 35 saves in a 3-1 win that snapped the Sabres’ seven-game losing streak.

“They’ve done a great job for us,” said Sabres defenseman and former Canuck Christian Ehrhoff, who will play his second game here since leaving to join the Sabres in 2011. “The goaltending position hasn’t been a question mark for us all year and these guys have just stepped in and kept right up with that.”

Lieuwen said he was particularly grateful to Nolan for giving him the chance.

“It means so much to me to get to play in this building and it says a lot about Ted,” Lieuwen said. “Ever since I’ve been here, he’s been nothing but supportive of me, encouraging me to play my game. Even after the Calgary game, he said he was happy with me and he was proud of me and that’s huge.

“Especially coming out of my first game, it was such a boost for me. It motivated me. It makes me work harder and want to win a game for him tomorrow.”

Sabres notebook: Canucks have plenty at stake

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

March 23, 2014

VANCOUVER — The first two games of the Buffalo Sabres' road trip were against Calgary and Edmonton, two teams not close to the playoff race. The dynamic will be quite a bit different tonight in Rogers Arena.

The Vancouver Canucks are in true desperation mode in their first year under coach John Tortorella after entering the season with Stanley Cup aspirations. They have just 10 games left and entered play Saturday five points behind Phoenix for the final Western Conference playoff slot, pending the Coyotes' game late Saturday against Boston.

The Canucks have made the playoffs in 10 of the last 12 seasons, getting to Game Seven of the Cup final in 2011 before losing to Boston. They looked golden this year after going 10-1-2 in December, but are just 9-19-3 since the new year as the heat has squarely landed on Tortorella and General Manager Mike Gillis.

The Canucks, of course, fell into a deep slump following Tortorella's six-game, 15-day suspension for trying to get to Calgary coach Bob Hartley in the dressing room hallway at the Saddledome after the teams opened their Jan. 18 game with a line brawl.

Vancouver has alternated a loss and win for eight straight games, no way to make up any ground. With 10 left, they probably need to get 16-18 of the remaining 20 points to have a chance.

"Every game. One at a time. Buffalo is our next one," was Tortorella's word-thrifty analysis here Saturday. "Just trying to take each day at a time."

Tonight's game will feature a pregame ceremony to honor Canucks captain Henrik Sedin for playing his 1,000th game during the team's last road trip. His twin brother, Daniel, returns to the lineup after missing nine games with a hamstring injury.

"Lately we've been working extremely hard," Daniel Sedin said. "I keep thinking we're going to get our share of wins. That's all we can focus on. Win our games and see what happens."

Daniel Sedin said he's looking forward to his brother's ceremony.

"It's good for him. We all know he's been healthy throughout his career," Daniel Sedin said. "It's going to be nice and hopefully that will get us up for the game even more."

Canucks forward and U.S. Olympian Ryan Kesler (sprained knee) said he was feeling better and could return. He has been out since being injured March 12 in Winnipeg. Starter Eddie Lack will be in goal tonight.

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Tonight's game will be the second back in Vancouver for Sabres defenseman Christian Ehrhoff and center Cody Hodgson. Both played in Buffalo's last appearance here, a 5-3 win on March 3, 2012.

Ehrhoff said the Game Seven loss to Boston still haunts him. It seems to have haunted the franchise as well. The Canucks have been first-round losers the last two years, winning just one game.

"Pretty heartbreaking to look back at that. It will hang over me until I get a chance to win the Cup," Ehrhoff said. "Until that happens, it's still going to be a heartbreaking thing to look back at. It's the toughest way you can lose. Game Seven of the finals. It's something you definitely carry with you."

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Buffalo's 2012 victory here was notable for the fact it scored three goals in the first 5½ minutes to knock Roberto Luongo from the game.

Ville Leino scored twice in the first 3:44 but won't get a chance to duplicate that outburst tonight. Leino, still without a goal while playing 50 of the Sabres' 70 games, will be a healthy scratch for the second straight game. Leino sat out Thursday's win in Edmonton.

One line shift Nolan made Saturday for tonight will see Matt Ellis joining Matt D'Agostini and Brian Flynn on the third line, with rookie Nicolas Deslauriers going to the fourth line with Zenon Konopka and John Scott.

Deslauriers has no points and a minus-5 rating in eight games with the Sabres.

"You don't want to give a young player too much too soon ... he has 8 games in the National Hockey League," Nolan said. "It's all about development."

Daniel Sedin to return as Canucks host Sabres

NHL.com

March 22, 2014

SABRES (20-42-8) AT CANUCKS (32-30-10)

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

Last 10: Buffalo 2-8-0; Vancouver 4-6-0

Season series: This is the second and final game between the Buffalo Sabres and Vancouver Canucks. The Canucks beat the Sabres 3-0 in Buffalo on Oct. 17. That game featured Roberto Luongo in goal for the Canucks and Ryan Miller for the Sabres; both have since been traded.

Big story: After missing nine games with a hamstring injury, Vancouver left wing Daniel Sedin will play Sunday for the first time since March 2. Center Ryan Kesler, who's dealing with a knee injury, skated Saturday and will be a game-time decision.

"Danny is in. Not sure on [Kessler]. We will make a decision tomorrow," coach John Tortorella said after practice Saturday.

Team Scope:

Sabres: Buffalo, which snapped a seven-game losing streak with a 3-1 win against the Edmonton Oilers on Thursday, has started different goalies in each of its past three games: Jhonas Enroth, Nathan Lieuwen and Matt Hackett. Lieuwen will get the call Sunday and will make his second NHL start facing the team we cheered for as a kid.

"It's incredible. Obviously The past week has been a whirlwind for me but this is just pretty special. [The Canucks] were my team growing up so it will be cool to play in this building." Lieuwen said after practice.

It's the third game of a five-game road trip for the Sabres who have a league-worst eight road wins this season.

"Vancouver is one of those teams desperate for points so they are going to come at us hard and we have to make sure we come out ready," coach Ted Nolan said.

Canucks: The return of Sedin and possibly Kesler should provide a boost to the Canucks' hopes of making the Stanley Cup Playoffs. Each has 40 points, tying them for second on the team behind Henrik Sedin.

"We've been working extremely hard. You can tell by watching the games," Daniel Sedin said. "If we keep that going, we're going to get our share of wins."

The Canucks are coming off of a 2-0 win against the Nashville Predators on Wednesday and are seeking their second straight win. They haven't won back-to-back games since Jan. 18-21 and have dropped five points behind the Phoenix Coyotes, who own the second wild-card playoff position in the Western Conference. But they're not ready to concede.

"We definitely aren't counting ourselves out. We have a group in here that's not going to give up and we're taking it a game at a time and our next task is against Buffalo," forward Zack Kassian said. "It's a big two points. We can't afford to lose any more hockey games."

Who's hot: Sabres forward Cory Conacher figured in all three goals Thursday with two goals and an assist. Drew Stafford has a goal in each of his past two games. ... Canucks forward Alexandre Burrows has five goals and eight points in three games. Henrik Sedin has five assists in three games. Defenseman Kevin Bieksa has assists in three straight games.

Injury report: Sabres forward Kevin Porter (lower body) is on injured reserve. Forwards Chris Stewart (ankle), Zemgus Girgensons (lower body), defensemen Alexander Sulzer (upper body), Tyler Myers (elbow) and Enroth (lower body) are out. Goalie Michal Neuvirth (lower body) is questionable... Canucks defenseman Andrew Alberts (concussion) and forward Mike Santorelli (shoulder) are on IR. Defenseman Christopher Tanev (finger) is out. Burrows (finger) left the game Thursday and will be out.

Sabres Neuvirth not progressing. Lieuwen will start

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 22, 2014

Vancouver, BC (WGR 550) -- Michal Neuvirth had been practicing with the team and hoped to start Sunday against the Canucks, but he did not practice on Saturday. Ted Nolan said, "We're trying something different, he was feeling really good and then goes on the ice and doesn't feel very well and then he felt good so we put him on the ice and the same thing, so we'll try to keep him off until he feels maybe over 100 percent and then we'll put him back on."

That means Nate Lieuwen gets the start in net which will be a thrill for him since he grew up in Abbotsford which is about an hour away from here. Lieuwen played in his first NHL game last Sunday against Montreal and then got his first NHL start in Calgary on Tuesday. Nolan said, "Nathan will play in front of his family and friends in his home Province and then Matt will get the game in Montreal."

Nolan hasn't seen much of Lieuwen's growth so the past six days is his first chance to get to know him. Nolan said, "What impresses me about any athlete is how he is as a human being. He's a real nice young man, he's well mannered, he works on his trade and that's how you win in this game I believe, you win with people and he seems to be one of the finest."

Lieuwen always seems to have a smile on his face and Saturday was no different when he talked about getting a start near his home, "It's incredible. The past week has been a whirlwind for me, but this is pretty special."

Living so close and of course being a hockey fan he said he saw many Canucks games as a kid, "I did, they were my team growing up so it'll be cool to play in this building."

As far as Vancouver players that he looked up to Lieuwen said, "I remember Naslund and Bertuzzi and those guys back in the day, so it's really exciting to be back here again."

In practice on Saturday Nolan put Matt Ellis on the left wing with Brian Flynn and Matt D'Agostini while Nic Deslauriers went with Zenon Konopka and John Scott. Nolan said, "You don't want to give a young player too much, too soon and I think the expectations and putting him in a second line position or a third line I mean he has eight games in the National Hockey League and it's all about development and truth being told, if we were a healthy group, he wouldn't be here right now, so it's up to us to watch and monitor." Nolan added, "You don't want to put a kid in a position of failure, you want to put him in a position of success, so we'll taper him back a little bit. I like his game, but we have to get back to the basics with him and then maybe when he's got five years in the league and he scores 20 goals he can try a backhand toe drag in the last minute of play."

That's two games in a row Nolan hasn't liked a play Deslauriers made late in the game.

Sabres prospect Compher flourishing

By Howard Simon

WGR 550

March 22, 2014

The Sabres trade of Andrej Sekera to the Carolina Hurricanes last June doesn't look very good right now.

Sekera has a career best 41 points, is 3rd on the Canes in scoring and is 10th among all defensemen in the league. In return for the native of Slovakia, the Sabres got Jamie McBain and a second round draft pick. McBain hasn't shown anything to make the Sabres believe he should be part of their long term plan.

But before you lash out at former GM Darcy Regier, keep in mind he turned the pick acquired in the deal into JT Compher. The way Compher is playing during his first year for the University of Michigan should excite you about his future.

The 5-11, 185 pound forward was named Big Ten freshman of the year this past week and made All Big Ten second team, the only freshman to receive all conference honors.

Compher, who will turn 19 next month, has 11 goals and a team leading 31 points in 35 games played. He also tops the Wolverines with a plus 14. Compher led all Big Ten rookies in points and led the conference with three shorthanded goals.

A native of Northbrook, Illinois which is a suburb of Chicago, Compher has nine multi point games this season for the 12th ranked Wolverines.

Compher patterns his game after Tampa Bay Lightning winger and Rochester native Ryan Callahan. Like Callahan, Compher is a strong two way player, blocks shot, doles out his fair share of hits and kills penalties.

His success on the collegiate level shouldn't come as a surprise. Compher played at a high level the last two years for the U.S. National Team Development Program. He helped Team USA earn a gold medal at the World Under 17 championships in 2012 and he tied for the team lead in scoring in 2013 when the U.S. won silver at the World Under 18 championships.

Compher probably would have played for the red, white and blue at the most recent World Junior Championship but a foot injury suffered during the selection camp ended his chances.

HOMECOMING KING

By Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

March 22, 2014

VANCOUVER – Good luck trying to wipe the smile off Nathan Lieuwen’s face.

The 22-year-old was born and raised less than an hour away in Abbotsford, BC. On Sunday he’ll be the starting goaltender at Rogers Arena facing the Vancouver Canucks, the team he grew up cheering for.

Lieuwen was grinning from ear-to-ear when he spoke with reporters following today’s practice.

“It’s incredible. Obviously this past week has been a whirlwind for me. This is just pretty special,” said Lieuwen, who was sporting a freshly shorn buzzcut. “The Canucks were my team growing up. It’ll be cool to play in this building.”

Sunday’s homecoming will cap off a wild first week of NHL action for Lieuwen. After playing on consecutive nights with the Rochester Americans, Lieuwen was recalled to Buffalo last Sunday when Michal Neuvirth went down with a lower body injury. He was then thrust into action that night against Montreal when Jhonas Enroth suffered a leg injury late in the second period. That was followed by his first career start in Calgary on Tuesday, where he made 23 saves in a 3-1 loss, after holding the Flames scoreless through the first 38:58 of action.

With everything that he’s gone through in the last seven days, Lieuwen says he’ll have to rely on his training and preparation to maintain his focus against the Canucks.

“I’ve just gotta kind of block it out. There’s obviously going to be a lot of emotions, and a lot of extra stuff that could creep into my head. I’ve just got to stay focused on my process and what I have to do on the ice. If I stay focused on that I’ll be fine.”

Sabres interim coach Ted Nolan had anticipated having Neuvirth back Sunday, but said today the goaltender had a slight setback in his recovery process.

“We’re trying something different. He’s been feeling really good, and then he goes on the ice and it doesn’t feel well. We’ll try to keep him off until he feels over 100 percent, and then we’ll put him back on.”

Nolan also said that Matt Hackett, coming off his first NHL win in two years, will get the start in Montreal on Tuesday.

Nolan said there won't be any lineup changes on Sunday, which means that Ville Leino will be scratched for a second straight game.

There was one minor line swap at today's practice. Matt Ellis was shifted to a line with Matt D'Agostini and Brian Flynn, while rookie Nicolas Deslauriers was dropped back to the right wing on a line with Zenon Konopka and John Scott.

Deslauriers is pointless in eight games with the Sabres since coming over in the deadline day deal that sent Brayden McNabb to Los Angeles. Nolan believes it's simply time to reel in the 23-year-old Deslauriers a bit.

It's like anything else, you don't want to give a young player too much, too soon. He has eight games in the NHL and it's all about development. Truth being told, if we were a healthier group he wouldn't be here right now. It is what it is. It's up to us to watch and monitor. You don't want to put a kid in a position of failure; you want to put him in a position of success. We'll taper him back a little bit. I like his game, but we've got to get back to the basics with him and develop him."

SUNDAY'S PROJECTED LINES

Marcus Foligno – Tyler Ennis – Drew Stafford
Cory Conacher – Cody Hodgson – Torrey Mitchell
Matt Ellis – Brian Flynn – Matt D'Agostini
John Scott – Zenon Konopka – Nicolas Deslauriers

DEFENSE PAIRS

Christian Ehrhoff – Rasmus Ristolainen
Jamie McBain – Mike Weber
Chad Ruhwedel – Henrik Tallinder

GOALIES

Nathan Lieuwen
Matt Hackett