



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

March 3, 2014

Sabres-Stars Preview

By Kevin Chroust

Associated Press

March 2, 2014

The Buffalo Sabres' trying season might now be facing its most difficult obstacle - life without star goaltender Ryan Miller.

The reality of that situation will settle in Monday night when the Sabres visit the Dallas Stars after shipping Miller to St. Louis on Friday.

"When a guy like Ryan Miller gets traded, that's not a normal player getting traded," interim coach Ted Nolan said. "He was the face of the organization for a long, long time. To lose a player like him, it's tough."

It got tougher in Buffalo a day after the trade when president of hockey operations Pat LaFontaine resigned. Amid the turnover, though, the Sabres (18-34-8) have won three straight.

"I think we're all numb right now so right now, we're just going to try to get this team focused on the Dallas Stars and that's our next opponent," Nolan told the team's official website. "We've got two new players in here and they come into this situation."

Dallas (28-22-10) can't be thrilled to see Miller join a Central Division rival, but at least it won't have to face him as it goes for a third win to close out a four-game home stretch.

The Stars had won two in a row before a 4-2 loss to Tampa Bay on Saturday. Antoine Roussel and Vernon Fiddler each had a goal and an assist but those came after the Lightning had built a 3-0 lead.

"They got one goal that bounced in off a guy's pants and another off a deflection. It wasn't our best start, but those kinds of things happen," Fiddler told the team's website. "We can't let that happen. We've got to be in every game. You give them a (three)-goal lead and it's tough to come back."

Kari Lehtonen allowed four goals on 21 shots after going 3-0-1 with a 1.25 goals-against average in his previous four starts.

The Stars likely won't face goalie Jaroslav Halak, who along with right wing Chris Stewart and prospect William Carrier came to the Sabres in exchange for Miller and center Steve Ott, with Buffalo also getting a 2015 first-round pick and a conditional pick. Halak said Sunday he wasn't expecting to play against Dallas but Stewart will.

Going from one of the top teams in the Western Conference to the worst team in the NHL rattled Halak and Stewart, but both are focused on making the best of the situation.

"I'll tell you, I'd be lying if I said I wasn't disappointed at first, but if you think I'm going to come in here and pout and feel sorry for myself, that's not the kind of person that I am," Stewart said. "So I've got to make the best of this situation and look at the positives. They've got a good young team here."

The Sabres' latest win came immediately after news of the trade, a 4-2 home victory over San Jose on Friday. Jhonas Enroth looked plenty capable in net with 36 saves, and he's won the team's two games since returning from the Olympic break after he went 0-10-4 from Nov. 2-Feb. 6.

"I was a bit more nervous than usual but I told myself I had nothing to lose," said Enroth, who played unexpectedly due to the timing of the deal.

The Stars are going for a two-game sweep of the Sabres after winning 4-3 in Buffalo on Oct. 28. The Sabres' Matt Moulson scored twice while Dallas' Tyler Seguin had a goal and an assist.

Sabres stunned by LaFontaine's resignation

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

March 2, 2014

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) -- Sabres forward Drew Stafford has witnessed plenty of turmoil during his eight seasons in Buffalo.

Following Stafford's rookie season in 2007, the Sabres lost co-captains Chris Drury and Danny Briere to free agency. Last year, long-time coach Lindy Ruff was fired.

What occurred during a 24-hour stretch this weekend has become the topper, leaving Stafford shaking his head in disbelief after returning to practice Sunday.

"I thought I had seen it all," Stafford said. "But, I guess, there's always room for more surprises. And this one's definitely a shocker."

On Friday, Stafford had difficulty keeping his emotions in check after star goalie Ryan Miller was traded to St. Louis. A day later, he was blindsided upon learning of Pat LaFontaine's abrupt resignation as president of hockey operations.

"It's tough," Stafford said. "It's another challenge, a little more adversity that you've got to put on top of the pile."

As if the Sabres (18-34-8) needed any more distractions during a season in which upheaval and dysfunction have been common threads for the NHL's last-place team.

At 2-13-1, Buffalo got off to its worst start in team history. Leading scorer Thomas Vanek was traded to the Islanders in October. The Sabres opened 0-8-1 at home, before enjoying their first win on Nov. 12. Three days later, general manager Darcy Regier and coach Ron Rolston were fired.

Now this.

Miller getting dealt along with captain Steve Ott, were widely anticipated moves because both were in the final years of their contracts. LaFontaine's departure was a surprise, coming a little more than three months after his arrival was hailed as a positive turning point for a struggling team.

"It's a lot for our fans to swallow in a short amount of time," Sabres president Ted Black said. "It creates uncertainty. And it's something that fans are going to be upset by."

Black failed to divulge any further details regarding the resignation except to reiterate LaFontaine wanted to resume his previous role working with the National Hockey League.

Black called the resignation a disappointment, but denied speculation that there had been any discord between LaFontaine and front-office staff or owner Terry Pegula.

LaFontaine has not returned messages, and on Sunday, his cell-phone mailbox was full.

What's clear is that his departure marks the latest setback for a franchise that has had difficulty establishing a winning course in the three years since Pegula bought the team and vowed to build an immediate contender. The Sabres are in jeopardy of missing the playoffs for a third straight season, and in the midst of a rebuilding plan that began with the purge of numerous high-priced veterans last year.

Black said the objective has not changed, and the team's transformation will continue under general manager Tim Murray.

"Pat was here for three months. It is one person," Black said. "I don't know if that impacts the greater mission or will deter us."

Murray was hired by LaFontaine in January, and now assumes much of his former boss's responsibilities.

It was Murray, who negotiated the Miller trade. And he is also fielding offers to make further deals before the league's trade deadline on Wednesday.

Next on Murray's priority list is negotiating a contract extension with interim coach Ted Nolan, who was brought in by LaFontaine for a second stint in Buffalo.

"We want Teddy to be our coach going forward," Murray said. "If he wants to be here, I want him to be our coach."

The question is whether Nolan wants to stay, something he left open following practice Sunday.

"Right now, it's not about my contract. It's about the situation that's happening," Nolan said. "It's about what's transpired in this organization, what happened to a very dear friend. And we'll leave it at that."

So much for the momentum the Sabres were supposed to be enjoying with their first three-game winning streak in preparing to play Dallas on Monday.

"We traded our franchise player, we traded our captain. That's tough enough as it is. And then all of a sudden the situation with Patty," Nolan said. "Right now, I have to put my personal situation behind right now and really concentrate on those 22 guys here."

Informed of Nolan's comments, Murray said, "I'm not going to beg anybody to come work here."

Murray said it's his objective to continue rebuilding the Sabres, which is what he was hired to do with or without LaFontaine.

"I can't make choices for him. He makes his own choices," Murray said. "I'm not one to dwell on what-ifs and sentiment and all that. But I'll forever be grateful that he hired me."

After deal, Sabres look ahead as more changes loom

By Nick Mendola

Associated Press

March 1, 2014

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) -- The Buffalo Sabres are moving on without the longtime face of their franchise.

And they know the experience will be anything but ordinary.

"When a guy like Ryan Miller gets traded, that's not a normal player getting traded," interim head coach Ted Nolan said. "He was the face of the organization for a long, long time. To lose a player like him, it's tough."

Tough, yes, but perhaps good practice for a team that could be offloading several more veterans before Wednesday's trade deadline, as general manager Tim Murray continues efforts to fix the NHL's worst team.

Murray traded Miller and captain Steve Ott to St. Louis on Friday. Buffalo acquired goaltender Jaroslav Halak, right wing Chris Stewart, prospect William Carrier, a 2015 first-round draft pick and a conditional pick.

It's unlikely to end there. Christian Ehrhoff said Friday that he recently complied with the Sabres' request to submit a list of eight teams that would make up the no-trade clause of his contract.

Soon-to-be unrestricted free agents Matt Moulson and Henrik Tallinder could also move, and Murray has said contract status doesn't dictate availability. Even Halak or Stewart could be traded.

"They're pieces that will be Buffalo Sabres when they pass their physicals and after that it's the same as everybody else," Murray said. "And what I said, if it makes sense it makes sense. ... If they're Buffalo Sabres, they play here and we're happy with them."

The overhaul began under Murray's predecessor, Darcy Regier, who was fired in November. The Sabres traded numerous high-priced veterans last season, including captain Jason Pominville.

It continued into October, when Thomas Vanek was traded to the New York Islanders for Moulson and two high draft picks.

The Sabres, as a result, have stockpiled picks. They could have as many as two first-round and three second-round selections in this year's draft, with 10 total picks over the first two rounds of the next two drafts.

Buffalo also has a solid group of prospects in its farm system, including defensemen Rasmus Ristolainen and Nikita Zadorov, who were both drafted in the first round in June.

Murray's objective is to add more draft picks or young prospects, and he's been clear about his intentions to make the team better regardless of cost.

"There's no untouchables," Murray said before the Miller trade. "It's a rebuild."

And for the players remaining on the team, it's a big opportunity to take a leadership role. In the case of Enroth, it's a chance to become a team's No. 1 goaltender for the first time in his career.

"If you don't call this a chance, I don't know what a chance is," Enroth said, later adding, "I truly believe I can be a No. 1 guy here."

Nolan noticed changes almost immediately after the trade was announced, as Ott and Miller said their goodbyes to teammates.

"You could really see it on Drew Stafford's face the most," Nolan said Friday. "Him and Matt Moulson really took over the leadership tonight with this young group."

Stafford is now the longest-tenured Sabre and the only player left from the 2006-07 team that won the Presidents Trophy, though Tallinder left as a free agent before being reacquired this summer.

The general manager's goals aren't lost on the players in the room, and Tyler Myers has expressed confidence in the direction of the team in general.

"You have to look at what we got, too," Myers said. "I think it's good for both sides. I'm happy for Ott and Miller."

Murray said the timing of the deal was not ideal for his roster, but the 22-year-old Marcus Foligno and other young teammates almost immediately recognized the bittersweet chance to drive the team into the future.

"I looked around with (Brian) Flynn and (Zemgus) Girgensons, and we just said we gotta step up," Foligno said. "This is a game where we have to play well and this is something where we lost them and now hopefully we're here for the long run and we're players that they count on."

LaFontaine resigns as Buffalo Sabres president

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

March 1, 2014

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) -- First, Ryan Miller. Now, Pat LaFontaine.

A day after trading their star goalie to St. Louis, the Buffalo Sabres lost another face of their franchise after LaFontaine abruptly resigned as president of hockey operations on Saturday a little more than three months after being brought in to provide a new direction to the NHL's last-place team.

The Sabres announced the decision in a news release issued after speculation had been raised of a potential front-office shake-up involving LaFontaine.

"I would like to thank Pat for all he has done for the organization," Sabres owner Terry Pegula said in the release. "Pat joined us at a very difficult time, and helped transition the organization down a new path."

The Sabres said LaFontaine would be returning to his previous role working with the National Hockey League. LaFontaine had been working with the league on player safety issues before being hired by the Sabres in mid-November.

The former Sabres captain's arrival was hailed as a major turning point for a struggling team. LaFontaine took over following a change in the front office during which general manager Darcy Regier and coach Ron Rolston were dismissed following the Sabres' 4-15-1 start.

LaFontaine's first move was hiring former Sabres coach Ted Nolan to take over as coach on an interim basis for the remainder of the season.

LaFontaine's next step came in January, when he hired Tim Murray as general manager.

"Terry Pegula hired me in November, and my primary objective was to lead the Sabres organization through a time of transition," LaFontaine said in the Sabres' release. "I'm proud of what we've been able to accomplish in a short period of time, and want to thank Terry and Kim Pegula for the opportunity and their support during my time with the Sabres."

LaFontaine's resignation still comes as a major surprise. In January, LaFontaine talked openly about how he would use his connections to USA Hockey in a bid to lure national and international events to Buffalo.

He leaves a day after Murray made his first big splash by trading star goalie Ryan Miller and captain Steve Ott to the St. Louis Blues.

In exchange, the Sabres acquired goalie Jaroslav Halak, forward Chris Stewart, prospect William Carrier, a 2015 first-round pick and a conditional 2016 third-round pick in a deal reached in advance of the NHL trade deadline on Wednesday.

The Sabres (18-34-8) had the day off on Saturday, and return to practice on Sunday before traveling to play at Dallas on Monday. They remain in last place, but are enjoying their first three-game winning streak following a 4-2 win over the San Jose Sharks on Friday.

This is not the first time LaFontaine has abruptly stepped down as an NHL team executive.

In July 2006, LaFontaine quit the New York Islanders a little over a month after being brought in to serve as senior adviser to owner Charles Wang.

In Buffalo, LaFontaine's absence was notable this week once the team returned to the ice following the league's Olympic break.

He was not spotted in the press box during the Sabres' three-game homestand that began with a 3-2 win over Carolina on Tuesday. That was unusual because LaFontaine had previously spent time watching games from the press-box level in Pegula's box, alongside Murray and several of the owner's associates.

LaFontaine also missed the team's "Power Play Luncheon" for fans on Friday, when he was scheduled to speak along with fellow former Sabres greats Gilbert Perreault, Rene Robert and Danny Gare. The crowd was informed LaFontaine had the flu.

The Sabres have become a top-heavy organization since Regier's dismissal.

Pegula created the position of president of hockey operations to hire LaFontaine. And Pegula did so only after LaFontaine declined a chance to become the GM by saying he didn't think he had enough experience for that job.

Along with hiring Murray, the Sabres also brought in Hockey Hall of Fame member and long-time executive Craig Patrick to serve as a special adviser.

LaFontaine backed the hiring of Murray and Patrick, by referring to both as his "wingers." He also discussed how important it was for him to be building a front-office team that could work together in rebuilding a team that has missed the playoffs in each of the past two seasons, and not won a playoff round since reaching the 2007 Eastern Conference finals.

It's not clear what effect LaFontaine's departure will have on the team's short-term future, including Nolan's status.

Murray said this week he's already had discussions with Nolan about extending his contract beyond this season.

Sabres want to keep Nolan, but coach's desire to stay unclear

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

March 2, 2014

DALLAS — One week ago, the Sabres were planning a news conference to announce an extension of Ted Nolan's contract. After a wild weekend that saw Pat LaFontaine resign as president of hockey operations, it's not clear whether Nolan even wants to stay in Buffalo past this season.

The future of the interim coach and the history of LaFontaine remained uncertain Sunday as the Sabres got back to work. Nolan conducted practice in First Niagara Center before flying to Dallas for tonight's game, but the emotional man did so with LaFontaine's departure weighing heavily.

"I don't even want to think about it, to tell you the truth. It's that tough," Nolan said. "It hasn't just been the last two months with Patty. I formed that relationship with him as a player back last time I was coaching. Everybody knows what kind man Patty is. They don't come much better than him."

Nolan and LaFontaine have been friends and allies since 1995, and LaFontaine opened the door for Nolan to return to Buffalo in November. It appears Nolan's job status had nothing to do with LaFontaine's shocking exit because the coach was safe.

The Sabres were set to announce last Tuesday that Nolan was staying in town with a multiyear contract, The News has learned. The news conference never took place, possibly because LaFontaine's shaky situation became known to Nolan. The optimistic coach was outwardly downcast during the week.

"We did talk about contract," Nolan said. "Right now is not about my contract. It's about the situation that just happened. It's about what transpired in this organization, what happened to a very dear friend."

"I have to put my personal situation behind right now and really concentrate on those 22 guys here. That was the main reason I got here was to try to turn things around and coach the Buffalo Sabres. Right now especially I'm going to really concentrate on that because we traded our franchise player, we traded our captain. It's tough enough as it is. All of a sudden a situation happens with Patty."

"I've just got to put how I'm feeling away to the side and deal with the team."

General Manager Tim Murray, who appeared with Sabres President Ted Black at an afternoon news conference, said he wants Nolan back but didn't know what the coach was thinking.

“If he wants to be here, I want him to be our coach,” Murray said. “I can’t speculate whether he does or not, and I’m not going to beg anybody to come and work here. I want people that want to be here. I want players that want to be here. We want Teddy to be our coach going forward.”

Nolan has repeatedly said coaching in Buffalo is his dream job, so not agreeing to an extension clearly has to do with LaFontaine. The Hall of Famer did not respond to messages seeking comment for the second straight day.

LaFontaine’s friends continued to express shock and search for answers regarding his exit. People inside and outside Buffalo who had talked with him recently say he expressed a genuine love for the job and was excited about the team’s future.

Now he’s gone.

“Pat LaFontaine resigned,” Black replied when asked if LaFontaine quit or was fired. “I can tell you there was no discord.”

Sources continue to say LaFontaine was let go, so did the fan favorite resign in order to avoid being fired? Black deflected the question.

“As per comments at the press conference and as was in the release yesterday, Pat resigned,” Black said in an email Sunday evening.

Though LaFontaine is out, his fingerprints remain.

“In the short time that I’ve known Pat, he’s done a lot for me on and off the ice as far as putting things in a new perspective and treating me with respect,” right wing Drew Stafford said. “It was a good experience playing under him. It’s just weird we’re already talking about it as a thing of the past.

“You go seven, eight years of steady, really nothing happening until maybe like a deadline deal or something, then the last 24, 48 hours – I’ve never really seen anything like it. It’s pretty crazy.”

During LaFontaine’s four months on the job, he hired Murray, Nolan and adviser Craig Patrick.

“We appreciate what he’s done,” said Black, who added there will not be another president of hockey operations. “The position was created when Pat came in. As of right now, there’s no intention to continue that position at all. Basically, the responsibilities will be assumed in the GM position with Tim.”

Black understands why fans are upset and dismayed with the appearance of dysfunction inside the franchise. A source close to ownership says Terry Pegula is

aware of the image problem but wants to look toward the future and believes winning will make people forget the angst.

The problem with that is the Sabres are a long way from winning. Murray will continue to try and change that this week. He moved goaltender Ryan Miller and captain Steve Ott on Friday, and more transactions are expected before Wednesday's trade deadline.

"I expect teams that I have talked to in the past will follow up and there will be lots of talk and speculation," said Murray, who wants to stay out of the team's off-ice soap opera. "For me, it's just about the hockey. It's about continuing to talk trade. It's about continuing to get ready for the draft. It's about continuing to evaluate the hockey staff. I just have to keep doing what I'm doing.

"I'm going to be grateful forever that Pat hired me and gave me my first GM job. I can't make choices for him. He makes his own choices. We all do. I'm not one to dwell on what-ifs and sentiment and all that."

Sabres' situation is as clear as mud

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

March 2, 2014

Downtown in Dysfunction Junction, where Ted Nolan must feel like he's in some kind of time warp back to 1997, the coach's emotional state is telling far more of the truth than anything the Sabres are saying.

Nolan has been morose for several days, to the point of tears on more than one occasion. Steve Ott and Ryan Miller, two players he absolutely loved, were getting traded and pretty much everyone in hockey knew it. But nobody knew Nolan was shielding a much deeper secret.

Pat LaFontaine gave Nolan a second chance in Buffalo in November, a chance to have a final act in the wake of the circus that ensued here nearly 17 years ago.

Following practice Sunday morning, Nolan pretty much seemed like he was close to joining LaFontaine out the door. After three months of saying he wanted to be the Sabres coach on a permanent basis, Nolan would no longer make that commitment in the wake of LaFontaine's stunning departure a few hours earlier.

"Right now is not about my contract," Nolan said, his voice once again cracking and the tears starting to form in his eyes. "It's about the situation that just happened. It's about what transpired in this organization, what happened to a very dear friend and I will leave it at that."

What happened?

Hold that press release. I did Saturday night. The Sabres claim nothing cataclysmic happened, that LaFontaine simply resigned to return to his old job in the NHL office. Of course, if you believe that, I've got a multi-million dollar timeshare in Florida that I'll be holed up in while covering the team's road trip this week.

Team President Ted Black was steadfast again Sunday that LaFontaine was not fired, although multiple sources continue to say that's the case.

Black says there's no discord in the Buffalo front office. In LaFontaine's eyes, there clearly was although it wasn't about the Miller trade, which new general manager Tim Murray consummated a few days after LaFontaine was already gone.

It probably wasn't about Nolan either. Murray's feeling on the coach is pretty much this: We've got a deal on the table – one the team nearly announced on Tuesday – so you can take it or go coach in Latvia because no one else in the NHL will touch you if you turn this one down.

The fans want answers about LaFontaine and they're not getting many. As usual, Terry Pegula was most notable for his absence. The Sabres' owner loves the accolades and he was certainly front and center in bringing LaFontaine back to extinguish the Blue and Gold tire fire in November created by Darcy Regier.

But as soon as things go sour, like the firing of Lindy Ruff last year or the widely panned retention of Regier, Pegula takes the exit stage left and lets Black dutifully take the bullets. Unacceptable.

You want an answer? This is about clashes in style. There are open questions about LaFontaine's ability to manage in the wake of his sudden departure eight years ago on Long Island that's now coupled with this one.

LaFontaine, of course, dealt with concussions during his playing career. Now that he's out the door, there's talk of outbursts with staff and a lack of willingness on LaFontaine's part for any sort of compromise.

"I don't have any concern about Pat's mental state," said Black, who seem mortified by the questioning of it.

It's all so hard to believe. Neither of our teams seem to have their act together, as subsets of the executive suite seem to be sparring with each other.

When it comes to the Sabres, all you really need to do is at this point is substitute "State College" or "Pittsburgh" for "Detroit" and you get where the influence of the franchise is coming from, just like the split going on with the Bills.

The key difference is Pegula's cronies are here in the building and having direct, on-the-scene impact. Joe Battista, who carries the title of vice president of hockey-related businesses, is nothing more than a longtime Pegula buddy who has no business being around an NHL operation.

Nolan certainly seemed unhappy to get the word to pull Ott and Miller from the lineup from Battista. Murray said he was still on the phone working the trade and time was certainly a factor, as the game was less than an hour away.

But Battista has exactly zero NHL experience before this year. He spent the last 26 years at Penn State and was a longtime coach of its club program before facilitating Pegula's \$88 million donation for the university's arena.

Battista is clearly here to help with the growth of HarborCenter. You can bet LaFontaine didn't like how he was becoming a player on the NHL side of the business. Black said Battista's role has not grown, but others will tell you it has.

Murray, remember, is still a rookie GM. You don't send an NHL neophyte down to tell the head coach an hour before a game his captain and franchise goaltender have to sit because they're traded. Bad optics for sure.

But other than that point, Murray was the star of Sunday's news conference. You can't believe much out of what comes out the Sabres lately, but you at least had to love Murray's attitude.

There were a couple of times it seemed he was downright scowling while standing at the front of the room. His stone jaw had a look that said, "I can't believe I'm standing here dealing with this. Let's go. Get your questions done so I can go back and make more trades."

Fair enough. Murray needs to get the Nolan situation ironed out, too. If LaFontaine really resigned, Nolan would have to simply understand. It would be career suicide not to. But if Nolan believes LaFontaine was wronged, as he clearly does, he may not work with this ownership group – even if that means he's done in the NHL.

Murray is leaving that up to Nolan.

"I just want people that want to be here to be here," Murray said. "If he wants to be here, I want him to be our coach."

It all sounds so simple. But as we all know, nothing in Dysfunction Junction is ever that way.

New Sabres Halak, Stewart prove to be quite witty

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

March 3, 2014

DALLAS — Jaroslav Halak and Chris Stewart are a couple of funny guys.

Halak, acquired with Stewart in the trade that sent Ryan Miller and Steve Ott to St. Louis, was asked Sunday what awaits Miller with the Blues.

“Probably less shots,” the Buffalo goaltender said.

Stewart is a wide-bodied, 6-foot-2, 231-pounder. He stood out during his first practice with the Sabres, most of whom could reach his dimensions only with a stepping stool and iron in their pockets.

“Well,” Stewart said with a grin, “standing next to John Scott out there, it’s kind of bit of an ego killer.”

It’s unlikely Buffalo will get many more glimpses at their sense of humor.

Halak and Stewart went from a Stanley Cup favorite to the 30th-place team Friday. It was a shock, but they’re willing to make the most of their time in Buffalo. They also know they might not spend much time there.

It’s entirely possible Sunday was the only practice they’ll ever have in First Niagara Center. Ottawa is highly interested in acquiring Stewart before Wednesday’s trade deadline, while the Star-Tribune in Minnesota reports the Wild are hot for Halak.

“I’m happy to be here right now, and we’ll see what’s going to happen a few days from now if I’m still here,” Halak said. “Anything can happen from now on. We’ve got three more days before the trade deadline, and we’ll see.”

Halak, a pending unrestricted free agent, is 24-9-4 with a 2.23 goals-against average and .917 save percentage. Minnesota likely isn’t the only club that would be interested in the goaltender. He will not play tonight in Dallas against the Stars, but Stewart is scheduled to dress.

The Senators like Stewart for his physical game and scoring touch. The 26-year-old scored 15 times for the Blues this season and potted 28 goals with Colorado in 2009-10.

“You hear about all the rumors,” Stewart said. “As long as I’m here, I’m going to focus 100 percent of my energy on winning hockey games for the Buffalo Sabres.”

While they want to help the Sabres, it was tough to leave St. Louis.

“I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t disappointed at first,” Stewart said. “If you think I’m going to come in here and pout and feel sorry for myself, that’s not the kind of person I am. I’m going to make the best of the situation and look at the positive.”

Halak is also disappointed to leave a team that can make a run toward the Stanley Cup.

“You build something, you want to see it through,” said Halak, who will have to watch Miller finish the job. “He’s a great goalie, and he’s going to fit in. We’ll see how that’s going to work out for them. Like I said, I wish them good luck in the playoffs.”

...

Center Tyler Ennis, who missed two games with an injury, is expected to play against the Stars in American Airlines Center. Being on the road should give the Sabres a temporary reprieve from the chaos in Buffalo that saw the trade Friday and Pat LaFontaine resign as president of hockey operations Saturday.

“Tyler is good to go,” coach Ted Nolan said. “Even he said something about what happened more so than about what his injuries are. We’re all numb right now.”

Dysfunction returns to the Sabres' front office

By Bucky Gleason

Buffalo News

March 1, 2014

Of all the mysteries involving the Buffalo Sabres in recent years, this one makes the least sense. It could be a while before anyone finds the logic in Pat LaFontaine abruptly parting ways with the Buffalo Sabres a mere 3½ months after he showed up on a white horse and sharing a saddle with Ted Nolan.

It's important to know that "parting ways" was written for a reason. The Sabres were spinning the idea that he resigned, as if he up and quit on them like he did the New York Islanders, so he could return to his former job with the NHL. Sorry, but like many things the Sabres say, I'm reluctant to believe them.

LaFontaine loved his gig with the Sabres. It was his dream job. He said so numerous times during his 109-day stay after assuming command. He was intent on getting the right pieces in place. He felt like he was home. His family was prepared to build a life here. He was obsessed with making it work in Buffalo, for Buffalo.

Why would he lie?

Well, I'm guessing that he wasn't lying. And that left me to wonder Saturday that there was more to this doozy, that he actually was fired after losing a power struggle with people in the front office. No matter, clearly his relationship with Terry Pegula & Co. quickly imploded before he walked, or was pushed, out the door.

LaFontaine wasn't returning phone calls Saturday. It should be interesting to hear his side when he emerges from the shadows. The NHL obviously still believes in him. He'll be returning to league headquarters. The Sabres, for better or worse, will continue through more tumultuous times ahead.

Just know that what exactly happened will never be completely clear. The rumor mill will be churning at high speed in the days and weeks ahead, clouding our thoughts and leading to more speculation about how it went down. Various versions of the truth will come out depending on different points of view.

Theories circulating Saturday ranged from Pegula's cronies ganging up on LaFontaine and getting in the owner's ear to LaFontaine feeling overwhelmed and buckling under stress from the job. One source said Pegula was furious with LaFontaine while another said he was in tears over his departure.

It did not appear, however, that LaFontaine and new General Manager Tim Murray disagreed over whether Nolan should be retained. LaFontaine believed

all along that Nolan was the right man for the job. Murray was working on a contract extension with the interim coach. We'll see if the job is right for Nolan.

Honestly, I'm not sure what, or whom, to believe anymore. The persistent turmoil that was evident before LaFontaine arrived appeared to be tapering off. The Sabres appeared to have a good, strong leader. By all accounts, LaFontaine brought intelligence, class and integrity the organization desperately needed.

And now this?

Goodness, gracious.

Nothing comes easy to the Sabres, who under LaFontaine were making progress in terms of restoring whatever credibility they had left. Murray was aggressive when trading away Ryan Miller and Steve Ott and appeared to get a respectable haul from St. Louis. Nolan was solidifying his place behind the bench.

And the Sabres won three straight games for the first time all season, including a solid victory over the San Jose Sharks without Miller and Ott and, apparently, LaFontaine. He was absent from team functions for most of last week. The organization told reporters he was under the weather, but now we know that wasn't true. He was under fire.

Looking back, perhaps that's one reason Nolan looked depressed in recent days. Maybe he was just bummed out about Miller. He probably knew something was amiss with LaFontaine and worried about everything falling apart – again.

Who's running the show now? Is it Ted Black, who seemed content with overseeing daily operations while LaFontaine handled hockey matters? Is it Murray, who was here for about 15 minutes before getting caught in a firestorm? Does this mean Ken Sawyer, all but muted with LaFontaine in charge, has a voice again?

And what does the future hold for Craig Patrick? He left his job with Columbus to become an adviser to LaFontaine, who is no longer around to hear his advice.

Pardon me for having too many questions and not enough answers, but that's what happens when trying to make sense of something that doesn't make sense.

Right when it looks like the Sabres are going in the right direction, the organization makes a U-turn. Right when it looks like the front office found serenity, chaos returns.

If you think the Sabres appear to be a dysfunctional franchise, imagine what people are thinking outside of Buffalo. Seriously, why would anyone want to play here?

Pegula talked about winning championships when he purchased the team, but instead watched his team spend more money and win less. He fired a coach he should have kept, kept a general manager he should have fired. Finally, he made a wholesale change that included LaFontaine at the top of the hockey department.

It's strange now, but LaFontaine was hired to make sense of this mess.

Players still trying to process trade of Miller, Ott

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

March 2, 2014

The Buffalo Sabres will be back on the ice this morning in First Niagara Center, with a quick practice before they head to the airport for a flight to Dallas and a game Monday night against the Lindy Ruff-led Stars.

The NHL's worst team is on a three-game winning streak for the first time this season but it has to be reeling in the wake of Friday's trade of Ryan Miller and Steve Ott and Saturday's resignation of Pat LaFontaine, the team's president of hockey operations.

It will be quite a scene for new goaltender Jaroslav Halak and new winger Chris Stewart to walk into – provided they even stick around. Rumors continue to have one or both getting flipped elsewhere prior to Wednesday's NHL trade deadline.

The Miller trade ranks as one of the biggest blockbusters in franchise history and it was pulled off in bizarre fashion, with the two players being told just before pregame warm-ups. Ott, in fact, was kicking a soccer ball with teammates in an arena hallway when he was told not to dress.

"It was a little bit of a circus before the game," defenseman Tyler Myers said after Friday's 4-2 win over San Jose.

"That's never happened to me in pro hockey," added defenseman Mike Weber. "You go from everyone getting ready to getting dressed, to going out for warm-ups, to a little bit of mass chaos."

John Scott, who was supposed to be scratched, had to hurriedly dress and take the last half of the warm-up. HarborCenter employee Ryan Vinz dressed as the backup goalie and Jhonas Enroth became a last-minute starter when told by interim coach Ted Nolan.

Just a few minutes earlier, Enroth had been in the rear of the locker room joking with team trainers, hoping a big deal didn't happen prior to a game against the Sharks.

"About three minutes later, Coach Nolan came up to me and told me I was starting," Enroth said. "I kind of jinxed myself."

Nolan was first told Miller should not warm up because a deal was imminent. Then he learned the same applied to Ott. Nolan said he brought both players into his office and about five minutes later was told the trade was on.

A red-eyed Nolan had trouble composing himself after Friday's win. He said Ott was the first player he met when he arrived in November and had quickly become one of his favorite captains. And Nolan has also been a huge Miller supporter since Day One.

"I'm a pretty emotional guy to begin with," Nolan said. "When you start thinking about what transpired, that's when it hits the heart strings."

Winger Drew Stafford, a close friend to Miller, was visibly upset during a postgame interview on the MSG telecast and could not speak to reporters after the game. But following the morning skate, an introspective Stafford told The News he was having trouble processing the Sabres' dressing room without its franchise goaltender.

"I've seen the core pieces go over the years," Stafford said. "One by one, they go. But Ryan has been the face of this franchise for a long time, even longer than I've been here. It is going to be extremely weird.

"But we know it's all a part of the business. At the end of the day, this is a business and sometimes people can forget that. Management has to make business decisions. It's unfortunate as a friend. It will be tough to see him go."

During the third period, the Sabres played Jumbotron video tributes to Ott and Miller and the crowd responded with a roaring standing ovation. The players on the bench stood up and joined their teammates on the ice in tapping their sticks in salute of their departed comrades.

"Every guy on the bench was watching those tributes," said Weber. "Tough to hold back the emotions. It's probably the worst part of the business, losing friends and teammates like that."

The trade of Ott was particularly tough on Weber, who billeted with Ott's family during his junior days in Windsor, Ont. And Weber was open about his hope that Ott might consider returning to Buffalo this summer in free agency.

"I grew up with Stevie. It was a dream come true to have him traded here and play with him the last year and a half," Weber said. "As a hockey player and as a brother to him, it's nice he's going to get that chance to go play for that Cup. ... Hopefully he gets that experience and we're able to make a good offer in the summer time and bring the boys back together."

Miller and Ott left Buffalo on a flight to Phoenix, where they joined the Blues and will play in tonight's game against the Coyotes.

Miller will be able to don his college and Olympic jersey number of 39, which was unavailable here because it was worn by Dominik Hasek and is expected to be

retired. Ott, who will wear No. 29, will be on a forward line with former Sabre Derek Roy and Team USA Olympic shootout hero T.J. Oshie.

Ott and Roy were traded for each other in July, 2012 with Roy going to Dallas. Roy has since played for Vancouver before signing as a free agent with St. Louis last summer.

A fourth former Sabre, defenseman Jordan Leopold, is also on the St. Louis roster. The Sabres and Blues have already played in Buffalo this season but will meet April 3 in Scottrade Center.

“They’re going to a team that will have a legitimate chance this year,” Myers said of Miller and Ott. “All the best to them – just not on the night we play them.”

Vinz gets his 60 minutes of fame

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

March 2, 2014

There was no time for excitement or social media posts.

There was only time for one thing – panic.

Ryan Vinz, the director of hockey technology for HarborCenter, was working late when Joe Battista walked into his office.

Battista, the vice president of hockey-related businesses for the Buffalo Sabres, asked Vinz if he had his goalie gear with him.

He did.

And the rest is written in emergency back-up goaltender folklore.

“I was in full-on panic mode to be honest,” Vinz said. “I was not expecting it or ready for it. I’m just glad I was able to be part of it. I was working on a presentation I have to give on Monday for HarborCenter and I was really focused on that. I skipped dinner with a co-worker, too. It probably was a good thing I stayed in the office.”

That’s how Lancaster native Vinz ended up being the Sabres backup goaltender Friday night.

It was about an hour before the game with the San Jose Sharks at First Niagara Center when the Sabres finalized a trade sending Ryan Miller and Steve Ott to St. Louis. The Rochester Americans were in Chicago and the Sabres, as per NHL rules, needed a second goaltender for the game.

Enter Vinz, a 2003 graduate of Lancaster High School where he played goal for his school varsity team. He went to Clarkson and tried to make the Golden Knights as a walk-on, but ended up spending four years as the program’s video coordinator – a position he turned into a successful career in hockey.

After graduating from Clarkson in 2007 he went to work for the Sabres as a video scout. In 2011 he left to work for Sportstec, a technology company that supplies the software for hockey video analysis. He started at HarborCenter a few months ago to establish the hockey technology component of the organization.

He still plays recreationally, hence his equipment was in his office. But Friday, gave him a completely different view and appreciation of the NHL game.

“I didn’t know what to expect. I didn’t know what I was thinking. I was just running around,” Vinz said. “I just have a lot of respect for those guys. It’s a totally different experience watching them on video or in the press box and being down there, being part of it and listening to the coaches. It was an amazing experience.”

Vinz relied on help from equipment manager Dave Williams to negotiate his way through the game.

“I had worked with the hockey department in the past so a lot of those guys helped keep me calm,” Vinz said. “I told Dave Williams to tell me what I needed to do, where to go, where I needed to be. He said, ‘Just work the door. That’s all you need to do.’ I was trying to focus on that as best I could.”

Would it have been cool to get in the game? Of course. But Vinz was pretty happy just working the door to the bench and watching Jhonas Enroth give a solid performance in a 4-2 Sabres victory.

“It would have been amazing but Jhonas had an amazing game,” Vinz said. “It was especially great to watch a fellow goaltender. That was the most exciting part, to be able to watch how well he played. After the game, the first thing I said when I went up to him was ‘Thank you for not getting injured and you had an amazing game.’ ”

For the record, Vinz signed a one-day amateur try-out contract, which means there was no big payout for his one game as a Sabre. But the experience was enough, especially for a native Western New Yorker.

“My parents had season tickets back at the Aud and they would bring home pucks and pennants from each game,” Vinz said, “I started skating when I was young and I just grew up a hockey fan. I was a goalie because they got to paint their masks. Putting on that jersey of your hometown team, that’s was just a life-changing experience.”

John Vogl's Inside the NHL: Top Miller moment a misunderstanding

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

March 2, 2014

In the fall of 2002, Ryan Miller walked into the Sabres' dressing room for the first time. So did I.

For 12 seasons, he played hockey in Buffalo and I wrote about it. Though our professions are wildly different, it was a shared experience. We visited 30 NHL cities across North America. We watched the fans go wild for a winner and boo a loser. We talked about games and restaurants, tourist spots and families.

While I've gotten to know other players better – I can tell you how Toni Lydman prepares his Christmas dinner and what Matt Ellis watches on TV – I've talked with Miller more than anyone. The goaltender is certainly the most cerebral athlete I've covered, and the 1,000 or so conversations have been great.

Well, make that 998.

There were two blowups in a dozen years, which is a pretty good ratio. During the first one, after Lindy Ruff criticized him and put the team through a gut-churning practice, I misunderstood Miller. For the second, which became a story I still hear about, he misunderstood me.

You know those days when you drag yourself into work and all you want is a quiet, easy shift, one that's free of hassles and ends before you know it? I was having one of those Feb. 13, 2011.

The Sabres hosted the New York Islanders in a Sunday matinee. The Sabres' previous game was Thursday in Florida. With two days between games, I extended my stay in the Sunshine State and went to Key West.

Key West is – how shall I put this? – ridiculously fun. My flight back to Buffalo wasn't until early Sunday morning, so I made sure to partake in the festivities.

Following a long Friday, I left Key West late Saturday night and drove up to Miami's South Beach area for a few hours before arriving in the Fort Lauderdale airport shortly before sunrise. The flight to Buffalo was supposed to get home around 10 a.m., which would give me time to catch a nap and recuperate before the 3 p.m. puck drop.

Of course, my flight got delayed. And delayed again. I finally arrived home at 1 p.m., took a quick shower and went to the rink running on fumes.

While I was hoping for a humdrum 3-1 game I could write by rote, Miller instead suffered one of the two worst losses of his career. It was a 7-6 overtime debacle against the woeful Islanders. He was not in a good mood.

The reigning Vezina Trophy winner had been on a decent run until that point, going 12-3-1 at the tail end of 31 straight starts. I figured he had earned a softball question that would give him an opportunity to explain the game and get me to bed.

“Did you feel OK?”

Having dealt with him for years, I expected the sort of answer a pitcher would give after getting shelled. “You know, I just didn't have it today. I could tell in warmups that I was a little off.”

Instead, the goalie went off the rails.

“John, I feel fine,” Miller replied in anger. “I don't even know why you're going down that lane. Do I feel fine? What does that mean? What are you implying?”

An argument recorded by Jerry Sullivan and the radio and television stations ensued. To this day, several friends greet me with, “Hey, do you feel OK?!” One Sabres reporter made a point of wryly asking Miller that question after every subpar performance.

For Ryan and I, the incident was put aside the next day, but it was definitely the most memorable from a dozen years of shared experiences.

Many looking to deal

The Sabres got the trades rolling. Expect the following teams to join in:

- Ottawa: The Senators really, really want Chris Stewart. The Sabres obviously aren't wed to the forward.
- Calgary: “Everyone is focused on the guys with expiring contracts,” Flames President Brian Burke said. “But we’re open for business for hockey deals, too.”

Though the Flames have explored an extension with Mike Cammalleri, moving the forward makes perfect sense. Left wing Sven Baertschi, a first-round pick in 2011, hasn't fit in.

- Detroit: “We’re always looking to upgrade if there’s a hockey trade out there,” GM Ken Holland said. “I don’t see us paying a big price for a rental. I don’t believe that’s the direction we should go.”

- Pittsburgh: GM Ray Shero has made a move at or near the deadline in six of his seven seasons. While the Penguins have too many holes to fill at once, they'll try to plug at least one.
- Phoenix: "We still think we have enough within our group to get to the playoffs," GM Don Maloney said, "and if we can add to that to give ourselves a better chance, that's our goal."

A few teams could sit this trade frenzy out:

- Colorado: "Our group is believing in each other," coach Patrick Roy said. "I think it's hard right now to think of making some changes. ... It's very, very dangerous to try to do too much. Am I comfortable to go with the team I have? The answer is yes."
- Toronto: GM Dave Nonis has steadfastly maintained he won't chase rentals or unload pending UFAs Dave Bolland, Nikolai Kulemin and James Reimer.
- Tampa Bay: The Lightning may make a move, but it won't involve Martin St. Louis. The star's Olympic rift with GM Steve Yzerman has died down, so anything drastic won't come until the summer.
- Winnipeg: The Jets don't have much cap space or many tradable pieces, plus new coach Paul Maurice started 10-3-1 so why mess that up?

Bailey causes a stir

The most eye-popping part of the Miller trade was seeing Sabres prospect Justin Bailey and his mother head toward the Buffalo dressing room just before the deal was made official. I thought for sure the Williamsville native was part of the transaction, which would have added another huge angle to the story.

Bailey stopped to chat on the way out and said he was just in town to check out the results of an MRI done on his injured shoulder. The 18-year-old has 25 goals and 43 points in 54 games with his junior team.

Sabres visit Stars in first game since trade

By Sean McCullen

NHL.com

March 3, 2014

SABRES (18-34-8) at STARS (28-22-10)

TV: NBCSN, TSN2

Last 10: Buffalo 4-5-1; Dallas 6-2-2

Season series: This is the final game this season between the teams. The Dallas Stars beat the Buffalo Sabres 4-3 on Oct. 28 at First Niagara Center.

Big story: This is the Sabres' first game since longtime goalie Ryan Miller and captain Steve Ott were dealt to the St. Louis Blues. The trade, which brought goalie Jaroslav Halak, forward Chris Stewart, prospect William Carrier, a 2015 first-round pick and a conditional draft pick to Buffalo, was announced during the Sabres' 4-2 win against the San Jose Sharks on Friday night. It remains to be seen whether Halak and Stewart will stay with the Sabres past the NHL Trade Deadline, which is Wednesday at 3 p.m. ET.

Halak, 28, who was 24-9-4 with a 2.23 goals-against average and .919 save percentage with the Blues this season, will become an unrestricted free agent this summer. Stewart, 26, who has 15 goals and 11 assists, is signed through 2014-15.

"As long as I'm here, I'm going to focus 100 percent of my energy on winning hockey games for the Buffalo Sabres," Stewart said of the trade rumors, according to The Buffalo News.

Miller, 33, made 23 saves in his debut with the Blues on Sunday, a 4-2 win against the Phoenix Coyotes. He had played all 540 games in his NHL career with the Sabres.

Team Scope:

Sabres: Halak told reporters after practice Sunday that he will not be in goal against the Stars, adding fuel to speculation he will be traded for a second time in less than a week.

"I'm happy to be here right now, and we'll see what's going to happen a few days from now if I'm still here," Halak told The Buffalo News. "Anything can happen from now on. We've got three more days before the trade deadline, and we'll see."

The Sabres have won all three games since the NHL break for the 2014 Sochi Olympics ended. In addition to the win against the Sharks on Friday, they beat

the Carolina Hurricanes 3-2 last Tuesday behind Miller's 36-save performance before topping the Boston Bruins 5-4 in overtime last Wednesday.

The game in Dallas opens a three-game road trip for Buffalo, which has the worst record in the NHL.

Stars: Dallas is 1-1-0 in two games, each at home, since the Olympic break ended and will play four of its next five games at American Airlines Center. Ben Bishop made 39 saves Saturday to lead the Tampa Bay Lightning to a 4-2 win against the Stars.

The game Monday is coach Lindy Ruff's second against his old team. The Sabres fired Ruff last February.

"There were great memories there, but it's like I've been here forever," Ruff, who had coached the Sabres since 1997, said, according to The Dallas Morning News.

In his first season in Dallas, Ruff has the Stars in position to make the playoffs for the first time since 2008. They have a big game Thursday, when they host the Vancouver Canucks. Dallas, Vancouver and the Winnipeg Jets are tied with 66 points entering Monday; the Stars hold the second and final wild-card spot in the Western Conference by virtue of having played fewer games than the other two.

"I'm way ahead of where I was when I got here. ... You see how people operate in tough situations, and I think we're way ahead of the curve in that category now," Ruff said.

Who's hot: Sabres defenseman Tyler Myers has two goals and two assists the past two games. Goalie Jhonas Enroth stopped 65 of 71 shots he faced in the wins against Boston and San Jose. ... Stars center Jamie Benn has a goal and three assists in the past three games. Forwards Antoine Roussel and Vernon Fiddler each had a goal and an assist against Tampa Bay.

Injury report: Buffalo center Tyler Ennis (undisclosed) participated in an optional skate Friday morning, but then sat out the game against San Jose. He is day-to-day. ... Dallas defenseman Brenden Dillon (lower body) practiced Sunday after missing the game against Tampa Bay. He is questionable. Defenseman Stephane Robidas (broken leg) is several weeks from returning.

NUMBERS GAME: BLUES GET MILLER, OTT FROM SABRES

By Scott Cullen

TSN.ca

February 28, 2014

The St. Louis Blues and Buffalo Sabres came to an agreement on a big trade that may only offer incremental improvement to the Blues in their quest for a Stanley Cup.

Numbers Game breaks down the Blues' acquisition of Ryan Miller and Steve Ott.

The Blues Get: G Ryan Miller and C Steve Ott.

Miller, 33, is enjoying one of the best seasons of his career, despite rarely getting rewarded with wins by this struggling Sabres team. Miller's .923 save percentage this season is the second-best of his career, bettered only by his .929 save percentage in 2009-2010, when he won the Vezina Trophy as top goaltender.

It's that strong play from Miller this year that has made him an attractive commodity on the trade market because, over the past three seasons, his .926 even-strength save percentage is only okay, just barely ahead of Jaroslav Halak's .925 mark.

It's also not like Miller has a sterling playoff reputation. He hasn't played beyond the first round since 2007 and his .917 career save percentage in the playoffs is actually worse than Halak's .923.

The numbers aren't going to present a strong edge for Miller, so the deal has to be predicated on some comfort level; that the Blues intangibly feel better about their chances with Miller than Halak.

Ott is a 31-year-old forward who has been asked to handle too much ice time on a Sabres team lacking bona fide NHL talent. He's averaging a career-high 19:42 per game -- a couple of seconds more per game than current Blues No. 1 centre David Backes -- despite getting destroyed in terms of puck possession.

However, Ott had established earlier in his career that he could be a decent complementary forward, skating in a top-nine role and penalty killing while chipping in some offence and annoying just about anyone he comes in contact with. Since the start of the 2009-2010 season, Ott is the only player in the NHL to have at least 60 goals and 600 penalty minutes.

In a third or fourth-line role with the Blues, though, Ott should be in position to have some success.

Both Miller and Ott will be unrestricted free agents in the summer, so there isn't any grand financial commitment from the Blues, though if their playoff run goes well, it's safe to assume that St. Louis would at least want to keep Miller around.

The Sabres Get: G Jaroslav Halak, RW Chris Stewart, LW William Carrier, a first-round pick in 2015 and a third-round pick in 2016.

Halak, 28, has been decent this season, posting a .917 save percentage (that matches his career mark) in 40 games. He's had some ups and downs, including an injury-marred 2013 season during which he posted an .899 save percentage but, by and large, he's been an above average goaltender throughout his 260-game NHL career. Halak's .917 career save percentage is actually a hair better than Miller's .916 save percentage.

While Halak was moved out, it's not impossible for the Sabres to flip him again prior to the deadline. Halak will be an unrestricted free agent in the summer, so there are no guarantees about where he's going to be playing next year.

Stewart is a 26-year-old power forward who has 15 goals, 26 points and a career-high 112 penalty minutes in 58 games this season. Those numbers are a far cry from last season, when Stewart led the Blues with 36 points in 48 games and his ice time has been knocked down to 14:42 per game, his lowest since his rookie year in 2008-2009.

Even worse, Stewart has been getting torched in terms of puck possession, despite starting more than 60% of his shifts in the offensive zone. On a team as good as the Blues, that's not easy to accomplish.

Nevertheless, Stewart is a big winger who can score and is under contract at a cap hit of \$4.15-million for next season. If he doesn't perform well in Buffalo, Stewart could very easily be moved again, or he could get flipped even before he suits up for the Sabres.

Carrier was a second-round pick of the Blues in 2013 and has 56 points (17 G, 39 A) in 59 QMJHL games. He has the size to be a power forward and was traded to Drummondville part way through the season. Carrier will need a few years to develop, but his offensive production this year raises some questions about whether he's going to be a notable scorer as a pro.

Getting the Blues' first-round pick in 2015 is a nice coup for the Sabres. It's not as though the Blues can be expected to collapse and be in line for the No. 1 pick, which is earmarked for Connor McDavid, but the 2015 draft is expected to be strong, so there is likely more value for the Sabres getting that pick rather than one late in the 2014 draft. The third-round pick in 2016 is a nice sweetener, with upside, as it could be a first-round pick if the Blues reach the Western Conference Final or Miller re-signs in St. Louis.

These are two teams in virtually opposite positions. The Blues are ready to take a run at the Stanley Cup and are willing to take on a couple of potential rentals to help in that regard, and while the Blues sacrificed some draft pick value, they didn't lose any core pieces of the team that has been so successful to this point in the season.

Pat LaFontaine resigns from his post as president of hockey operations for Sabres

By Pat Leonard

New York Daily News

March 1, 2014

That's that for Pat.

Pat LaFontaine suddenly resigned from his post as the Buffalo Sabres' president of hockey operations on Saturday night, fewer than four months after joining the franchise. Not coincidentally, he stepped down one day after the Sabres' Friday night trade of top goalie Ryan Miller and captain Steve Ott to the St. Louis Blues.

According to a report from Renaud Lavoie of TVA Sports in Montreal, LaFontaine disagreed with GM Tim Murray, whom LaFontaine hired in January, over whether to make the deal.

"The last straw was the Ryan Miller trade," Lavoie reported on Twitter. "Pat LaFontaine was pushing to give Miller an extension. Tim Murray was pushing for a trade."

LaFontaine has had a stint in an NHL front office end abruptly before. In 2006, he spent just 40 days as an unpaid senior adviser to Islanders owner Charles Wang before resigning on July 18, 2006, after Wang fired then-GM Neil Smith.

This time with Buffalo, he lasted 108 days before leaving the Sabres, who hired him after firing previous GM Darcy Regier looking to rebuild a losing franchise.

LaFontaine reportedly will resume his previous role as vice president of development and community affairs for the NHL.

"(Sabres owner) Terry Pegula hired me in November and my primary objective was to lead the Sabres organization through a time of transition," LaFontaine said in a statement issued by the team. "I'm proud of what we've been able to accomplish in a short period of time and want to thank Terry and Kim Pegula for the opportunity and their support during my time with the Sabres. I also want to convey my best wishes to all of the players in the Sabres organization and to wish them the best of success in the future. Most importantly, I want to convey my heartfelt appreciation to the great fans of the Sabres for the way I have been treated here as a player and as an executive."

Ryan Miller trade a good, old-fashioned blockbuster: Cox

By Damien Cox

Toronto Star

February 28, 2014

The first shoe has dropped.

Size 18, too.

We see fewer and fewer old-style, blockbuster hockey trades any more in the NHL's salary cap era, but the Friday Night Special between the Buffalo Sabres and St. Louis Blues that sent all-star goalie Ryan Miller to the Blues was surely one of those.

Sabres captain Steve Ott went to Missouri along with the 33-year-old Miller, the third Buffalo captain (Jason Pominville, Thomas Vanek) to be traded in less than a calendar year. Going to the Sabres were goalie Jaroslav Halak, winger Chris Stewart, prospect William Carrier, St. Louis' first-round pick in 2015 and a conditional second rounder.

Now that's a hockey trade, ladies and gentlemen.

Ott, Miller and Halak are all scheduled to be unrestricted free agents this summer. The rebuilding Sabres, meanwhile, now have a collective 10 picks in the first two rounds of the 2014 and '15 entry drafts.

But that's for tomorrow. For today, the Blues hope Miller, probably four years removed from his best hockey, can be more productive behind Ken Hitchcock's excellent defence in St. Louis and help end a 42-year Stanley Cup drought. They managed to make the deal without sacrificing any of their top prospects or youngsters, although some might debate the actual difference between Halak and Miller.

"Ryan Miller this year made me feel it might be only a five or six per cent upgrade," said Blues GM Doug Armstrong. "But that's how you get better.

"Only making the playoffs is no longer the goal. Having success and playing for a championship is."

Rarely have big-time goalie moves been made near the deadline, and rarely have major netminder deals of any kind produced major success in the same season they were made. Patrick Roy, of course, moved from Montreal to Colorado in the fall of 1995 and won a Stanley Cup in Denver the following spring.

Dwayne Roloson nearly did something like that twice. He was dealt to Edmonton partway through the 2005-06 season and helped the Oilers get to the Cup final, although he was hurt in Game 1.

Five years later, he was picked up in a trade by the Tampa Bay Lightning, and carried to the Bolts to Game 7 of the Eastern Conference final before losing to Boston.

Miikka Kiprusoff, finally, was dealt by San Jose to Calgary in November of 2003 and he carried the Flames to the seventh game of the '04 Cup final before losing to Tampa.

Can Miller do something similar for the Blues, a club knocked out of the playoffs by Jonathan Quick and the L.A. Kings the past two years? St. Louis has their Olympic tandem on the back end with Jay Bouwmeester and Alex Pietrangelo, the kind of protection Miller hasn't had in western New York for several seasons.

The Sabres, meanwhile, may just be getting started. Both Halak and Stewart could be peddled elsewhere before next Wednesday's deadline. Ottawa — Buffalo GM Tim Murray's former club — is said to have serious interest in Stewart, a big scoring winger.

Stewart has 15 goals this season and another year on his contract with a \$4.15 million (U.S.) salary cap hit. The Sabres, by the way, picked up the difference in salaries between Miller and Halak, worth about \$300,000.

A deal of this size and impact could now get the market moving. Until now, the most significant deal this winter has probably been the Jan. 22 swap between the Rangers and Predators that saw Michael del Zotto head to Music City in exchange for Kevin Klein, a deal of two defencemen.

The biggest deal of the season until Friday occurred way back on Oct. 27 and also involved Buffalo. Thomas Vanek packed his bags and was transferred to Long Island, with Matt Moulson heading the other way. The Isles sent their first-round pick this June to the Sabres in the deal, although they can defer that pick to next year, risky in that the likes of Connor McDavid and Jack Eichel will be available in the '15 draft.

For Murray, hired this winter by new team president Pat LaFontaine, this was his first major attempt to put his mark on the rebuild of the Sabres. Earlier in the day he'd indicated no deal was imminent, but both players were scratched hours later before the Sabres took the ice against San Jose.

Some wondered if Murray might have been able to get more assets by trading Ott and Miller separately. Part of the Buffalo GM's willingness to get the deal done might have been the suggestion Carolina could be willing to part with its starting goalie, Cam Ward.

"We were extremely happy with the deal," said Murray. "If you're happy with it, then make it."

Murray, who has paid his dues in the business before getting his first shot as a GM, still has Moulson to trade and says everybody but his kids are available.

He's trying to build a champion from the bottom up. Armstrong, on the other hand, runs a team highly motivated to take a serious shot at winning it all now.

Two GMs with whose interests overlapped.

That's how blockbusters get made.

NHL trade rumors: Want a deal? Call Sabres' Tim Murray

By Sean Gentile

Sporting News

March 2, 2014

If there were any doubt heading into the weekend, it should be gone: the Buffalo Sabres are general manager Tim Murray's show.

Goalie Ryan Miller, captain Steve Ott and president Pat LaFontaine are gone, and the end result is twofold: interim coach Ted Nolan, who was hired by LaFontaine, is feeling the heat, and the Sabres have a war chest of high draft picks with the potential to add more.

Murray is in charge of both of those situations. First, Nolan, who has gone 10-23-4 since taking over the team on Nov 13. He's had next to nothing to work with, though, and drawn praise for the job he's done. There had been talk of removing his interim tag, but that's taken a backseat — largely because LaFontaine, Nolan's biggest backer, resigned on Saturday, reportedly over the Miller trade. Contract negotiations with the coach continue.

"I don't want even want to think about it, to tell you the truth. It's that tough," Nolan said on Sunday, according to the Buffalo News' John Vogl.

"I have to respect what's transpired, what's happened and have faith it was for the right reasons."

Murray, drama aside, deserves credit for all this. The Sabres were going nowhere with their previous roster. Everyone knew that, and Murray's task was salvaging what he could. He's done that by acquiring picks when he could, and immediately tradable assets where he couldn't.

At the moment, Buffalo has 10 combined selections in the first two rounds of the 2014 and 2015 NHL drafts. That could easily jump to 13, should they (as expected) trade wingers Matt Moulson and Chris Stewart and goalie Jaroslav Halak. Defensemen Christian Ehrhoff and Tyler Myers' names have come up, as well — and Ehrhoff in particular would net Murray a huge return. He's a legitimate top-pair guy with a decent (if long-term) contract.

In addition to their own first- and second-round picks in 2014, Buffalo holds the Blues' first-rounder and second-rounders from the Los Angeles Kings' (acquired for Robyn Regehr) and Minnesota. In 2015, they have their own first- and second-round picks, and second-rounders from the Kings (also obtained in the Regehr trade) and the New York Islanders (acquired for Thomas Vanek).

They also possess a conditional first from the Islanders — in either 2014 or 2015, to be determined by the Islanders — as part of the Vanek/Moulson trade. A 2016 third-rounder from St. Louis turns into a 2014 first-rounder if the Blues make the

Western Conference finals or re-sign Miller before the draft. If that happens, St. Louis gets Buffalo's second-rounder and a third-round pick in 2014.

Then you've got the NHL players acquired in the Miller trade: Stewart, an inconsistent power forward who had 15 goals with the Blues, could well wind up in Ottawa, where Murray worked under his uncle Bryan until Lafontaine hired him. Halak could be on his way to the Minnesota Wild, who are looking for a goalie because of Josh Harding's multiple sclerosis-related issues.

From Michael Russo of the Star Tribune:

Murray is now trying to trade Halak to the Wild. He's 28, in the last year of his contract and was 24-9-4 with the Blues with a 2.23 goals-against average. But some inside the Wild worry he was a product of the Blues' stingy system and there's a reason St. Louis felt Miller, not Halak, was the final piece of a Stanley Cup puzzle.

But if the price is right, (Wild GM Chuck) Fletcher could pull the trigger.

And Murray will have manufactured another asset.

Stars coach Lindy Ruff feeling little sentiment as old club visits Dallas

By Mike Heika

Dallas Morning News

March 2, 2014

Lindy Ruff's visit to Buffalo on Oct. 28 was all about closure.

The Stars coach was given the fond farewell from fans that he didn't receive after being fired by the Sabres last February. His new team took a 4-3 win in the old building, and Ruff left his 15 years in Buffalo in the rearview mirror.

So when Ruff's Stars face the Sabres at American Airlines Center on Monday, the feeling won't be so sentimental.

"There were great memories there, but it's like I've been here forever," Ruff said of his transition to Dallas.

And that might be the best thing Stars fans have heard all year. While there was a tremendous transition over the summer that created all sorts of upheaval, the process of becoming a team has been tangible.

"I definitely feel it," defenseman Trevor Daley said. "We added so many new players in the off-season, plus a new GM and a new coach, and that's going to cause some growing pains. But it seems we're past that now, it just feels like a team here."

The Ruff trip back home helped the Stars overcome a slow start as did ensuing visits to Boston for center Tyler Seguin and Detroit for general manager Jim Nill. The Homecoming Float Tour served a great purpose of pulling the team together, and teaching each other a little about their new teammates.

"It was a transition, and you could feel that when it happened," Nill said. "I think we did come together as a team, and you can even look at the hard times of the year [like a 1-8-1 slump in January] and say we grew from that. Time does that."

Ruff said time helped him after he was fired Feb. 20, 2013. While he had a spectacular run with the Sabres, making it to the conference finals four times and the Stanley Cup finals once, he also knew there was a reason he was let go. So he looked into the way he was doing things and reassessed.

"When it's suddenly over like that, you replay things in your mind, how you handled situations and going forward how you want to handle situations," Ruff said. "Other coaches told me: It's going to be hard, but you're going to like the change. You'll get an opportunity to do some things when you're somewhere else, change some of the coaching strategies."

Ruff said he has been a gentler, more patient coach in Dallas. He still is demanding, and pushes for rapt attention to detail, but he also knows that players such as rookies Alex Chiasson and Valeri Nichushkin need a lighter touch. And he realizes building team chemistry can take time.

It's no surprise to those around the team that they are 7-2-2 in their last 11 games and improving on everything from shot differential to drawing power-play opportunities, because they have been working toward those goals. Ruff said he feels comfortable with the entire roster, from captain Jamie Benn to undrafted forwards Antoine Roussel and Ryan Garbutt.

"I'm way ahead of where I was when I got here," he said. "From the Benns to Roussel and Garbutt, what I expect out of them and what they expect out of me, that's changed a lot. From working with Tyler Seguin and learning his personality and how he operates and how he ticks, that doesn't happen in a week or two. You see how people operate in tough situations, and I think we're way ahead of the curve in that category now."

So ahead that the coaches and players anticipate a strong push toward the playoffs through March and April something that could be new to the fans, who have endured five seasons without the playoffs.

"There's a belief here, I do feel that," said Daley. "There's a little bit of swagger, and that's something we probably lacked the past few seasons. He's done a great job of getting us on the same page and getting us believing in the right way to play, and that's been working for us. I definitely feel we can have a strong finish here this year, a different finish."

And that means that Monday's game against the Sabres is more about the future than it is about the past.

Need to know: Will Stars defenseman Trevor Daley finally be able to contain the Sabres' Matt Moulson?

By Mike Heika

Dallas Morning News

March 2, 2014

Buffalo Sabres at Dallas Stars

7 p.m. today (NBC Sports Network, KTCK-AM 1310)

Key Matchup: Matt Moulson vs. Trevor Daley

In his last three games against the Stars, Moulson has tallied six goals. He had two goals in a 4-3 Stars win in Buffalo Oct. 28 and had four goals in one game as a member of the Islanders two seasons ago. Daley will likely face the assignment of matching Moulson.

Key Number: 1.93

The Sabres rank last in the NHL in scoring at 1.93 goals per game. They also rank last in goal differential at minus-1.00 per game, and rank 29th in shot differential at minus-7.7 shots per game.

Injuries

Stars: D Brenden Dillon (lower body) is questionable. D Stephane Robidas (leg) is out.

Buffalo: C Tyler Ennis (soreness) is questionable.

Notable

Dallas is coming off a 4-2 loss to Tampa Bay, but is 7-2-2 in its last 11 games... Buffalo ranks last in the NHL in winning percentage at .367 (18-34-8) but has won three straight games...The Sabres made a huge trade Thursday, sending goalie Ryan Miller and captain Steve Ott to St. Louis in exchange for goalie Jaroslav Halak, winger Chris Stewart and draft picks...The game will start at 7 p.m. to accommodate a national television broadcast on NBC Sports Network... Dallas has moved up to fifth in the NHL in power play opportunities at 215, but is 1-for-26 with the man advantage in the past seven games.

GameDay: Buffalo Sabres at Dallas Stars

Fort Worth Star Telegram

March 2, 2014

Sabres at Stars

7 p.m. Monday, American Airlines Center, Dallas

TV: NBC Sports Network; Radio: KTCK/1310 AM, 96.7 FM

Records: Sabres 18-34-8, 44 points; Stars 28-22-10, 66

About the Sabres: Buffalo has been in upheaval the last few days. Pat LaFontaine, the president of hockey operations, resigned Saturday. The move came a day after the Sabres traded goaltender Ryan Miller and captain Steve Ott to St. Louis for goalie Jaroslav Halak, forward Chris Stewart, a prospect and two draft picks. ... Buffalo is in last place in the Eastern Conference, but has won its last three games against San Jose, Boston and Carolina.

About the Stars: Dallas, which lost 4-2 at home to Tampa Bay on Saturday, faces the first of a back-to-back set Monday. The Stars travel to Columbus on Tuesday. Monday's game kicks off a stretch in which the Stars will play 15 games in 27 days, including four back-to-back sets. ... Backup goalie Dan Ellis will start one of the next two games, but coach Lindy Ruff didn't specify which one. ... Defenseman Brenden Dillon, who missed Saturday's game with a lower body injury, is questionable Monday. — From NHL online reports

More Sabres dysfunction; local radio

By Chuck Pollock
Olean Times Herald
March 3, 2014

Some thoughts on the unending embarrassment that is the Sabres and the changing face of sports radio in the Southern Tier:

IN REALITY we might never know the machinations that caused Pat LaFontaine, the Sabres' President of Hockey Operations, to sever relations with Buffalo's unfailingly dysfunctional franchise.

Maybe he did, as the Sabres' hierarchy has suggested, have an urge to return to New York and resume his previous job with the NHL after a mere 3 1/2-month stay in Buffalo.

But I can't resist a good conspiracy theory ... and the above explanation doesn't pass the smell test.

It's much more logical, in my view, that LaFontaine, one of the classiest acts in National Hockey League history, lost a power struggle. The only question is who won ... owner Terry Pegula? ... team president Ted Black? ... senior advisor Ken Sawyer? ... new general manager Tim Murray?

The latter is unlikely since LaFontaine hired Murray and the two seemed on the same page with the recent changes.

But Black and Sawyer are Pegula confidants ... did the power struggle involve one or all of them?

Then, too, it's entirely possible LaFontaine merely became disenchanted with his Sabres position and wanted back to his job monitoring NHL player safety back in Manhattan. However, that's not the vibe you got when he took the Buffalo position last November.

What's certain is this ... LaFontaine leaving under murky circumstances is yet another embarrassment for a franchise that's last in the league standings but first in NHL front office intrigue.

And here's the reality.

No matter which version of LaFontaine's exit is true, the reaction will be the same among fans who idolized the former Sabre.

Buffalo's front office blew it ... again.

Reeling Sabres insist Pat LaFontaine wasn't fired; Ted Nolan upset over departure

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

March 3, 2014

BUFFALO – A Sabres icon bolted less than four months after returning to the team he loved. The franchise goalie and captain got traded.

The Sabres just endured perhaps the most trying weekend in their 43-year history. That was before the popular coach sounded like he might want to leave.

“It’s a lot for our fans to swallow in a short amount of time,” Sabres president Ted Black said Sunday, a day after Pat LaFontaine abruptly resigned as president of hockey operations.

Black understands LaFontaine’s stunning departure creates uncertainty for a team that had finally seemed to stabilize itself after becoming an NHL laughingstock.

“It’s something that fans are going to be upset by,” Black said inside the First Niagara Center.

Still, Black said, LaFontaine was only one person in a large organization.

“I don’t know if it impacts the greater mission and will deter us,” said Black, who found out LaFontaine a few days ago would be leaving.

Rumors are swirling the Sabres forced LaFontaine out in some sort of power struggle. Black was adamant LaFontaine, who wasn’t involved in Friday’s blockbuster Ryan Miller-Steve Ott trade, wasn’t fired from the position Sabres owner Terry Pegula created for him.

“Pat LaFontaine resigned,” said Black, who characterized Pegula as “disappointed.”

LaFontaine’s hand-picked interim coach, Ted Nolan, was rocked by his close friend’s exit. An emotional Nolan said earlier Sunday he didn’t want to discuss his future.

“It’s tough,” Nolan said after the Sabres prepared for tonight’s game in Dallas against the Stars. “I don’t even want to think about it right now, to tell you the truth. It’s that tough.”

Sabres general manager Tim Murray wants Nolan to stay. They’re still negotiating a contract extension with him, he said.

“We want him to come back,” Murray said. “I don’t know what he’s thinking. We’re just going down that road. So I guess I’ll get an answer shortly.”

Is Murray concerned Nolan doesn’t want to stay in Buffalo?

“I just want people that want to be here,” he said. “If he wants to be here, I want him to be our coach. I can’t speculate whether he does or not. I’m not going to beg anyone to come and work here. ... We want Teddy to be our coach moving forward.”

Nolan acknowledged he has talked to management about a new contract.

“Right now is not about my contract,” he said. “It’s about the situation that just happened, what transpired in this organization, what happened to a very dear friend. We’ll leave it at that.”

He has said in the recent past he wants to keep coaching the Sabres.

“Several times I did,” Nolan said. “But right now’s not the time to discuss that.”

Nolan sounded like someone who knows he’ll be moving on soon. He said he’s experiencing an “emotional roller coaster.”

He hasn’t spoken to LaFontaine in the past couple of days and called his departure a “big surprise.”

“Everyone knows what kind of man Patty is,” he said. “They don’t come much better than him.”

With the team undergoing a major overhaul, he wants to concentrate on his players.

“That was the main reason I got here is to try to turn things around and coach the Buffalo Sabres,” Nolan said. “Right now, especially, I’m going to really concentrate on that because we traded our franchise player. We traded our captain. That’s tough enough as it is. Then, all of a sudden, a situation happens with Patty.”

Black said Murray will assume some of LaFontaine’s responsibilities. The Sabres won’t search for a new hockey president. Senior advisor Craig Patrick, a LaFontaine hire, will stay on.

Murray, who was hired by LaFontaine on Jan. 9, said he was on the same page with his boss and likes the club’s management structure.

“I’m going to be grateful forever that Pat hired me and gave me my first GM job,” Murray said.

Veteran Sabres winger Drew Stafford hadn't experienced anything like the weekend in his eight-year career.

"You go seven, eight years of the steady really nothing happening until maybe like a deadline deal or something," he said. "The last 24, 48 hours, I've never seen anything like it. So it's pretty crazy."

LaFontaine joined the Sabres on Nov. 13 after Pegula fired general manager Darcy Regier and coach Ron Rolston. He also resigned from a senior advisor role with the New York Islanders after 40 days in 2006.

The 49-year-old's going to back work as the NHL's vice president of hockey development, a position he left to join the Sabres.

Leaving Blues for lowly Sabres wasn't easy for newcomers Jaroslav Halak and Chris Stewart

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

March 3, 2014

BUFFALO – They're only human, you know. Leaving the St. Louis Blues, a legitimate Stanley Cup contender, for the rebuilding Sabres wasn't easy at first for goalie Jaroslav Halak and winger Chris Stewart.

But the veterans, part of Friday's blockbuster Ryan Miller-Steve Ott deal, have accepted they're now playing for the NHL's worst team, at least temporarily.

Rumors are swirling the Sabres will flip them before Wednesday's trade deadline. Halak, an unrestricted free agent following the season, is believed to be wanted by a couple of playoff teams.

"Anything can happen for now on," Halak, who won't play tonight in Dallas against the Stars, said Sunday inside the First Niagara Center following their first practice with the Sabres.

Stewart added: "I don't really know what to think. You hear about all the rumors."

The two had good gigs going in St. Louis.

Stewart, who said he's endured a "roller coaster" season, had 15 goals and 26 points in 58 games.

"I'd be lying if I said if I wasn't disappointed at first," Stewart said about the trade. "If you think I'm going to come in here and pout and feel sorry for myself, that's not the kind of person I am. So I'm going to make the best of the situation and look at the positive. They got a good, young team here. I grew up born and raised in Toronto. I'm happy to be back on the East Coast."

Meanwhile, Halak was 24-9-4 with a 2.23 goals-against average and .917 save percentage this season.

"It's not easy," Halak said. "Obviously, you build something during the season."

Contenders rarely trade their starting goalie during the season. But the 28-year-old Slovak knew he could be dished. The Blues are built to win the Cup now.

Halak only played two playoff games in three years in St. Louis and struggled last season while battling a groin injury.

“There’s been a lot of talk this season already,” Halak said. “I’m not saying I knew, but I kind of expected that something was going to happen. I was really shocked when that happened right before the game. I thought if something would happen, it would happen on (Wednesday).”

Still, Halak played well this season behind the Blues’ tight defense.

What awaits Miller, the Sabres’ MVP this trying season, in St. Louis’ net?

“Probably less shots,” Halak said. “That’s probably the first thing he’s going to see.”

Miller faced 1,411 shots in 40 games with the Sabres, an average of 35.3. In 40 games with the Blues, Halak faced 1,002, an average of 25.

Stewart, who had 28 goals in 2009-10 and 2010-11, said he became a better all-around player during his three years in St. Louis.

“I think my time there I definitely learned to play at all ends of the rink,” said the 26-year-old, the 18th overall pick by Colorado in 2006.

At 6-foot-2 and 231 pounds, Stewart provides size the Sabres need badly. He should skate beside center Cody Hodgson and Matt D’Agostini tonight.

“You got to play to your strengths,” he said. “As you can see, I’m going to use my big frame to my advantage and finish checks and get to the net, just go score those ugly goals and bang some bodies around.”

He added: “I think I’m your typical power forward who likes to play that physical game. I like to use my speed to my advantage. ... I have no problem sticking up for teammates.”

Both players know one new teammate, D’Agostini, a former Blue, well. Halak also played with him in the minors and in Montreal.

“I told him we might meet again, and here we are,” Halak said.

Notes: Sabres center Tyler Ennis (general body soreness) will return from a two-game absence tonight. ... With the trade deadline approaching, Sabres general manager Tim Murray said “teams have called.” He anticipates follow-up calls and doesn’t plan to hold anyone out of tonight’s game. ... Tonight starts a three-game road trip. The Sabres play Wednesday in Tampa Bay and Friday in Florida. ... The Sabres, winners of three straight games, will be facing former coach Lindy Ruff for the second time tonight. Ruff’s Stars beat the Sabres 4-3 on Oct. 28.

Stunner: Pat LaFontaine resigns from Sabres

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

March 1, 2014

BUFFALO – In a stunning development, Sabres legend Pat LaFontaine, the team’s president of hockey operations less than four months, resigned today.

LaFontaine will return to the job he had with the NHL.

According to TVA’s Renaud Lavoie, the last straw for LaFontaine was Friday’s blockbuster deal in which the Sabres sent Ryan Miller to the St. Louis Blues.

LaFontaine wanted to give the 33-year-old Miller an extension. New general manager Tim Murray, who LaFontaine hired in January, wanted to deal the franchise goalie.

Meanwhile, TSN’s Darren Dreger reported there was no power struggle and LaFontaine wanted to return to New York.

In less than a day, the Sabres traded Miller, the face of the team, their captain, Steve Ott, and lost the head of their hockey department.

The 49-year-old LaFontaine joined the Sabres amid much fanfare Nov. 13 after the team fired general manager Darcy Regier and coach Ron Rolston. LaFontaine immediately hired Ted Nolan, his old coach, on an interim basis.

Based on recent words from Murray, it appeared Nolan, someone LaFontaine has vouched for, would be receiving an extension soon. Now, his future is in doubt.

LaFontaine, whose No. 16 hangs from the First Niagara Center rafters, brought credibility and hope to the Sabres after the team became a laughingstock amid one of the worst starts in NHL history.

“I would like to thank Pat for all he has done for the organization,” Sabres owner Terry Pegula said in a statement. “Pat joined us at a very difficult time and helped transition the organization down a new path.

“Tim Murray will continue as general manager and Craig Patrick will continue as a senior hockey advisor. As has been the case since I bought the team, we’ll continue to do whatever is needed to rebuild the organization and keep it on path towards our ultimate goal of winning the Stanley Cup.”

LaFontaine said in a statement: “Terry Pegula hired me in November and my primary objective was to lead the Sabres organization through a time of transition. I’m proud of what we’ve been able to accomplish in a short period of

time and want to thank Terry and Kim Pegula for the opportunity and their support during my time with the Sabres.

“I also want to convey my best wishes to all of the players in the Sabres organization and to wish them the best of success in the future. Most importantly, I want to convey my heartfelt appreciation to the great fans of the Sabres for the way I have been treated here as a player and as an executive.”

Sabres goalie Jhonas Enroth ready to seize starting job with Ryan Miller gone

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

March 2, 2014

BUFFALO – Ryan Miller is gone. Jaroslav Halak, the goalie the Sabres received in Friday's blockbuster trade with the St. Louis Blues, will be an unrestricted free agent following the season. He could be dealt within days.

For now, Jhonas Enroth, Miller's backup for three seasons, will shoulder the load down the stretch, interim Sabres coach Ted Nolan said.

The 25-year-old Swede finally has an opportunity to become a No. 1 goalie.

"If you don't call this a chance, then I don't know what a chance is," Enroth said Friday after making 36 saves in the Sabres' 4-2 win against the San Jose Sharks. "I'm not going to try to put too much pressure on this moment. I'll just try to be myself and stay professional."

While Nolan, whose Sabres had Saturday off, said Enroth will play the bulk of the remaining 22 games, he wouldn't declare a starter. He doesn't know much about the 28-year-old Halak, who has played 260 NHL games.

"It depends on what comes back the other way," Nolan said. "I'm not 100 percent sure yet. I just know what's going out our way."

Enroth's fortune has changed quickly. Fresh off winning a silver medal at the Sochi Games, he won both starts last week. Remember, he hadn't won since Oct. 25 before Wednesday's 5-4 overtime triumph against Boston. He's 3-12-5 with a 2.90 goals-against average and .906 save percentage in 22 games this season.

"I got to believe in myself so I'm a true believer I can be a No. 1 guy here," Enroth said.

Miller was supposed to play Friday. Enroth was joking with trainers about trade rumors when Nolan told him he would be starting.

"I kind of jinxed myself or whatever you want to call it," Enroth said.

He added: "I was more nervous than usual, kind of late notice. But I just told myself to relax and go out there and compete."

Miller's mentorship has meant a lot to Enroth.

“I’ve been fortunate to be sitting next to him for two or three years now,” he said. “One thing that really stands out with Ryan is his professionalism. He’s a professional. He prepares for practice and games every day.”

Notes: With Rochester on the road and Halak with the Blues in California, Ryan Vinz, the director of hockey technology at HarborCenter, dressed as Enroth’s backup. The 28-year-old Lancaster native played high school hockey. ... With former captain Steve Ott a late scratch with Miller on Friday, tough guy John Scott joined the warm-up late. ... Sabres center Tyler Ennis (general body soreness, Nolan said) skated Friday morning but missed his second straight game. Center Zenon Konopka (finger) returned.

Ted Nolan emotional over Pat LaFontaine's departure from Sabres, doesn't want to discuss future

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

March 2, 2014

BUFFALO – Pat LaFontaine's resignation as the Sabres' president of hockey operations has rocked interim coach Ted Nolan, his close friend.

"It's tough," an emotional Nolan said this morning inside the First Niagara Center. "I don't even want to think about it right now, to tell you the truth. It's that tough."

Nolan hasn't spoken to LaFontaine in the past couple of days and called his departure a "big surprise."

"Everyone knows what kind of man Patty is," he said. "They don't come much better than him."

Of course, now Nolan's future here is in doubt.

LaFontaine brought Nolan back to the Sabres on Nov. 13, his first move as president. It appeared Nolan, who's popular with his players and the team's rabid fan base, would be awarded an extension at some point soon.

Nolan acknowledged he has talked to management about a contract.

"Right now is not about my contract," he said. "It's about the situation that just happened, what transpired in this organization, what happened to a very dear friend. We'll leave it at that."

He has said in the recent past he wants to keep coaching the Sabres.

"Several times I did," Nolan said. "But right now's not the time to discuss that."

Nolan sounded like someone who knows he'll be moving on soon. He said he's experiencing "emotional roller coaster."

With the team undergoing a major overhaul – franchise goalie Ryan Miller and captain Steve Ott were traded Friday – he wants to concentrate on his players.

"That was the main reason I got here is to try to turn things around and coach the Buffalo Sabres," Nolan said. "Right now, especially, I'm going to really concentrate on that because we traded our franchise player. We traded our captain. That's tough enough as it is. Then, all of a sudden, a situation happens with Patty."

In other news, winger Chris Stewart, acquired in Friday's blockbuster deal with St. Louis, will make his Sabres debut Monday in Dallas. Goalie Jaroslav Halak, the subject of trade rumors before he even landed in Buffalo, won't play. Both practiced today.

Center Tyler Ennis (general body soreness) will return from a two-game absence Monday.

DUVALL: Miller's departure marks a Sabres low point

By Eric DuVall

Tonawanda News

March 2, 2014

Tonawanda News — It's hard to know what to say about the Buffalo Sabres anymore.

Unfortunately for me, I get paid to figure that out, so here goes nothing.

They're in last place, the worst team in professional hockey. They traded away their franchise goaltender Ryan Miller and captain Steve Ott an hour before what everyone figured would be Miller's swan song at First Niagara Center.

Instead we got a video montage in the third period that brought fans to their feet and not just a few tears to their eyes.

Friday was a surreal night to go to a game. The outcome, an unexpected 4-2 victory over the much more talented San Jose Sharks, was an afterthought.

Friday night felt a little like the final meeting with a divorce lawyer to sign the papers.

Friday night felt a little like attending a wake for someone who isn't dead.

The truth is, trading Miller had to happen. At 34, more of his pro hockey career is behind him than in front. If he's going to win a Stanley Cup it won't happen here. He deserved to be traded to a contender. Fans can't begrudge him a chance to make his mark on the sport. Most I've talked to don't.

And after that stunning but hardly surprising news Friday, another lightning bolt: Recently hired president of hockey operations, Pat LaFontaine, has resigned.

It's difficult to know what prompted his decision. The timing, just a few days short of the trade deadline with other moves almost certain to be made, leaves one to wonder whether Patty agreed with the organization's decision to part ways with Miller rather than try to resign him after this season, when he would have his pick of teams any one of which would be a more attractive option than last-place Buffalo.

If LaFontaine and his hand-picked new general manager Tim Murray were at odds over the Miller situation I would be surprised. Miller's status had to have been question No. 1 during the interview process and I can't see LaFontaine signing off on a GM candidate whose approach to the most significant personnel situation was at odds with his own.

In the end, does it really matter why? Talking brass tacks hockey doesn't feel right, right now.

Watching Miller's in-game press conference, his eyes red-rimmed as he thanked the fans and expressed a genuine affection for life in Western New York, felt wrong. I stood next to the ketchup dispenser watching it with a woman, probably in her mid-60s, who also had tears in her eyes.

When Miller was finished she muttered her discontent and stomped away.

He wasn't an ordinary player in any respect. He was uncommonly graceful, articulate and honest, sometimes to a fault. He exuded passion for the game and leadership qualities few men possess.

Miller leaving represents a low point, a bottoming out. We starved sports fans must acknowledge this is the worst the team has been, perhaps ever. They're farther now from owner Terry Pegula's goal of winning a Stanley Cup than they have ever been.

The games were tolerable — this team is watchable — for only one reason, the play of Ryan Miller.

Now that reason is gone. It feels as if there exists not a single reason outside pure habit to watch them right now. Even the most passionate of fans know these games don't matter one iota.

The last tangible tie to the Golisano era — to Darcy Regier and Lindy Ruff — is no longer a Buffalo Sabre.

It's tough now to wax nostalgic for the Regier-Ruff days but there were some special times. The 2005-06 season was pure magic and made a new generation of fans fall in love with this game, this team.

Ryan Miller was a big part of that, maybe the biggest part.

Gone are the illusions we might someday return to that form.

Now all we can do is hope the next iteration of the Buffalo Sabres — Tim Murray's Buffalo Sabres — will get us back there someday.

Sabres President Ted Black and GM Tim Murray Address Media

By TJ Luckman

WGR 550

March 2, 2014

Sabres President Ted Black and GM Tim Murray met with the media this afternoon, addressing Pat LaFontaine's abrupt resignation yesterday. Black told the media that resigning was entirely up to LaFontaine.

"Pat was here for three months," said Black. "We wish him well, and moving forward, we appreciate what he's done. He brought us Tim Murray. He brought us Craig Patrick. He brought us Ted Nolan. He was here for a short amount of time, he made those impacts. He wanted to go back to the NHL, and he resigned.

Black was asked twice, thoroughly, whether LaFontaine was fired or just resigned. Both times, Black responded that LaFontaine indeed resigned. "His comments are to that effect, as well," said Black.

Reportedly, there was discord among members of the Sabres' front office. When addressed, Black said otherwise.

"The how and why, I can't speak to anyone's motives with regard to wanting to go back to the NHL, relocate families, things like that. I can't address that. I can tell you there was no discord."

In the aftermath of LaFontaine's resignation, it was speculated his resignation had to do with Sabres GM Tim Murray's trade of Ryan Miller or perhaps that he did not want to re-sign Sabres coach Ted Nolan to a contract extension. The latter, at least, doesn't seem to be the case. Paul Hamilton reports the Sabres have offered Nolan a three-year extension.

"We want him to come back," said Murray. "I don't know what he's thinking. We're just going down that road, so I'll guess I'll get an answer shortly from him."

Murray goes as far as to say that he isn't concerned about how Nolan's friendship with Pat LaFontaine affects his relationship with the team in respect to his willingness to sign an extension with the Sabres.

"I just want people who want to be here to be here," said Murray. "If he wants to be here, I want him to be our coach. I can't speculate as to whether he does or not. I'm not going to beg anybody to come and work here. I want people that want to be here. I want players that want to be here. We want Teddy to be our coach going forward."

Murray goes on to say that he's comfortable being the GM of the Buffalo Sabres.

"I was hired to come in here to be the GM," said Murray. "You know ultimately that you have to answer to the owner. Every single GM in this business does. I got a lot of advice with the congratulations of other GMs, and that to me was their biggest piece of advice. He pays the bills and owns the team."

Murray says he and LaFontaine saw eye-to-eye with respect to the rebuild of the team, saying that's what he was hired to come to Buffalo and do. According to Murray, every single trade call has been relayed through Pat.

Except for maybe one.

When asked if LaFontaine was in on the trade of Ryan Miller, Murray said he wasn't. "No. He wasn't in the loop on that."

With the resignation of Pat LaFontaine, it leaves an open spot in the front office for the position of President of Hockey Operations. The Sabres have no plans to fill the position created for LaFontaine's arrival, according to Ted Black.

"As of right now, there are no plans to continue that position at all," said Black. "Basically, the responsibilities will be subsumed in the GM position with Tim."

Sabres Black said LaFontaine was not fired. Murray still wants Nolan

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 2, 2014

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Ted Black didn't get back into town until Sunday and did talk about Pat LaFontaine resigning from the Sabres. Black said Terry Pegula was disappointed about it. Black also said LaFontaine was not fired and did resign. Despite only being in his position for 109 days, Black felt LaFontaine made an impact, "Pat was here for three months, it is one person, we wish him well moving forward, we appreciate what he's done, he brought us Tim Murray, he brought us Craig Patrick, he brought us Ted Nolan, he was here for a short amount of time, he made those impacts, he wanted to go back to the NHL and he resigned." Black added, "The how and why, I can't speak to anyone's motives with wanting to go back to work for the NHL or relocate families here or things like that, but I can tell you there was no discord."

With the trading of Ryan Miller and Steve Ott along with the resignation of LaFontaine, there's been a lot of backlash from the fan base. Black said, "It's a lot for our fans to swallow in a short amount of time. Your franchise goalie is gone, your captain is traded, the former player Hall of Famer that was President of Hockey Operations has resigned so it creates the same reaction that you're probably measuring from your readers and from Twitter. It creates uncertainty and it's something that fans are going to be upset with."

Before leaving for Dallas, Ted Nolan spoke and was very emotional about LaFontaine leaving. He said he does not even want to think about contract talks right now. Tim Murray says Nolan is his man, only if he still wants to be in the organization, "We want him to come back, I don't know what he's thinking, we're just going down that road so I guess I'll get an answer shortly from him."

As far as if Murray's concerned about if Nolan will accept his contract offer the GM said, "I just want people that want to be here to be here. If he wants to be here, I want him to be our coach. I can't speculate if he does or not and I'm not going to beg anybody to come and work here, I want people that want to be here, I want players that want to be here and we want Teddy to be our coach moving forward."

Murray confirmed that LaFontaine was not part of the talks to trade Ryan Miller and Steve Ott.

For Murray he's very much a bottom line guy. He said he is not going to change anything, "For me it's just about the hockey and it's about continuing to talk trade and about continuing to get ready for the draft, I just have to keep doing what I'm doing and I'm going to be grateful forever that Pat hired me and gave me my first GM job, but I can't make choices for him, he makes his own choices."

Black said LaFontaine's position in the organization was created for him and that he will not be replaced.

The newest Sabres practice with the team

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 2, 2014

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The two newest additions to the Sabres practiced with their new team before leaving for Dallas. Jaroslav Halak was in goal while Chris Stewart, played the wing with Cody Hodgson and Matt D'Agostini.

Both men knew it was possible they could be traded by St. Louis and both men know that Buffalo could send them on their way before 3:00 on Wednesday.

Halak will not play in Dallas as he revealed Jhonas Enroth will get the call. As far as the trade Halak said, "There has been a lot of talk this season already. I'm not saying I knew, but I kind of expected something was going to happen, but I was really shocked when it happened right before the game because I thought if something happened it would happen on the 5th not on the 28th, but it's hockey, it's business and I'm here right now."

Halak goes from one of the best teams in the NHL to one of the worst that will not make the playoffs. Halak said, "It's not easy, you build something the whole season and we played well as a team when I played for the Blues and its tough when you get traded from almost being the first one to being the last one, but I'm here and I'm going to try to do my best when I get a chance."

Chris Stewart is a big, strong, thick man. With St. Louis, he got lost with all the size they have there, but here he's huge compared to many of his smaller teammates. Stewart said he knew he could be traded, "This time of the year you always hear about the rumors and that kind of stuff, but anytime you do get traded, you're always surprised so you take it and just go with it."

Stewart of course is in the same boat as Halak coming from a Stanley Cup contending team to the 30th place club. He said, "I'd be lying if I said I wasn't disappointed at first, but if you think I'm going to come in here and pout and feel sorry for myself, that's not the kind of person I am, so I'm going to make the best of the situation and look at the positive, they've got a good, young team here plus I grew up and was raised near Toronto and happy to be back on the east coast."

Stewart changed teams one other time in his career when he went from Colorado to St. Louis. He said you adapt pretty quickly, "It takes a couple of days. Usually most locker rooms are the same, the hockey players are great guys and really fun to be around. I've played with a couple of guys that are on this team and they've welcomed me and have been great so far."

Stewart scored 15 goals and 11 assists for 26 points in 58 games this season. He said, "It's been a bit of a rollercoaster, it's been up and down and up and down, but I'm here to get better."

With the trading deadline coming up Wednesday, Monday could be the only game either or both men play for the Sabres.

This Sabres fan will grin and bear it

By Mike Schopp

WGR 550

March 2, 2014

Pat LaFontaine was one of my all-time favorite hockey players. My interactions with him were few but I always was impressed with him -- be it in an interview about hockey, his charity work or even a personal discussion about memorabilia. As many others have said, LaFontaine left you thinking he really cared about you.

Needless to say to any fan born before 1985, LaFontaine was a superb hockey player. He was the rare player to combine an edgy style with outrageous talent; normally hockey players come with one or the other. The result: a well-earned place in the Hockey Hall of Fame.

I loved the idea of his joining Sabres management. His reputation with people -- to the best of my knowledge anyway -- was outstanding. Heck, I'd get to talk to him!

Saturday he mysteriously left the team, and at this time reports are conflicting about why and how it happened. When I heard, I was sad.

Last night I remembered, however, a sports fan's truism that no matter what happens to the people that comprise a team, it's the team we love the most.

LaFontaine leaves and who knows how or even if he'll be replaced. I know that while some ideas will seem better than others, ultimately whatever happens is something I will defend.

Because it's the team I like the most.

As a player LaFontaine left the Sabres and played for the New York Rangers. I never cared about him as a Ranger. My favorite Sabre ever is Daniel Briere. I never rooted for him in Philadelphia. Doc Gooden and Darryl Strawberry will always be in my heart as great Mets; as Yankees they were stick figures in pinstripes.

It's about the team.

Perhaps LaFontaine's departure stemmed at least in part from general manager Tim Murray's wish to trade Ryan Miller, or just the follow through. In my opinion trading Miller was a definite right move. So many times in the last decade I've wanted the Sabres to be real about their overall quality and make cold, unsentimental moves to improve. Often those moves came far too late, or never at all.

Darcy Regier was the face of all that, and now he's gone and many fans -- most -- are excited for a more aggressive attitude from the team about roster change. If LaFontaine left over Miller then in what to me is a very important area he really was no different than Regier.

It may have been more of a general dissatisfaction over not getting to make final hockey decisions, as has been reported, and this casts a wider net than simply making it about Miller. That idea is confounding. How did LaFontaine not know clearly what the chain of command would be? How did he come upon Murray, who struck me and many others as a calculated, wheeler-dealer type on the very first day in the job?

How many questions should LaFontaine have asked of candidates for the GM job before getting to this one: What do you think we should do with Ryan Miller? For me that answer is a small number. All of this speaks to LaFontaine being delusional, naive or some other thing.

I'm not happy LaFontaine left, unless his judgment combined with his high stature unnecessarily complicated or even constricted important decision-making. He'll go "play" for another "team" now, and just like when he did that as a hockey player, I won't care that much.

It's about the team. That's who we're born with.

I hope Murray gets his space. He plays for my team now.

Sabres Nolan is emotional about LaFontaine's departure

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 2, 2014

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- As I reported on Saturday, Ted Nolan has received a three year contract extension offer from the Buffalo Sabres. Nolan confirmed, there have been talks, but his future with the Buffalo Sabres is the last thing he wants to deal with right now.

Nolan was extremely upset Sunday after practice because of Pat LaFontaine's departure and said his sole focus is going to be on the players and not his situation. Nolan said, "It doesn't matter when I heard, it was a big surprise for sure." Nolan added, "Right now it's one of those situations where I have to put my personal situation behind right now and really concentrate on those 22 guys here because we traded our franchise player, we traded our captain, that's tough enough as it is and then all of a sudden the situation happens with Patty, so I have to put my personal how I'm feeling to the side and deal with the team. I respect what's transpired from both sides and that's beyond my pay scale. I have to respect what's transpired and what's happened and have faith it was for the right reasons."

As emotional as Nolan was, he couldn't even begin to talk about staying with the Sabres, "Right now I can't even discuss that, it's such an emotional rollercoaster, I owe it to the players, they need direction, they need coaching, they don't need to hear all this stuff." Nolan has said several times that he'd like to stay, but he won't go there now, "Several times I did, but right now is not the time to discuss that because of the situation that just occurred. When you're emotional, you never want to make emotional comments on anything. Yes, we did talk about a contract, but right now is not about my contract, it's about a situation that just happened, it's about what transpired in this organization, what happened to a very dear friend and we'll leave it at that."

Tyler Ennis is healthy and ready to play in Dallas. Chris Stewart will step into Steve Ott's spot on a line with Cody Hodgson and Matt D'Agostini. Jaroslav Halak will not play Monday in Dallas. Jhonas Enroth gets the start. Both Stewart and Halak had their first practices with their new teammates on Sunday.

Nolan said he will not name a captain for the rest of this season.

HAMILTON: Fans had to know the Miller trade needed to happen

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 1, 2014

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- When I was on the extended postgame show with Brian Koziol and Brian Duff after the Ryan Miller trade a fan called in with interesting thoughts.

The man felt ripped off because he had purchased tickets for a future game so his son could see his favorite player Ryan Miller. He felt he has now overpaid to see an inferior product.

That got me thinking for the rest of the evening. I'm sure this fan isn't the only one that bought tickets to see Miller.

Unfortunately trades and player movement is part of professional sports, it's a business first and players learn that at a young age, but I totally understand what that man is talking about. Young children don't understand the bottom line of sports.

The only way I can explain it is Buffalo and Tim Murray did what it had to do. The problem was

Ryan Miller wasn't coming back to Buffalo. Terry Pegula and others wanted him back, but he decided he did not want another contract and was going to walk away when free agency started.

From Miller's point of view it was the only way he was likely going to compete for a championship. Miller will be 34 this summer which means he'd be 37 or older by the time Buffalo can expect to have this rebuild up and running, so fans what did you want your team to do? Should they have just kept him so the fans, who's money supports the franchise can see him until the end? If that happened, he walks away for nothing just like Daniel Briere and Chris Drury.

Tim Murray had to protect the franchise. As far as buying tickets, I'm not going to begin to tell you how to spend your money. That has to be your choice, but the fighting for 8th place in the conference every season was getting the Sabres nowhere.

I think I like Murray's style. His first trade would rank as one of the biggest in franchise history.

There was Eddie Shack for Rene Robert, Jim Schoenfeld, Danny Gare and Derek Smith for Mike Foligno, Dale McCourt and Brent Peterson, Tom Barrasso and a third round pick for Doug Bodger and Darrin Shannon, Phil Housley, Scott Arniel, Jeff Parker and a first round pick that turned out to be Keith Tkachuk for Dale Hawrchuk and a first round pick that turned out to be Brad May, Pierre

Turgeon, Uwe Krupp, Dave McLlwain and Benoit Hogue for Pat LaFontaine, Randy Wood and Randy Hillier, Dave Andreychuk, Daren Puppa and a first rounder that turned into Kenny Jonsson for Grant Fuhr and a fifth round pick that turned into Kevin Popp, Alexander Mogilny and a fifth round pick that turned into Todd Norman for Michael Peca, Mike Wilson and a first round pick that turned into Jay McKee, Pat LaFontaine for a second round pick that turned into Andrew Peters and then getting to the most recent trades of Jason Pominville and Thomas Vanek.

Murray seems unafraid which is just what the Sabres need. The need aggressiveness in that post and it seems like Murray got very good value in his first effort. There of course is a long ways to go even to get to 3:00 on Wednesday.

The ride is different folks, everything you felt and experienced the last 16 years is going to be done differently. You may not agree with every move and every move may not work, but I think we know the effort to make to right moves will be made.

JW - The Next Chapter

By Jeremy White

WGR 550

March 1, 2014

The Buffalo Sabres now enter the post-Ryan Miller era with no concrete plan on their next franchise goaltender. While I appreciate just how good Miller is, I'm quite happy that this team will be entering a new phase and likely building an entirely different way.

If you're looking for reaction to the Ryan Miller trade you can hit up Twitter and find every opinion you'd expect and a few you might not. I'm going to borrow from a Twitter-friend of mine Scott Michalak.

Scott Michalak @ScottyMCSS

Every one of your grew up with incredible goaltending. Brace thineselves. Game stealing goalies are hard to find. #Sabres

Scott uses a phrase that I'm hoping the Sabres use very little over the next ten years. I don't want any more "game stealing". Ryan Miller and Dominik Hasek as your top two goaltenders in franchise history, is up there with plenty of teams for best tandem ever (Hasek being a clear cut #1 and arguably best of all-time and Miller being an extraordinary goaltender in his own right).

I'm not sure who the goaltender will be next year, or the year after that. I don't know who it'll be that leads the Sabres into their next trip to the Stanley Cup Final. I do believe quite firmly that it'll happen once they have a team that's worthy of the trip.

We've seen two of the best between the pipes, and both Miller and Hasek stole their fair share of games over the years. But if you think about "game stealing", it generally means that you won while being the inferior team.

I didn't need Ryan Miller traded away. I just needed the Sabres to approach it with a different mindset. You need great goaltending to win a Stanley Cup, but teams that are religiously tied to their guy aren't generally the best in the league. The top teams slide their backup goaltender in, and the drop off isn't too drastic.

The Bruins went from Tim Thomas to Tuukka Rask without any drop off.

The Kings have Jonathan Quick, upstart Martin Jones, and have dealt away both Jonathan Bernier and Ben Scrivens because each looked very good behind that team.

Chicago has two Cups with two goaltenders.

Ryan Miller's last three playoff exits were to Ray Emery, a young Tukka Rask (as the new Boston #1), and the Bobrovsky-Boucher-what was the other guy's name, I think it was Leighton but it's so ridiculous I don't even want to look it up-monster in Philadelphia.

I'm not against paying a goaltender big money. I'm not telling you that any old Joe Q Goaltender off the street can win. I'm simply saying that the Buffalo Sabres will no longer have the Ryan Miller crutch to lean on...and for the first time since 2007, maybe we'll see a team that plays like that.

I wish the best of luck to Ryan Miller. He's the winner in this deal more than any other. He traded the Sabres, for the Blues.

Going forward, the Sabres may struggle to have the superior goaltender on a nightly basis, but that's ok with me.

I want the superior team. By his not-so-veiled talk about what's best for both sides at the deadline, it's safe to guess that Miller did too.

Miller's departure expected but still emotional

By Howard Simon

WGR 550

March 1, 2014

I knew the trade was coming and yet when I received the breaking sports news text that Ryan Miller was not on the ice for pre game warm ups on Friday night, my first thought was “Holy (censored) its actually going down!”

I was out running errands but I stopped to get on twitter so I could find out more details. When I saw the tweets about Miller going to St. Louis, I immediately thought “I guess I’ll be rooting for the Blues in the playoffs.”

I then went about the rest of my business not feeling any emotion at all about the trade of the winningest goalie in Buffalo Sabres history.

The emotion didn’t hit me until I saw Miller step to the podium for the goodbye press conference held during the first intermission of the Sabres game with San Jose.

It was at that moment that sadness came over me as we bid farewell to one of the more popular and beloved athletes in Buffalo sports history.

The Sabres did the right thing even though it probably left many of their faithful fans heartbroken. Moving Miller for assets as opposed to giving him a new, long term contract was the course of action General Manager Tim Murray had to take as he attempts to rebuild the franchise.

As I watched Miller struggle to come up with the proper words as he bid farewell, it felt the same as a parent watching his son or daughter move out of the house and start life on their own.

There are a number of things I will remember about Miller, who spent more than a third of his life in Western New York.

Leading the Sabres to back to back conference finals in 2006 and 2007 and then winning the Vezina Trophy in 2010 are at the top of the list.

He wasn’t wearing a Sabres uniform at the time but one of my favorite Miller memories will certainly be the 2010 Olympics. I’ll always remember the feeling of pride watching “our guy” lead “our country” to a silver medal.

I’ll also remember the final game of last season when it appeared Miller might have made his final appearance in Sabres blue and gold. The way he acted after the game, his acknowledgements to the crowd in the post game ceremonies and the ovation he received all looked like a player and community saying good bye to each other.

I've always been impressed with Miller's professionalism, his class, and even though it got him into hot water at times, the ability to wear his heart on his sleeve. Miller's career reminds us once again how a special bond can be formed between a player and the community that player calls home. He was a model citizen off the ice and never cast the Sabres or Western New York in a bad light.

Miller did not become the first goalie to lead the Sabres to a Stanley Cup but his legacy will be that he goes down as the second best goalie in franchise history to Dominik Hasek.

It was time to move on but it doesn't make the departure any easier. In the meantime, I look forward to watching the Blues in the playoffs and rooting for Miller to get his name on the Stanley Cup.

Miller, Ott & colleagues reflect on them leaving

By Brittini Smallwood

WIVB

March 1, 2014

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – It's the end of an era. Two of the Buffalo Sabres top players Ryan Miller and Steve Ott have been traded to the St. Louis Blues.

Miller and Ott said they'll deeply miss Western New York.

"I don't know if I'll make it through so I'll just keep it quick. I'm just thankful to everyone in Buffalo. Friends, fans, the organization" said Miller, former Sabres Goaltender.

"I'm just very thankful for the opportunity...(the) short time with the Sabres that I got here. My family... the fans I want to thank them as well. They've been nothing but first class from the moment I put the jersey on here" said Steve Ott, former Sabres Team Captain and Forward.

Many fans have stood by both players over the years. Some are happy that they have a new opportunity ahead of them, and others are sad to see them go.

Therese Forton-Barnes is just one of those many people. She's worked with Miller off the ice. She said now that he's leaving; there will be a void in the Western New York community.

"I've worked with a lot of athletes over 27 years and he's right up there at the very top because he is just so passionate about what he does off the ice" said Forton-Barnes, the owner of Event to a Tee.

Barnes has worked with Miller for the past eight years. She helped him start his non-profit, the Steadfast Foundation. The organization helps cancer patients and their families have a better quality of life while they're dealing with a very difficult time. It sponsors outreach efforts like group outings, patient milestone parties and donates televisions and computers to cancer patients.

Dr. Martin Brecher, the Chair of the Pediatrics Department at Roswell Park Cancer Institute and Chief of Hematology/Oncology Division at Children's Hospital has also worked with Miller through his foundation.

He released the following statement about Miller's trade. "Ryan Miller has always made time for children with cancer in Western New York, whether through personal visits with the kids or through generous donations that made so many of our programs possible. Ryan has made a pledge to these families to continue his support, and is, and always will be, an important part of our family no matter where he lives."

Forton-Barnes added that even though Miller is off to St. Louis his foundation will continue to work to impact the lives of cancer patients locally.

"Now we have a new market. We have two markets. We have Buffalo and we have St. Louis" said Forton-Barnes.

STEWART AND HALAK JOIN TEAM, NOLAN ADDRESSES FUTURE

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

March 2, 2014

After a whirlwind of a weekend off the ice, the Buffalo Sabres were met by some new faces at practice Sunday morning.

Forward Chris Stewart and goaltender Jaroslav Halak joined the team on the ice at First Niagara Center for their first practice with the team since being acquired from the St. Louis Blues on Friday for Steve Ott and Ryan Miller.

Between the trade Friday and the sudden resignation of president of hockey operations Pat LaFontaine on Saturday, there have been a lot of distractions for a team that's now won its past three games to deal with.

Interim coach Ted Nolan, who was brought in by LaFontaine in November to help steer the on-ice product back in the right direction, is locked in on what the team needs to do to have success moving forward.

"I think we're all numb right now so right now, we're just going to try to get this team focused on the Dallas Stars and that's our next opponent," he said. "We've got two new players in here and they come into this situation."

As far as his future with the team is concerned and a possible contract extension, Nolan said he didn't think it was the right time to discuss those matters.

"When you're emotional, you never want to make emotional comments on anything," he said. "Yes, we did talk about a contract. Right now, it's not about the contract. It's about what's transpired in this organization, it's about what happened to a very dear friend and we'll leave it at that."

The Sabres jumped on a plane to Dallas after practice in preparation of a Monday night meeting with the Stars. Tyler Ennis should be ready to play after missing the past two games with general body soreness, Jhonas Enroth will start in goal and Stewart will play on a line with Matt D'Agostini and Cody Hodgson.

"The younger players, they need direction and they need coaching," Nolan said. "They don't need to hear all this stuff. The one thing about hockey, they go on the ice and they play."

D'Agostini played with both Stewart and Halak when he was with St. Louis from 2009-13 and also played with Halak when both were in the Canadiens organization.

When D'Agostini was traded from the Blues to the Devils last season, Halak told him they'd be on the same team again at some point down the road.

“I told him we might meet again and here we are,” Halak said.

D’Agostini is looking forward to playing with his old – and new – teammates.

“Definitely no slouches that we go back so we’re happy to have them,” he said.

With the NHL Trade Deadline set for 3 p.m. on Wednesday, more trades occurring that involve the Sabres would not be out of the realm of possibility. The two newest Sabres could potentially be on the move as well.

Both Stewart and Halak have heard the rumors and aware of the possibility that Buffalo may not be their final destination this season.

“As long as I’m here I’m just going to focus 100 percent of my energy on winning hockey games for the Buffalo Sabres,” Stewart said.

The Blues are currently battling for the top spot in the Western Conference and are preparing to make a serious run at the Stanley Cup. The Sabres, on the other hand, sit in 30th place in the League and will miss the playoffs for the second season in a row.

“Obviously it’s tough when you’re traded from almost being the first one to being the last one,” Halak said. “But I’m here and I’m going to try to do my best here when I get a chance.”

Stewart is also looking forward to a new opportunity with the Sabres.

“I’ll tell you, I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t disappointed at first, but if you think I’m going to come in here and pout and feel sorry for myself, that’s not the kind of person that I am,” he said. “So I’ve got to make the best of this situation and look at the positives. They’ve got a good young team here.”

With Ott now in St. Louis, Nolan said he won’t look to name a new captain right away.

“I don’t think anyone can replace a captain like Steve Ott right now. We’ll pass around the leadership,” Nolan said.

He then singled out Drew Stafford as a player that’s really impressed him lately as a leader.

“We’re going through an emotional period right now and the way Drew handled himself [after] losing one of his close friends and losing your captain, he really stepped up the other night in that room and took the lead,” Nolan said. “He kept his personal feelings behind so that’s what we’re all trying to do right now.”

Stars-Sabres Preview

By Mark Stepneski

Stars.com

March 2, 2014

Buffalo Sabres at Dallas Stars

Tuesday, March 3

7:00 p.m.

TV: NBC Sports Network

Radio: The Ticket 1310 AM/96.7 FM

About the Stars

The Stars (28-22-10) are coming off a 4-2 loss to Tampa Bay on Saturday. The Stars outshot the Lightning 41-21 in the game, but they fell behind 3-0 and the deficit was too big to overcome.

“The thing I liked is we hunkered down and went to work. We fought our way back,” said Stars coach Lindy Ruff. “Even at 3-2, we had two or three opportunities to tie it up and missed those opportunities.”

Monday’s game kicks off a stretch of 15 games in 27 days for the Stars, including four sets of back-to-back games.

“Obviously with the Olympics, everything’s cramped in the schedule. We have to take care of ourselves and guys have to be mentally sharp because you’re not always going to have the most energy,” said Stars center Vernon Fiddler. “So we’ve got to be mentally prepared every game, right out of the gates. And it’s going to be a tough stretch, but we’ve got a great dressing room in there and a lot of guys that will put in the work.”

Although Buffalo currently ranks 30th in the league with 44 points, the Stars are not taking the Sabres lightly.

“They are a team that hasn’t lost a game since the break,” Fiddler said. “They are playing carefree. They have a lot of young guys with a lot to prove. They have great coaching. We’ve got to be ready for them.”

Monday’s game will conclude the Stars’ three-game homestand.

Injuries: D Brenden Dillon (lower body) is questionable. D Stephane Robidas (leg) is out.

About the Sabres

The Sabres (18-34-8) improved to 3-0-0 since the Olympic break with a 4-2 win over San Jose in Buffalo on Friday. Just prior to the game, the Sabres traded goaltender Ryan Miller and captain Steve Ott to St. Louis.

"It was tough. Give the guys a lot of credit, they found a way. They battled," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said.

On Saturday, there was more upheaval for the Sabres as president of hockey operations Pat Lafontaine abruptly resigned.

"I think we're all numb right now so right now, we're just going to try to get this team focused on the Dallas Stars and that's our next opponent," Nolan said. "We've got two new players in here and they come into this situation."

The Sabres acquired goaltender Jaroslav Halak and Chris Stewart from St. Louis in the Miller-Ott deal. Both practiced with the team Sunday, but there is a belief that the Sabres could flip one or both players before Wednesday's trade deadline.

"I don't know what to think. You hear about all the rumors," Stewart told Buffalo media. "As long as I'm here, I'm going to focus 100 percent of my energy on winning hockey games for the Buffalo Sabres."

Monday's game kicks off a three-game road trip for Buffalo.

Injuries: C Tyler Ennis (body soreness) is questionable. C Kevin Porter (lower body) is out.

Series Notes

*This is the second of two meetings between the Stars and Sabres.

*The Stars won the season's first meeting, defeating the Sabres, 4-3, in Buffalo on Oct. 28.

*The Sabres last played in Dallas on Oct. 30, 2010, falling to the Stars, 4-0.

Statistical tidbits

*Buffalo, which has defeated Carolina, Boston and San Jose since the break, has won three straight games for the first time this season.

*The Sabres, who rank last in the league in scoring at 1.93 goals per game, have scored 12 in the three games since the break.

*The Stars have outshot their opponents in 11 of the last 13 games, averaging 32.2 shots per game while allowing 23.6.

*The Sabres rank 29th in shots per game (26.6) and 29th in shots against per game (34.3).

*The Sabres have scored on the power play in seven of their last nine games and are 7-33 (21.2 percent) during that stretch.

*The Stars are 1-26 (3.9 percent) on the power play over their last seven games.

*The Stars are 18-19 (94.7 percent) on the penalty kill over the last six games.

*The Stars are 9-11-2 vs. the Eastern Conference.

*The Sabres are 6-13-1 vs. the Western Conference, including a 1-8-0 mark against the Central Division.

*Stars captain Jamie Benn has registered points in eight of the last 11 games and has 14 points (six goals, eight assists) during that stretch.

*Sabres defenseman Christian Ehrhoff has nine points (three goals, six assists) over his last nine games.

*Tyler Seguin leads the Stars in goals (25) and points (57).

*Cody Hodgson leads the Sabres in goals (15) and points (32).