



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres start rebuilding after busy day of trades

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

March 5, 2014

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Sabres general manager Tim Murray completed dismantling the aging core of Buffalo's roster with a flurry of moves made before the NHL trade deadline Wednesday.

Now he can focus his attention on rebuilding the league's worst team from scratch.

"The start of the building for me was on Friday," Murray said, referring to a stunning trade in which he sent goalie Ryan Miller and captain Steve Ott to St. Louis. "And today was a continuation of it. But there's still a lot of building to do."

The first-time GM was so busy that he had difficulty telling what time it was by the time he could address reporters after swinging three trades involving 10 players, four draft picks, and also claiming forward Cory Conacher off waivers.

"I think it's a good day," Murray said. "I think the combination of picks that we added and young players that we've added gives us a ton of ammunition now going into the draft."

The trades came at a time with the Sabres (18-35-8) in last place, and in a state of disarray after Saturday, when Pat LaFontaine abruptly resigned as president of hockey operations a little over three months after taking over.

Murray, who was hired by LaFontaine in January, has since assumed his former boss's duties and attempted to instill focus and direction to a team rebuilding through youth.

"I don't want to say 'change the culture,' because that makes it sound like there was something wrong with it here," Murray said. "I'm trying to establish a certain culture, and that's you earn what you get. ... We have to create inner competition."

The key deal was Murray's first of the day, when he traded defenseman Brayden McNabb, prospect forward Jonathan Parker and two second-round picks to Los Angeles. In exchange, the Sabres landed what Murray regarded as two promising prospects, forwards Hudson Fasching and Nicolas Deslauriers.

Fasching, listed at 6-foot-2 and 213 pounds, is currently in his freshman season at Minnesota, where he is third on the team with 27 points (12 goals, 15 assists) in 31 games. Deslauriers, a converted defenseman, has 18 goals and 21 assists in 60 games in his first AHL season with Manchester.

For Murray, the two were valuable enough for him to give up a pair of draft picks (a second-round pick this year, and another one in 2016), which is not something he was anticipating to do.

"We need young players at every position," Murray said. "The two forwards we got back are heavy skilled forwards that we hope going forward are a big part of what we are."

The Sabres then dealt forwards Matt Moulson and Cody McCormick to Minnesota in exchange for forward Torrey Mitchell and two second-round picks (2014 and '16). They also traded goalie Jaroslav Halak to Washington for goalie Michal Neuvirth and defenseman Rostislav Klesla.

Moulson and Halak, who was acquired in the Miller trade, were expendable because both were in the final years of their contracts and unlikely to re-sign with Buffalo.

Mitchell and Neuvirth both have one year left on their contracts, allowing the Sabres an opportunity to determine whether they fit in the team's long-term plans.

And then there was the addition of Conacher, who was claimed a day after being placed on waivers by Ottawa.

It marked a homecoming for the second-year player, who spent his four-year college career playing for Canisius in Buffalo, and grew up in nearby Burlington, Ontario.

At 5-foot-8 and 175 pounds, Conacher is an under-sized forward who had a promising rookie season last year, when he had 11 goals and 18 assists in 47 games split between Tampa Bay and Ottawa. He has had difficulty fitting in with the Senators this year, with four goals and 16 assists in 60 games.

Murray is familiar with Conacher, as he was the Senators assistant GM before being hired by the Sabres. And Murray said Conacher has the potential to fit what he's attempting to build in Buffalo.

"His work ethic is terrific, and so is his character. So I want competition," Murray said. "I want one of our draft picks to say that they're (unhappy) that we went and got Cory Conacher. That's how you create competition."

LA Kings get D McNabb from Sabres, shuffle roster

Associated Press

March 5, 2014

EL SEGUNDO, Calif. (AP) — The Los Angeles Kings acquired defenseman Brayden McNabb from the Buffalo Sabres in a trade involving multiple prospects Wednesday.

The Sabres sent McNabb, forward Jonathan Parker and two second-round draft picks to the Kings for forwards Hudson Fasching and Nicolas Deslauriers.

The Kings then sent forward Linden Vey to the minors to clear salary cap space on the big-league roster for forward Marian Gaborik, acquired in a deadline trade with Columbus.

Los Angeles also signed promising goalie Patrik Bartosak to a three-year entry-level contract.

McNabb is expected to join the Kings' AHL affiliate in Manchester, but general manager Dean Lombardi sees a major role for the tough-nosed defenseman in Los Angeles in the near future.

McNabb has played in 37 games for Buffalo since late 2011, recording one goal and seven assists. He has played 12 games for the Sabres this season and 38 for their AHL affiliate in Rochester.

"Given where our team was at, it was going to be at some point critical to get a young defenseman who has a chance to play in your top four," Lombardi said. "He's closer to being ready than if I had to go after a kid who was still in junior."

Lombardi also said part of McNabb's game is being "overaggressive," but the GM likes that: "You'd rather tame a lion than paint stripes on a kitty cat."

Fasching was a fourth-round pick by the Kings last summer. The freshman forward at Minnesota has 12 goals and 15 assists in 31 games.

Deslauriers was a third-round pick in 2009 who moved from defenseman to left wing this season in Manchester for his first professional season. He has a team-leading 18 goals and 21 assists in 60 games for the Monarchs.

The Kings also acquired minor-league forward James Livingston from San Jose at the deadline for a seventh-round pick in 2016.

Capitals get G Halak from Sabres for G Neuvirth

By Howard Fendrich

Associated Press

March 5, 2014

ARLINGTON, Va. (AP) — Four years ago, Jaroslav Halak shut down Alex Ovechkin's top-seeded Washington Capitals in the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs. Now the Capitals hope the goalie will help them reach the postseason.

Bringing aboard a player whose name conjures bad memories for the franchise, the Capitals acquired Halak from the Buffalo Sabres in a swap of goalies at the NHL trade deadline Wednesday.

The Capitals sent backup goalie Michal Neuvirth and defenseman Rostislav Klesla to Buffalo, which only acquired Halak last Friday in a deal with the St. Louis Blues. Washington picked up Klesla from the Phoenix Coyotes on Tuesday.

The Capitals, just outside the playoff picture at the moment, also received a 2015 third-round draft pick in the trade with Buffalo, which is last in the NHL with 44 points.

Halak starred for Montreal in the 2010 playoffs, when the eighth-seeded Canadiens came back from a 3-1 deficit to stun the Presidents' Trophy-winning Capitals in seven games. Over the last three games, Halak stopped 131 of 134 shots, including 41 of 42 in a 2-1 victory in Game 7.

"He's played well in Montreal. He's played well in St. Louis. And we hope he can come here and play well," Capitals general manager George McPhee said. "He's a good goalie, and he can get hot."

McPhee said Halak — who can become a free agent after the season — and Braden Holtby will split time at goalie as Washington tries to avoid missing the playoffs for the first time since 2007.

"Both guys'll start games," McPhee said. "We'll see where it goes."

The Capitals entered Wednesday 10th in the Eastern Conference; the top eight teams make the postseason.

Ovechkin tops the NHL with 43 goals, and Nicklas Backstrom is third with 48 assists. But Washington's defense has been a real problem: Only five of the other 29 teams have allowed more goals.

McPhee said none of the available defensemen "moved the needle." So that led him to the 28-year-old Halak, who went 24-9-4 with a 2.23 goals-against average and a .917 save percentage in 40 games with the Blues this season. In eight NHL

seasons with Montreal and St. Louis, he's appeared in 260 games, going 139-81-26 with a 2.38 GAA and a .917 save percentage.

Halak was in uniform for only one game with Buffalo. On Sunday, he was asked about the possibility of getting traded again.

"I mean, anything can happen from now on," Halak said. "We've got three more days before the trade deadline. We'll see."

Holtby is 19-13-3 with a 2.94 GAA and a .911 save percentage with Washington this season.

"We love Braden Holtby. Love his talent, love his character, love the way he battles," McPhee said. "He's going to be here a while, a long time. There's lots to like about him."

Neuvirth was 4-6-2 with a 2.82 GAA and .914 save percentage this season with the Capitals. He's played in 134 NHL games, all with Washington, going 59-41-13 with a 2.67 GAA.

"He wasn't happy being the No. 2 (goalie), and so we tried to accommodate him," McPhee said. "And we brought in an experienced guy, and I think it's an upgrade on the tandem, which is what we wanted to accomplish."

Sabres general manager Tim Murray said he's a fan of Neuvirth's and thinks a change of scenery will do the goalie some good.

"For whatever reason, he's a backup there, and he's just not as important as he wants to be," Murray said. "And I think when he gets to feel some love again, or whatever you want to call it, and has an opportunity, that he can get his game back."

Murray went on to say that in Washington, Neuvirth's "stats were pretty good right now on a good team, but not a great team."

About Halak, Murray said: "I would have considered keeping him if there were no trade offers that I liked."

To have a backup goalie Wednesday against Philadelphia, the Capitals recalled Philipp Grubauer from Hershey of the American Hockey League.

Washington made two deals Tuesday, adding left wing Dustin Penner in a trade with the Anaheim Ducks, while shipping forward Martin Erat to Phoenix.

As was the case with Neuvirth, Erat wanted to leave the Capitals. And as was the case with Halak, Penner can become a free agent after this season.

"Like Penner, he's going to be playing for a new contract," McPhee said about Halak. "And they usually play pretty well when they're doing that."

AP Sports Writer John Wawrow in Buffalo, N.Y., contributed to this report.

Sabres claim Conacher off waivers from Senators

Associated Press

March 5, 2014

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — The Buffalo Sabres have claimed forward Cory Conacher off waivers from the Ottawa Senators.

The move comes on trade deadline day, with the rebuilding Sabres in a state of flux after trading goaltender Ryan Miller and captain Steve Ott last week.

Conacher returns to Buffalo, where he set school records for goals and points in four years at Canisius College.

He's reunited with Sabres general manager Tim Murray, who was the assistant general manager of the Senators when they acquired Conacher and a fourth-round draft pick from Tampa Bay in exchange for goaltender Ben Bishop in April 2013.

Conacher had four goals and 16 assists in 60 games for the Senators this season and has posted 49 points in 107 NHL games since signing with Tampa Bay in 2012.

Sabres-Lightning Preview

By Kevin Chroust

Associated Press

March 5, 2014

The Tampa Bay Lightning have spent much of the season without one of their two big franchise names. As they get one back, they've parted ways with the other.

While center Steven Stamkos will return Thursday night against the Buffalo Sabres as the Lightning begin a six-game homestand, they sent Martin St. Louis to the New York Rangers shortly before Wednesday's trade deadline for Ryan Callahan and two draft picks.

Stamkos, who hasn't played since Nov. 11 due to a surgically repaired broken right tibia, was cleared Wednesday by team doctors.

"I'm excited, a little anxious, a little nervous, everything all in one," Stamkos said. "It's been a long road. It's been tough, but I think this time heading in (to see the doctor) I was the most confident going in there knowing how I felt on the ice, off the ice, what I needed to do in order to get cleared to play, and the tests I needed to go through, and everything felt great."

Stamkos had 23 points in 17 games before the injury and will be part of the puzzle in replacing former captain St. Louis' 61 points, which rank among the top 10 in the league. St. Louis had been seeking a trade after being left off the original Canadian Olympic roster by Lightning general manager Steve Yzerman.

Callahan, a fellow right winger and the Rangers' former captain, has 25 points in 45 games before being shipped to Tampa Bay (34-23-5) along with a 2015 first-round pick and a 2014 conditional second-round selection.

"The Lightning are very excited to have Ryan Callahan join the organization and help us in our quest to make the playoffs," said Yzerman, who praised St. Louis in a statement. "Ryan is an outstanding player and leader who we look forward to seeing on the ice (Thursday) night."

The Sabres (18-35-8) made their biggest deal in the days leading up to the deadline, sending goaltender Ryan Miller and former captain Steve Ott to the St. Louis Blues. However, they made another notable move Wednesday by claiming Cory Conacher off waivers, though it's uncertain if the former Ottawa forward will debut Thursday.

The Lightning just faced Miller on Tuesday in a 4-2 loss at St. Louis. Tampa Bay led 2-0 after the first period with goals from Alex Killorn and Tyler Johnson but would suffer its third loss in four games back from the Olympic break.

They've had the lead in all four games and been outshot 134-88.

"We had multiple-goal leads in three of the four games and we led in every single game, but if you're going to sit here and take 16 shots in one game, 17 shots in another game, 21 shots in another game and expect to win games, it's not going to happen," coach Jon Cooper said. "Unacceptable."

Buffalo had a season-best three-game winning streak snapped Monday in a 3-2 loss to Dallas, the Sabres' first of three consecutive road games.

They acquired netminder Jaroslav Halak in the deal with the Blues, but Jhonas Enroth has started three straight games in goal. He made 36 saves against the Stars and has a 3.00 goals-against average in the 2-1-0 span.

They debuted Chris Stewart, another piece of the trade, at right wing Monday, but the offense came from Tyler Ennis' two goals with Matt Moulson assisting on each. Ennis has four goals in his last three games while Moulson has eight points on a six-game streak.

The Sabres led 1-0 after a first period in which they were outshot 16-5.

"(We need) better starts. We got in a hole early," Ennis told the team's official website. "They took it to us. We took penalties and they really dominated us in the first period. Jhonas played great, but we need a better start."

The Lightning posted 3-2 wins in October in their two meetings with the Sabres this season as Johnson had two goals and an assist.

Sabres continue extreme makeover

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

March 5, 2014

Tim Murray had barely hung up the phone on his last trade call when he started looking ahead. The NHL draft is in June, and the Sabres' general manager can't wait.

He hopes the next chance to wheel and deal is as productive and exciting as his first one.

Murray, as expected, was a busy man on trade-deadline day Wednesday. Buffalo's new GM made three multiplayer deals and a waiver claim, continuing the reshaping of the organization he began Friday by trading Ryan Miller and Steve Ott.

"I'm not done," Murray said in First Niagara Center. "There's a lot of building to do."

He and the Sabres have plenty of assets from which to build. For the next three drafts, Buffalo possesses five first-round picks, plus a conditional first-rounder, along with a half-dozen second-round selections and a conditional choice in round two.

"It's a good day," Murray said before flying to Tampa, Fla., where the Sabres play tonight. "The combination of the picks that we've added and the young players we've added, I think it gives us a ton of ammunition now going to the draft, where there will be players available that aren't available on trade-deadline day.

"A No. 2, 24-year-old left winger is going to fall out with his coach after they lose in the first round. Whatever the case may be, there's always good, young players available at the draft. We still have a ton of picks to be players in that. We have young players to be players in that.

"We were a focus today, I think, and I think on draft day if those types of players are available, we can be a focus again. If they're not available, we use the picks and hopefully keep adding top young talent."

Murray, who just two months into his job has cemented a reputation as a stern-faced guy with little time for frivolity, actually smiled and joked a few times while reliving his day. It was an exciting one:

- Buffalo traded forwards Matt Moulson and Cody McCormick to the Minnesota Wild for two second-round picks and forward Torrey Mitchell. The 2014 pick acquired originally belonged to Winnipeg, while the other selection is in 2016.

- The Sabres sent goaltender Jaroslav Halak and a 2015 third-round pick to Washington for goalie Michal Neuvirth and veteran minor-league defenseman Rostislav Klesla.
- Buffalo acquired forward prospects Hudson Fasching and Nicolas Deslauriers from Los Angeles for minor leaguers Brayden McNabb and Jonathan Parker, plus second-round picks in 2014 and 2015. The picks actually came from the Kings in last year's deal featuring Robyn Regehr.
- The Sabres claimed former Canisius College star Cory Conacher off waivers from Ottawa.

"I knew we had some guys that we could possibly move, and which direction we were going to go I wasn't quite sure," Murray said. "You do a lot of listening and then you discuss each proposal and make what you hope is the right decision."

The departures of Moulson and Halak, a pair of pending unrestricted free agents, were expected. The deal that sent McNabb, who's played 37 games for the Sabres, and two picks to Los Angeles was not part of the plan. Murray's admiration of Fasching and Deslauriers made it too irresistible to pass up.

Fasching, 18, is excelling on the first line for the University of Minnesota, which is the No. 1-ranked team in the NCAA. The 6-foot-2, 213-pound right winger is third on the Gophers with 27 points in 31 games. Six of his 12 goals came in the last 10 outings. Fasching, drafted in the fourth round last June, also had two goals and four points for the United States at the world junior championships.

"He's a guy that we've liked, that I've liked for a long time," Murray said. "He has a chance to be a top-six forward if he develops properly."

Deslauriers, a third-round pick in 2009, is a 6-1, 230-pound winger who played defense until this season. He's embraced the switch and has 18 goals and 39 points with the Kings' Manchester AHL team. He and Klesla will report to Rochester.

Murray views Neuvirth as an alluring reclamation project. The Capitals' backup, who has appeared in 134 NHL games, is 4-6-2 with a 2.82 goals-against average and .914 save percentage. Murray believes the 25-year-old can live up to his standing as a 2006 second-round pick.

"For whatever reason, he's a backup there and he's just not as important as he wants to be," Murray said. "I think when he gets to feel some love again or whatever you want to call it and has an opportunity, then he can get his game back."

The Sabres needed to acquire the 29-year-old Mitchell and his \$1.9 million salary-cap hit to get the deal done for Moulson, who was one of the top names on

the market. Mitchell, who has 35 goals and 90 points in 383 games, has one year and \$2.5 million in salary left on his contract.

It was the second straight year in which the Sabres made a deadline deal with the Wild, who picked up Jason Pominville last season.

The departure of Moulson, acquired in October as part of the trade that sent Thomas Vanek to the Islanders, closes the book on Buffalo's former scoring leader. The Sabres essentially sent out Vanek (while retaining \$2.1 million of his salary) and McCormick to get back a first-round pick in 2014 or 2015, three second-round selections and Mitchell.

New York traded Vanek to Montreal on Wednesday for prospect Sebastian Collberg and a conditional second-round pick.

Judging by Murray's cheerful demeanor, he hopes June is much, much busier.

"We have to add players," the GM said. "We have to create inter-competition, and this is the start of it."

Three ex-Sabres parachute into playoff races

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

March 5, 2014

TAMPA, Fla. — Matt Moulson was expecting the call, Jaroslav Halak was basically praying for it and Cody McCormick essentially had no idea it was coming.

But the three departing Buffalo Sabres all derived a similar benefit by getting traded Wednesday: They've been sent from a last-place team into the thick of the playoff race.

Moulson and McCormick are going together to Minnesota to join former Buffalo captain Jason Pominville with the Wild. Halak took his gear and was gone from the Westin Harbour Island hotel here a scant two hours after the 3 p.m. deadline, headed for a flight to take him to Boston and the Washington Capitals' game there tonight.

The Capitals entered Wednesday's play just one point out of the final wild-card slot in the Eastern Conference and getting a goaltender like Halak, who went 24-9-4 with St. Louis, is what they feel they need to comfortably get into the top eight. Minnesota looks to be on easy street in the West, with a seven-point lead in the wild-card race and a 7-1-2 burst in its last 10 games.

Moulson was one of the hottest names on the trade market Wednesday, and has been at the top of the list of likely rental players almost from the time he was dealt from the New York Islanders to the Sabres on Oct. 24.

Getting dealt was zero surprise. The fact that it took almost to the deadline was.

"It's definitely a relief after sitting around for a week seeing other guys get traded and wondering if you were going to be here," Moulson said. "It's good to finally have a place to go.

"It's an exciting hockey city to go to, much like the fans in Buffalo. They're passionate about hockey in Minnesota, the State of Hockey and all. They're going to be good fans."

The Sabres never made Moulson an offer as an unrestricted free agent, even though he was open to listening and Buffalo clearly needs goal scorers.

"A lot was going down with the team trading away guys like Ryan Miller and Steve Ott and building for the future," Moulson said.

"It's pretty much set in stone. I knew it was coming. Tim Murray was up front and honest about what was going on."

Moulson said his priority now is playing for the Wild. Re-signing with them or going somewhere else is staying on the back burner for now.

“I’m going to Minnesota to help them win a Stanley Cup. That’s their goal,” Moulson said. “Anything I can help to win games I’m going to do. I’m not going to think about the other stuff because that will take care of itself.”

McCormick met reporters after having already spoken to Pominville, the Wild winger and former Buffalo captain.

“Jason Pominville said some things that were exciting, that made me excited to join the Minnesota Wild,” McCormick said. “Our wives are friends. Our kids are friends. It makes for an easier transition.”

McCormick was in his fourth year with the Sabres after being acquired from Colorado and injuries have plagued him the last three years.

But Wild General Manager Chuck Fletcher is intrigued by McCormick’s toughness.

“They wanted some size and grit,” McCormick said. “I’m just hoping to get there and be able to contribute to that.”

Halak becomes the 10th player in franchise history to suit up for a game with the Sabres but not play.

The ninth, by the way, was emergency backup goaltender Ryan Vinz, the HarborCenter employee who served as backup on Friday after Ryan Miller was sent to St. Louis.

At least Vinz got to sit on the bench and operate the door as players came and went from the ice.

Halak spent his one game with Buffalo on Monday in Dallas sitting on his own in a runway because the benches in American Airlines Center are too small to accommodate the backup.

Halak, who was the goalie when Montreal upset Washington in the playoffs and advanced to the 2010 Eastern Conference finals, just bided his time with the Sabres knowing another move was likely in the offing.

“The last four days have been crazy,” Halak said.

“Getting traded and all the rumors being out there that I’m going to be traded again. I’m glad it’s over and now I’m really happy I have a chance to make the playoffs.

Halak said he was happy he would only have to worry about Washington star Alex Ovechkin in practice now and smiled when asked about the strange twist that allowed him to now play for a team that he was largely responsible for upsetting in a previous spring.

“I have great memories playing against them, sure,” he said. “Now I’m going to be their teammate and try to do my best. We’ll see how that’s going to go. I know they have a lot of hockey left and they’re in a playoff race. I’m going to try to do my best to help them get there.”

Conacher heads 'home' to Buffalo after pick from waiver wire

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

March 5, 2014

The future was nerve-rackingly uncertain.

Having been placed on waivers earlier in the day, Cory Conacher suited up with Ottawa for the Senators' game in Edmonton on Tuesday night. It was likely his last game with the Sens. It could have been his last game in the NHL for a while. There had been promising talks, but nothing was certain. Nothing until Wednesday just before noon when the former standout at Canisius College landed, for all intents and purposes, back home.

The Buffalo Sabres claimed Conacher off waivers, ending the 24-year-old's 24 hours of emotional upheaval.

"That was one of the tougher games I've played in based on the circumstances," Conacher said of Tuesday's game against the Oilers. "I felt sick to my stomach at points. Even right now, I'm shaking and nervous but excited at the same time. I'm just trying to pinch myself that this is happening."

The native of Burlington, Ont., grew up a Toronto Maple Leafs fan, but he also grew up watching the Sabres. When he came to Canisius for his collegiate career, he had the opportunity to watch the Sabres more closely. And now to have the opportunity to play for the organization, well, that's almost too special for words.

"Any player always has a number of teams in the back of his head he wants to play for at some point in his career," Conacher said. "Not that Ottawa wasn't one of them, but Buffalo was definitely near the top of the list for me. To be able to go there and try to make an impact with them and be part of the process and what Tim Murray is building is really exciting for me and my family."

Murray, of course, is familiar with Conacher. He was the assistant general manager for the Sens when the team acquired Conacher last year in a trade that sent Ben Bishop to the Tampa Bay Lightning.

What did the new Sabres general manager like about Conacher? First of all, he was free – a pickup off waivers that cost the Sabres nothing in return. But there's a huge upside Murray sees in Conacher, not just in skills but for the culture he wants to create in Buffalo.

"He cares," Murray said. "He's a good person. He's a competitive guy. He can skate. There's lots of things I like about him on the ice. He's what I like to call a good complementary player and if we had better players here around him he'd be a better complementary player, as most complementary players are."

“I’m trying to establish a certain culture and that’s you earn what you get. And his work ethic is terrific and he’s got character. I want competition. I want one of our draft picks to say today that they’re pissed off the Sabres went out and got Cory Conacher.

“That’s how you create competition.”

In 107 NHL games between Tampa Bay and Ottawa, Conacher has 49 points (15 goals, 34 assists). He was the Most Valuable Player of the AHL while leading Norfolk to the Calder Cup in 2012. At Canisius, he remains the all-time leader in points (147) and goals (62) while holding 10 other school records.

His hockey career has always been about proving people wrong – people who thought he was too small to play (he’s listed at 5-8) or who were concerned about his Type 1 diabetes.

Although he didn’t find the right fit with the Senators, Conacher had nothing but good things to say about his teammates and the organization in Ottawa. But the Sens juggled lines and his playing time was inconsistent.

“There were times it felt like a fit,” Conacher said. “Then other times it didn’t seem so right. ... It might have been time for a change.

“I’m going to get back to the way I played to get into this league,” Conacher said. “I may have started to get away from that in Ottawa. ... I wasn’t confident in the plays I was making. I need to be controlling the puck more and continue to drive to the net and be around the net with the puck to get more shots. I have to want the puck a little more and not be afraid to make a mistake here or there. Take risks.”

And what better place to take risks than in a city that feels like home? Conacher is close to his family, still based in Burlington, while his younger brother, Shane, is a freshman at Canisius College.

While there may be some nerves about joining his new team, which, with immigration paperwork, may not be until Friday, there is a definite comfort level for Conacher in Buffalo and an opportunity to be part of the Sabres’ future.

“The fans are obviously very passionate about the game and that’s one of the good things about Buffalo,” Conacher said. “There are lots of great things about the city of Buffalo. ... I talked briefly with Tim Murray and he told me he’s going to give me the opportunity to be a big player and hopefully be part of the process of what he sees for the team. And I want to be part of that. I want to be in Buffalo and hopefully I will be for a long time.”

Friends and family excited by Conacher signing with Sabres

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

March 5, 2014

You'll have to excuse the enthusiasm of a little brother.

The Buffalo Sabres could not officially claim Cory Conacher off waivers until noon on Wednesday but as talk of the deal circulated via social media, Shane Conacher took to Twitter to welcome his older brother back to Buffalo.

"He kinda jumped the gun on that," Cory said.

It's understandable.

Shane, a freshman at Canisius College, is among the Golden Griffins who are pretty pumped that favorite son Cory will be playing down the street for the Sabres.

Conacher holds 12 program records at Canisius, including the team's all-time totals in points (147) and goals (62). It's not just his success at becoming an NHL player that has been fun for the Ice Griffs to follow but the way in which he has earned his chances.

"Cory knows how many people have written him off," Canisius coach Dave Smith said. "He's willing to create an opportunity to succeed and it's so much fun to watch because he's just like one of those little trains that's 'I think I can. I think I can. I think I can. Oh, I did.' It's a great inspiration but it's fun. Cory loves hockey and Cory believes in Cory Conacher and for us to be spectators for that ride, we can all learn from it.

"I think the only piece missing from his game at the NHL level is he needs to get back to producing with poise. He's so fast, he needs to just produce with poise. I saw him do that in the American league. I've seen it on occasion in the National Hockey League. I know he's grown and developed and he'll continue to do that."

Murray's trade day intensity is refreshing

By Bucky Gleason

Buffalo News

March 5, 2014

Tim Murray was still coming down from an adrenaline high after wrapping up his first NHL trade deadline Wednesday when he was asked about the day. You would have thought the Sabres' general manager was a skydiver who walked away without a scratch after his parachute failed to open.

"It was exhilarating," Murray said. "It was fast and furious. I'd be lying if I said I didn't enjoy 90 percent of it."

No matter what Murray accomplished in the annual swap meet, it was exactly what people needed to hear. He was a refreshing change from Darcy Regier, who numerous times over the years looked like he was near tears after trading his players. His lips would quiver as he braced for questions about why he didn't accomplish enough.

After a while, there was a sense Regier was too attached to his players or petrified to make a mistake. You wondered how many potential deals slipped away because he was hesitant or scared to say goodbye. Murray showed nothing of the sort a few hours after trading a good prospect in Brayden McNabb to the Los Angeles Kings.

In fact, it was the opposite.

Sure, there were scouts in the room making a case for McNabb. He's a big, physical kid who someday could develop into a top-tier defenseman for the Kings. And so what if he does? Murray was too upbeat about what forwards Hudson Fasching and Nicolas Deslauriers could bring to Buffalo than what was walking out the door.

Murray liked the deal, so he made the deal. "I wish him the best," Murray said of McNabb. "Obviously, that team liked him and wanted him. He's leaving. I'm not going to worry about what he becomes and what he does. ... He obviously helped bring us what we believe are two very good young players, so God bless him. If he becomes a really good player in L.A., it won't bother me one bit."

And that was it. No fuss. No muss. No worries. Time for a beer.

"We make lots of mistakes," Murray said. "But if you get paralyzed because you might make a mistake, then you'll never make a deal. You do your homework, you scout, you do all the background work that you can do, and then you make the deal. I'm by these two guys now. I'm ready for the next thing. Today is over."

And tomorrow is waiting.

Sorry, but if you're looking for approval, or disapproval, of the trades Murray made Wednesday, you came to the wrong place. The final score on his first swap meet isn't going to be tabulated for years. When it comes to Fasching, I know plenty about fishing. He's an 18-year-old kid with good size. I'm told he has a high hockey IQ.

There's no way of knowing with absolute certainty whether most players will have an impact in the NHL until they reach the NHL. Fasching is one among many prospects Murray hopes will be part of the solution. Murray said his stock plummeted going into the 2013 draft, which was why he was taken in the fourth round.

OK, so there's risk involved. Yeah, and ...

It's the Sabres' job to develop the University of Minnesota freshman into a quality forward who can help them in the coming years. The same goes for Deslauriers, a puck-mover, and the kiddie corps the Sabres are rebuilding around. If they work out the way Murray believes they can, the suffering will end.

"I have a vision of something," Murray said. "I think that's why I was hired. There's nothing to explain. I see something and act accordingly. What I see" in Fasching "is something that I like. That boat won't sail for two or three years, then you can praise me or criticize me. I can take either."

For now, they're just names, the way Miroslav Satan and Michael Peca were just names when they showed up after getting traded to Buffalo. The community was wild over Mikhail Grigorenko and barely made a peep about Zemgus Girgensons, only to find the latter was miles ahead of the former. If you're a Sabres fan, you can take comfort knowing Murray's strength is identifying young players and projecting their potential. Draft picks generally don't arouse the fan base. Even eternal optimists in Buffalo are jittery about the unknown. They need to see tangible results. They're left hoping Murray knows what he's doing. And that, my friends, amounts to an upgrade.

I'm sure people will grouse about the Sabres getting worse Wednesday. In the short term, that's probably true. In less than a week, they had their franchise goalie, their captain, the player they received for Thomas Vanek and their president of hockey operations walk out the door. When the franchise isn't in transition, it's in an uproar.

Murray presented a strong front, if not a stern face, amid the chaos. He showed the foresight to make one deal lead to another. It's what happened when Murray shipped Ryan Miller and Steve Ott to St. Louis and flipped Jaroslav Halak to Washington for Michal Neuvirth, three years younger and \$1.25 million cheaper.

It's not much, but it's something.

People are looking for progress in a lost season. As low as it's been, the team's descent will likely continue. At times, it looks like the entire franchise is spiraling out of control. The sky isn't falling. The Sabres have been falling from the sky. They needed a guy like Murray to pull the rip chord and ensure a safe landing.

Based on how he looked Wednesday, it's his idea of fun.

Sabres notebook: Game prep takes a back seat to roster moves

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

March 6, 2014

TAMPA, Fla. — The Buffalo Sabres will be in the midst of a wave of emotion tonight when they play the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Early Wednesday morning, the game became a big target for hockey watchers across North America when it was learned that it will mark the return of Tampa Bay star Steven Stamkos after he's missed 45 games with a broken leg.

But it will now also mark the debut of former New York Rangers standout Ryan Callahan in the Tampa Bay lineup after he was acquired for beloved veteran Marty St. Louis in a blockbuster trade of captains that stunned Lightning fans.

Television news coverage here used the words "heartbreak" in on-screen graphics to describe the loss of St. Louis, who asked out to move near his Connecticut home – and to get away from GM Steve Yzerman, who had initially snubbed him from the Team Canada Olympic selections before naming him as Stamkos' replacement.

"That's going to be really weird," said Sabres winger Drew Stafford, who compared the shock of the deal to Buffalo's trade of Ryan Miller. "It's a guy that's been the face of the franchise and been an influence for a lot of players. When Nathan Gerbe was here, he really looked up to Marty. Tyler Ennis is the same way. Marty has a lasting impact on a lot of players."

St. Louis won the Hart and Art Ross trophies in 2004 and won the Art Ross again in 2013. Even at age 38, he entered Wednesday's games with the most points in the league since the start of the 2009-10 season (388 points in 351 games). St. Louis has 29 goals and 61 points this season and also one year remaining on his contract at \$5.625 million.

"He has been one of the greatest players in the organization's history but in the end we honored his request today," Yzerman said.

St. Louis immediately flew to New York to play in the Rangers' game against Toronto. Before he left, he released a statement to Tampa Bay fans in which he referenced his trade request.

"I know many of you are disappointed with me for my decision to want to leave," St. Louis wrote. "I would rather not discuss what brought me to that decision, but in the end this is a decision for my family."

“I respect the fact that many of you do not agree with my decision and are angry with it. All I really can say is that I am sorry and I am very appreciative of the support you have shown me through the years.”

Callahan is a pending free agent who could not come to terms with the Rangers on a long-term deal in the \$6 million per year range, especially when he pushed for a no-trade clause. The Rochester native is rumored to be a top target of the Sabres if he's available when the free agency period opens July 1.

...

The Sabres practiced for about 45 minutes in the Tampa Bay Times Forum but it was hard to really prepare for tonight's game. Trainers and equipment men looking at cell phones on the bench were noticed. So were reporters doing likewise in the stands.

Coach Ted Nolan learned about the trade of Brayden McNabb and the waiver claim of Cory Conacher just as he came off the ice.

“It was pretty hard to concentrate on defensive zone coverage and neutral zone coverage and some of the aspects we have to work on on a daily basis,” Nolan said. “It's hard to get the guys to focus. I told them if there's ever a day to practice your concentration level, this is the day to concentrate on it.”

...

Winger Chris Stewart, acquired from St. Louis with goalie Jaroslav Halak, was not traded, as many observers expected. Ottawa, rumored as Stewart's top destination, instead traded for Edmonton's Ales Hemsky.

“You can't read too much into it. It's that time of the year. People make a big deal about it and either you're going to be here or not,” said Stewart, who said he's OK with staying in Buffalo because he's from Toronto. “I'm excited for the challenge. If you move, you just take it one step at a time.

“It's all out of my control,” Stewart said of Hemsky. “He's a right winger, I'm a right winger and they did pick him up. It doesn't take that much to figure it out.”

New-look Lightning get Stamkos back to face Sabres

By Brian Hunter

NHL.com

March 5, 2014

SABRES (18-35-8) at LIGHTNING (34-23-5)

TV: MSG-B, BELL TV, SUN

Last 10: Buffalo 4-5-1; Tampa Bay 3-7-0

Season series: This is the third of four games between the Buffalo Sabres and Tampa Bay Lightning. Alex Killorn's overtime goal gave the Lightning a 3-2 win at First Niagara Center on Oct. 8, while a late goal by Ondrej Palat led them to another 3-2 victory at Tampa Bay Times Forum on Oct. 26.

Big story: Steven Stamkos returns and a new chapter in the history of the Lightning begins Thursday after Martin St. Louis was traded to the New York Rangers on Wednesday for Ryan Callahan in a swap of team captains.

Team Scope:

Sabres: Twenty-one games remain for Buffalo to audition young talent for next season. The Sabres followed up the huge trade with the St. Louis Blues last week that saw goalie Ryan Miller and forward Steve Ott moved by also parting ways with the goalie they got back in that trade, Jaroslav Halak, as well as forwards Matt Moulson and Cody McCormick and defenseman Brayden McNabb prior to the NHL Trade Deadline passing on Wednesday.

Michal Neuvirth, acquired from the Washington Capitals for Halak, joins Jhonas Enroth as the new goalie tandem. Each is 25 years old. Veteran forward Torrey Mitchell comes over from the Minnesota Wild in the package for Moulson and McCormick. Forward Hudson Fasching, seen by general manager Tim Murray as a top-six prospect, was part of the McNabb trade. The Sabres also added forward Cory Conacher off waivers from the Ottawa Senators.

"We were focused today," general manager Tim Murray said, "and on Draft Day, if players are available, we can be aggressive, and if not we can keep adding young talent."

Lightning: This is the start of a six-game homestand for Tampa Bay, giving the fans plenty of opportunity to get used to seeing Stamkos zip around the ice again and come to terms with the absence of St. Louis, who joined the organization for the 2000-01 season, was part of a Stanley Cup team in 2004 and six times reached at least 30 goals and 80 points.

"I'm going to utilize all the skills Marty has taught me over the years," Stamkos said in the Tampa Bay Times. "He's taught me a lot of things and he's taught a lot of guys a lot of things. We learn from that and get stronger as a team. That's the only way we can get through this."

Callahan, who has scored as many as 29 goals in a season, is an unrestricted free agent after this season. He was traded after being unable to reach an agreement with the Rangers on an extension, but general manager Steve Yzerman said he hopes to sign Callahan to a new contract.

"I've heard nothing but good things from players that have played there," Callahan told TSN. "... They're in the playoff hunt too, which is big. I'm excited to get down there to Tampa and get going."

Who's hot: Sabres forward Tyler Ennis returned Monday to score both their goals in a 3-2 loss to the Dallas Stars. He has four goals in the past three games he's played. ... Lightning forward Teddy Purcell has an assist in four of the past five games.

Injury report: Tampa Bay defenseman Radko Gudas (leg) missed the game Tuesday and is day-to-day.

Sabres stay busy making trades for future

By Joe Yerdon

NHL.com

March 5, 2014

BUFFALO -- Buffalo Sabres general manager Tim Murray headed into the NHL Trade Deadline with a number of possibilities and came out of it continuing the organization's plan to rebuild.

Murray's Wednesday was busy. The Sabres made three trades and acquired forward Cory Conacher off waivers from the Ottawa Senators. For the first time in Murray's career, he ran the show by himself.

"I had a big role in Ottawa and in Anaheim. I was the middle guy between the GM and the scouting staff that were in the other room. This time there was no middle man," the 50-year-old said. "I was running back and forth. It's exhilarating, it was fast and furious. I'd be lying if I said I didn't enjoy 90 percent of it."

Two trades involved players the Sabres acquired in earlier deals, forward Matt Moulson and goalie Jaroslav Halak.

Buffalo traded Moulson and forward Cody McCormick to the Minnesota Wild for Torrey Mitchell and two second-round picks. Moulson was acquired in October by former GM Darcy Regier from the New York Islanders in a trade for Thomas Vanek. Moulson's contract expires at the end of the season and he will be an unrestricted free agent.

The Moulson trade wasn't announced until 4 p.m. ET, and the timing of it was fine by Murray's standards, but perhaps not by others'.

"I had a couple GMs that had guys like that, that called me asking, 'When are you getting rid of your guy so I can get rid of my guy?'" Murray said. "I don't know where that logic comes from, but the big players that were on our roster that were available were traded. You can't get carried away with the timeline because if you're in a hurry or anxious, good things may not happen."

Mitchell is likely to replace McCormick on the fourth line. Conacher could replace Moulson in the Sabres' top six.

Conacher, who played at Canisius College in Buffalo before turning pro, is a player Murray knows from his time in Ottawa.

"There are lots of things I like about him on the ice. He's what I call a good complementary player," Murray said. "His work ethic is terrific and he's [got] character. I want competition. I want draft picks to say they're [ticked] off that we went and got Cory Conacher. That's how you create competition."

Halak and a third-round pick in 2015 were traded to the Washington Capitals for goalie Michal Neuvirth and defenseman Rostislav Klesla. Halak was acquired Feb. 28 in the trade that sent Ryan Miller and Steve Ott to the St. Louis Blues. Halak also can become an unrestricted free agent.

"I would've considered keeping him if there were no trade offers that I liked, so that was my course with all the UFAs, pending UFAs," Murray said. "Whether that's the right course I don't know. They were going to be traded if a suitable trade could happen. If that didn't happen, then we had some time here to evaluate, Halak for example, the new guy that already came in a trade, and then we'd make that decision. I hadn't thought about the future with him, and that's the next step. Right now, we don't take that next step because he's not here."

Neuvirth this season is 4-6-2 with a 2.82 goals-against average and .914 save percentage, and has Stanley Cup Playoff experience. He was supplanted as the starter in Washington by Braden Holtby, and the chance to compete for more playing time in Buffalo is something Murray is counting on to motivate the 2006 second-round pick (No. 34).

"For whatever reason he's a backup [in Washington] and he's just not as important as he wants to be. I think when he gets to feel some love again and has an opportunity that he can get his game back," Murray said. "When I say get his game back, his stats are pretty good, right now, on a good team but not a great team. At 25 years old, turning 26 (on March 23), he's got a background of playing in top competition in his age group. Now it's our job to get him back to playing top competition in his age group, and his age group is the National Hockey League."

The Sabres' first trade Wednesday sent minor-league defenseman Brayden McNabb, forward Jonathan Parker and two second-round draft picks to the Los Angeles Kings for minor-league forward Nicolas Deslauriers and University of Minnesota forward Hudson Fasching.

"We need young players; the two forwards we got we really like their future," Murray said. "The two players we were getting back we thought very highly of. It wasn't a position thing, it was the two players."

Murray said he likes their potential, especially Fasching's.

"There is some chance in that trade. We're trading for two futures and we're trading picks," Murray said. "You have to look at what you're giving and what you're getting. It's not a guess; it's an educated guess based on scouting. [Fasching] has a chance to be a top-six forward if he develops properly, to the height of his potential; he's an NHL player. He's a power forward, he's got skill, he's got hockey sense, and he's a good hockey player."

Murray's first deadline day went without drama or any shocking moves. For an organization that's in the midst of rebuilding, having a stress-free day is a good thing. In Murray's case, it's the first big step on the way to making the Sabres a better team.

"I think it's a good day," Murray said. "I think the combination of the picks we've added and the young players that we've added, I think that it gives us a ton of ammunition now going into the draft, where there will be players available that aren't available on trade-deadline day.

"There are always good young players available at the draft, and we have still a ton of picks to be players in that, we have young players to be players in that. We were a focus today, I think. I think on draft day, if those types of players are available, we can be a focus again, and if they're not available we use the picks and hopefully keep adding top young talent."

Cory Conacher excited to join Buffalo Sabres

By Bruce Garrioch

Ottawa Sun

March 5, 2014

CALGARY - As the clock struck midnight on his career with the Senators, Cory Conacher headed to the Scotiabank Saddledome to pick up his equipment.

Next stop: Buffalo.

The Senators winger didn't get the job done while he was here but he'll get a second chance from former Ottawa assistant GM Tim Murray with the Buffalo Sabres to establish himself in the NHL.

Picked up on waivers Wednesday, Conacher will join the Sabres Friday. He'll get a chance to play in a top six role and show that he belongs.

"I'm excited to get this opportunity to play and make an impact with the Buffalo Sabres," said Conacher before leaving the Saddledome around 11 a.m. MST.

A native of Burlington, Ont. he will be close to home and he played college hockey in Canisius in Buffalo. If he was given the right by the Senators to choose his destination, this would have been it.

He re-wrote the scoring record books at Canisius during a storied career.

"They definitely would have been right at the top," he said. "I've loved that city ever since I started playing at Canisius. It's like a second home to me.

"To be able to play there in the NHL it's a dream come true. At the same time, it's tough leaving Ottawa. They've got a great organization and they've done so much for me.

"They have a lot of good people in management who have helped me out and just the guys on the team have been great. I've got a lot of close friends here. They're going to be a really good team in the future."

Dealt to the Senators at last year's deadline from the Lightning in exchange for goaltender Ben Bishop, it just didn't work out in Ottawa for Conacher. If he isn't scoring, he's not contributing.

That's just the reality. He couldn't get it done here.

"It's definitely tough saying goodbye to these guys," said Conacher. "I'm getting a second chance I guess. I don't know how to explain (what happened) here in Ottawa.

"There was times where I felt like I could fit here and there were other times where maybe I didn't fit here so well. I was able to meet a lot of good players, teammates and friends.

"I know Tim Murray is turning that organization around and I'm excited to get there."

Rebuilding Sabres busy at trade deadline, not done overhauling roster

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

March 6, 2014

BUFFALO – Tim Murray said he began his first NHL trade deadline day as a general manager with no expectations, unsure which direction the rebuilding Sabres might go.

By the end Wednesday, Murray had made three notable deals, trading familiar names like Matt Moulson, Cody McCormick and Brayden McNabb while acquiring NHL talent and prospects. He also grabbed Canisius product Cory Conacher off waivers.

Murray, who sent franchise goalie Ryan Miller and captain Steve Ott to St. Louis on Friday, called it a “good day.” He’s not done, either.

“This may be the roster we have for five years depending on who’s a coming free agent or whatever,” Murray said inside the First Niagara Center. “But we have to add players. We have to create inner-competition, and this is the start of it.

“So the start of building, for me, was Friday, and today was a continuation of it. There’s still a lot of building to do.”

That building, Murray said, will continue at the NHL Entry Draft in June. The Sabres still have a bevy of picks – they dealt two second-rounders early in the day before acquiring two more later – and youngsters, assets Murray said are “a ton of ammunition heading into the draft.”

“There will be young players available that aren’t available at trade deadline day,” he said.

Perhaps just as notable as the deals, the Sabres kept some of their top talent, most notably Christian Ehrhoff, Tyler Myers and Drew Stafford. Naturally, there was “a lot of kicking tires,” Murray said.

“They check to see if you’re up to the task and can get one of your best young players for a bargain,” he said. “I don’t blame them for that. That’s good strategy.”

Here are the deals:

– Murray sent Moulson and McCormick, two 30-year-old forwards entering unrestricted free agency, to the Minnesota Wild for winger Torrey Mitchell and second-round picks in 2014 and 2016.

Moulson, a three-time 30-goal winger, was one of the best rentals available. The Sabres acquired him Oct. 27. The gritty McCormick is a versatile fourth-liner.

The 29-year-old Mitchell has 35 goals, 90 points and 194 penalty minutes in 383 games with the San Jose Sharks and Minnesota. He has one goal and nine points in 58 games this season.

“He’s a hard-playing, hard-skating guy that again fits the new culture,” Murray said about Mitchell, who has a year left on his contract.

– In a somewhat surprising trade, the Sabres sent McNabb, a 23-year-old defense prospect many believed would be an NHL regular soon, and second-round picks in 2014 and 2015 to the Los Angeles Kings for 18-year-old NCAA winger Hudson Fasching and 23-year-old AHL winger Nicolas Deslauriers.

“We need young forwards,” Murray said. “The two forwards we got, we really like their future. ... So it wasn’t a position thing, it was the two players. I didn’t come into today expecting to trade draft picks.”

Fasching, the 118th overall pick in June, has 12 goals and 27 goals in 31 games as a freshman at the University of Minnesota. The American’s 6-foot-2 and 207 pounds.

Murray said Fasching performed like a “dominant power forward” at the world junior championship after a down season.

“He’s a guy that I’ve liked for a long time,” he said. “We believe that he can be that type of player down the road. There is some chance in that trade. We’re trading for two futures.”

He added: “He has a chance to be a top-six forward if he develops properly.”

Deslauriers, the 84th overall pick in 2009, has 18 goals and 39 points in 60 games with AHL Manchester this season. He’s 6-feet and 230 pounds and used to play defense. He’ll report to Rochester.

“If you look at his stats, he’s taken that position quite nicely as far as goals, shots on goal, the way he plays and he can still run the point on your power play,” Murray said.

McNabb, meanwhile, had one goal, eight points in 37 games over parts of two seasons with the Sabres. He played 12 games earlier this year. The Sabres selected him 66th overall in 2009.

“We had a lot of guys in the room that really liked Brayden McNabb,” Murray said. “I think he’s an NHL player.”

The Sabres also sent Los Angeles minor league forward Jonathan Parker to shed a contract.

– As expected, the Sabres flipped Jaroslav Halak, the goalie they acquired from the Blues, sending him and a third-round pick in 2015 to the Washington Capitals for goalie Michal Neuvirth and defenseman Rostislav Klesla.

Halak never played for Sabres.

Did Murray consider keeping the 28-year-old Slovak, an unrestricted free agent following the season?

“I would’ve considered keeping him if there were no trade offers that I liked,” he said. “That was my course with all the pending UFAs.”

The 25-year-old Neuvirth fell out of favor with the Capitals this season, becoming their No. 3 netminder at times.

“I like the goalie that I got back, plain and simple,” Murray said. “He’s a young goalie that I’ve seen for a long time, played in the OHL. For whatever reason, he’s a backup there. He’s just not as important as he wants to be.

“I think when he gets to feel some love again or whatever you want to call it and gets an opportunity, that he can get his game back. In saying ‘get his game back,’ his stats are pretty good now.”

Neuvirth is 4-6-2 with a 2.82 goals-against average and .914 save percentage in 13 games.

The 31-year-old Klesla, the fourth overall pick in 2000, will report to Rochester. Washington acquired him Tuesday. He had never played in the AHL before this season.

The Sabres played the Lightning tonight in Tampa Bay.

Sabres want Canisius product Cory Conacher to help establish new culture

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

March 6, 2014

BUFFALO – Cory Conacher woke up early Wednesday morning knowing he'd have a new team by noon. The ensuing hours weren't easy. The 24-year-old winger said he experienced a mix of excitement and sickness passing through waivers.

Finally, late in the morning, the Canisius College product found out the rebuilding Sabres had claimed him from the Ottawa Senators.

"I'm very excited," Conacher told the Times Herald by phone Wednesday afternoon. "It was a long 24 hours, but luckily it worked out in my best interest."

Conacher said the Sabres were "near the top of the list" of teams he wanted to join. He expects to meet them Friday in Florida because of immigration work.

"Buffalo's my second home," he said. "It's going to be a fun opportunity to play with them, hopefully be part of their process that they're going through right now as far as rebuilding. I know they're going to have a good team in the near future with (general manager) Tim Murray."

Murray, who just left Ottawa's front office, couldn't pass on Conacher.

"He was a free player," he said. "He didn't cost us anything. He cares. He's a good person. He's a competitive guy. He can skate. There's lots of things I like about him on the ice. He's what I like to call a good complimentary player. If we had better players here to surround him, he'd be a better complimentary player."

Murray believes Conacher can help him establish "a certain culture."

"That's you earn what you get, and his work ethic is terrific and he's character," he said. "So I want competition. I want one of our draft picks to say today that they're (ticked) off we went and got Cory Conacher. That's how you create competition."

The undrafted Conacher grew up in nearby Burlington, about an hour across the Ontario border. His brother, Shane, is a freshman at Canisius.

"It's very special for my family and friends to be able to come out a little more than they could've in Ottawa, and to have my little brother at Canisius is even more exciting," Conacher said.

Conacher just endured a wild 24 hours. Incredibly, the Senators played him in Tuesday's 3-2 loss in Edmonton after waiving him.

"That's one of the tougher games that I played just because of all the emotions going through my body the whole day because I was told I was out on waivers at (10 a.m.)," he said. "It was just a tough day for me."

He added: "At the same time, it was just nice to just have that last game with the guys."

Conacher said his agent, Tim Reynolds, "was working the phones pretty hard all day" Tuesday and told his client the Sabres were interested.

The Sabres' rebuild excites Conacher. He enjoyed watching Tyler Ennis during his Canisius career and hopes he can play beside the diminutive center.

"Going into an organization that's in a rebuilding stage is pretty special for me because I'm a young player and I want to be part of that for a long time, and I know that with the Buffalo Sabres it won't take long to rebuild," Conacher said.

Conacher, a restricted free agent following the season, had six goals and 25 points in 72 games after the Senators acquired him last season from Tampa Bay for Ben Bishop. He has four goals and 20 points in 60 games this season.

He burst into the NHL last season, scoring nine goals and 24 points in 35 games before the Lightning dealt him.

What happened this season?

"I'm not sure," Conacher said. "It's tough to say. There was times I felt like I was a big part of the team. There was other times ... you didn't feel like you were put in the right position to play well."

Still, Conacher said he loved Ottawa and it was tough to leave.

"At the same time, I think it's for the best," he said. "I don't think I was fitting to the way they wanted me to fit in."

Victor Fernandes: GM Murray, Sabres earn high marks with deals

By Victor Fernandes

Erie Times News

March 6, 2014

The Buffalo Sabres stole some of the spotlight from the NHL's Wednesday trade deadline with the deal that sent goaltender Ryan Miller and forward Steve Ott to St. Louis.

The magnitude of last weekend's deal catches your eye, even though moving Miller from a team in the middle of a drastic rebuild seemed inevitable nearly all season long.

It sparked immediate speculation surrounding the two players -- goaltender Jaroslav Halak and forward Chris Stewart -- the Sabres acquired in the trade to go with the talk that surrounded several other players, namely strong and skilled forward Matt Moulson. Meanwhile, new Sabres general manager Tim Murray also added two high-round selections -- a first-rounder and second-rounder in the 2015 NHL Entry Draft -- to the recent haul of picks that secured forward prospects J.T. Compher (Michigan, NCAA) and Justin Bailey (Kitchener, OHL) in the second round last summer and reportedly stands at 11 picks in the top two rounds over the next three years.

Murray went back to work Wednesday, especially as the 3 p.m. deadline arrived. He traded Halak and one of those extra picks -- a third-rounder in 2015 -- for goaltender Michal Neuvirth and defenseman Rostislav Klesla.

Murray also sent Moulson, a soon-to-be unrestricted free agent who probably wouldn't have re-signed with Buffalo, and fellow forward Cody McCormick to Minnesota for forward Torrey Mitchell and second-round picks in 2014 and 2016. Earlier in the day, Murray sent defenseman Brayden Schenn, forward Jonathan Parker and two picks to Los Angeles for forwards Hudson Fasching and Nicolas Deslaurier, then claimed forward Cory Conacher off waivers.

Through those moves and stockpiled picks, Murray is in position to handle this rebuilding effort the right way, especially in the 2015 NHL Draft. Erie Otters center Connor McDavid and Jack Eichel, a Massachusetts-born forward with the United States National Team Development Program, are projected to be the top two picks that summer.

McDavid could be the cornerstone of an NHL club in the future. Reports indicate Eichel is building that same reputation. The Sabres should be at or near the bottom of the league standings next season. So they should have their chance to claim one of those talented players, and more just like them, in upcoming drafts.

Deadline day produced other intriguing trades -- Martin St. Louis from Tampa Bay to the New York Rangers for forward Ryan Callahan and two high picks,

forward Thomas Vanek from the New York Islanders to Montreal, forward Marian Gaborik from Columbus to the Kings. Vancouver sent goaltender Roberto Luongo to Florida a day earlier.

But the Sabres deserve to be at the forefront with their moves. If Murray handles this rebuilding job well moving forward, the Sabres eventually will steal the spotlight on the ice.

JW: Access Granted

By Jeremy White

WGR 550

March 6, 2014

My trip inside the Buffalo Sabres deadline day war room serves as a good look into just how the entire operation works on one of the busiest days of the year.

I arrive at the Sabres offices in First Niagara Center around 11:30. Sabres President Ted Black escorts me into the major conference room, introduces me to the group, and sits me down next to GM Tim Murray at the head of the table.

TSN is on the television. Tim Horton's coffee is available. It's a lot like any sports radio station.

I'd estimate there are 10-14 men in and out of the room throughout my time in "Sabres Central". Sabres Director of Amateur Scouting Kevin Devine sat to my left, with Senior Advisor Craig Patrick next to him. I fade into the background as quickly as possible to listen in and observe just how the frenzied process plays out.

After a quick glance and a nod hello from Murray, they are right back to work.

Murray seems to be bouncing back and forth between two states of consciousness while I'm there:

1. On the phone
2. Talking with the table about who he was just on the phone with, or who he'd be calling next

Murray runs point in the operation with the conference table of men throwing in their opinions as names come out. I'm not at liberty to discuss specific names of players that were mentioned, but I can tell you how it happens.

As Murray is shopping a particular player, in this case one that did get traded, he paces in and out of the room with the phone at his ear getting an idea of a potential offer. As he finishes the conversation he tosses the phone on the table, and throws the conversation at his sounding board. A prospect's name comes up and instantly there are men throwing out their reports of that player, personal information, injury history, projections, his ceiling...and then another name as an alternative. The conversation shifts and turns to "Well what about that player? Can we get him instead? What'll it take?"

I have a chance to get a small taste of Tim Murray's style in the room. He's running the show in that room. Murray's been described as a no-nonsense, shrewd talent evaluator. You're likely hearing that he isn't one to sugar-coat.

That's are accurate.

Murray is straight and to the point. As the team finishes up the waiver claim on Cory Conacher his abilities are compared to another player that could be available. "Do we think he's better than Conacher?"...and on and on it goes.

As the Sabres rifle through the potential scenarios, they're talking about several players. One gentleman at the table brings up another name in ORGANIZATION X and there's a brief silence as the room considers it. The silence is broken by the ringing of Tim Murray's cell phone.

The process repeats.

It's 12:15, and my time in the war room is up.

On the way out I meet Sabres Director of Hockey Related Businesses Joe Battista, who shows me the Sabres "Hockey Tech" department. There are three giant flat screens laying out the depth charts of every NHL Team. The top screen lists every NHL player on every NHL team, and their RinkNet score. The Sabres have individual evaluations of every player in the league on this board at all times. Directly below that screen is the AHL depth chart. Each team falls in line vertically with its parent club on the screen above. The third screen has prospects that are playing in juniors. It's a stunningly crisp look at every asset eligible to play in the NHL.

From there we head over to the video department (which I think they call PUCKS?). Ryan Vinz, the former Sabres backup goaltender, is one of the guys in that department. The guys show me just how quickly they can pull up video on any player in the world.

Want to see Cory Conacher's even strength shots from outside of fifteen in the third period? On Thursdays? Click. Here they all are...in one window. Looking around this department, and the Hockey Tech department you get a feel for the cutting edge technology that's out there in the sports world. You find yourself saying, "Of COURSE they have this kind of stuff."

The plan from this point in the Hockey Tech department is to integrate these systems into a fast, efficient tool to give Murray every advantage possible.

I say my goodbyes, and leave First Niagara Center to come back for the

I'd like to thank the Buffalo Sabres for their hospitality on deadline day. I didn't hear anything too crazy in the room. If you're looking for me to say, "SOURCES TELL ME THEY ALL HATE _____", then I must apologize. I can't.

There were rumblings...smatterings...and one lingering name I heard that I'll wonder about for a few months. What was it?

Can't tell you. I'm not even sure I heard it. But I think I did....

BREAKING: Moulson to MIN, Halak to WSH

WGR 550

March 5, 2014

Moulson, McCormick to Minnesota

The floodgates poured open in the final hours leading up to Wednesday's NHL Trade deadline, and the Buffalo Sabres dealt Matt Moulson and Cody McCormick to the Minnesota Wild for center Torrey Mitchell and two draft picks.

The 28-year old Mitchell was a 4th round pick of the San Jose Sharks in the 2004 NHL Draft. This season he's netted one goal and notched eight assists. He has 90 points thus far in his six-year NHL career.

The two picks Buffalo receives are reported to both be 2nd round draft picks, one in 2014, and one in 2016.

Halak Dealt again

Jaroslav Halak heads to Washington after just five days with Buffalo. Coming back to the Queen city from the Capitals - goaltender Michal Neuvirth, defenseman Rostislav Klesla, and a 6th round pick from the Capitals. The Sabres also give up a 3rd round pick in 2015.

Klesla has been traded now two days in a row, he was part of the deal that send Martin Erat to Phoenix last night. The 31-year old has 4 points in 25 games this year, and he's spent parts of 14 seasons in the NHL.

Fellow Czech Michal Neuvirth is the other piece coming back to Buffalo. He sports a 4-6-2 for the Capitals this year. His best season came in 2010-2011 as he went 27-12-4 with a .914 save percentage.

McNabb traded to LA Kings

WGR 550

March 5, 2014

The Sabres first trade of the day involves a big defenseman, but not Tyler Myers. Brayden McNabb, as well as two 2nd round draft picks, have been dealt to the Los Angeles Kings in exchange for prospects Hudson Fasching and Nicholas Deslaurier. Fasching, a 2013 4th round pick, is a 6'2 213 pound forward who is a freshman at the University of Minnesota. In 31 games played this year he has 12 goals 15 assists 27 points. Fasching also played for Team USA at this years World Junior Tournament. Deslaurier was a third round pick in 2009 and has spent the past three seasons in the AHL with the Manchester Monarchs.

Sabres Claim Cory Conacher off Waivers

WGR 550

March 5, 2014

It was hinted this morning but confirmed at noon, the Sabres have officially claimed Cory Conacher off of waivers. Conacher is an alumnus of Canisius and is the school's all-time leader in points (147), goals (62) and game-winning goals (12) in 129 games. He went undrafted but signed on with the Tampa Bay Lightning in 2011 and placed 2nd in the NHL in rookie scoring before being dealt to the Senators as part of the Ben Bishop deal.

SABRES STAY BUSY ON DEADLINE DAY

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

March 5, 2014

TAMPA – Tim Murray stayed busy during his first trade deadline as a general manager.

The Buffalo Sabres started their day by claiming forward Cory Conacher off waivers and then picking up forwards Nicolas Deslauriers and Hudson Fasching from the Los Angeles Kings for Rochester Americans players Brayden McNabb, Jonathan Parker and two second-round picks.

The organization's biggest deals of the day, however, weren't announced until after the 3 p.m. deadline passed. As Murray and the Sabres work to rebuild the roster, they acquired Torrey Mitchell and two second-round picks (one in 2014 and the other in 2016) from the Minnesota Wild for forwards Matt Moulson and Cody McCormick.

The Sabres also dealt goaltender Jaroslav Halak, whom they acquired on Friday as part of a package for Steve Ott and Ryan Miller, and a third-round pick in 2015 to Washington for goaltender Michal Neuvirth and defenseman Rostislav Klesla.

Depending on conditions that have to be met, the Sabres could have as many as five first-round picks in the next two drafts. They also currently hold seven second-round picks over the course of the next three drafts.

Murray told the media in Buffalo that he didn't have any real expectations going into the day when it came to what deals could be made, but liked how everything turned out.

"I think it's a good day," Murray said. "I think the combination of the picks that we've added and the young players we've added, I think it gives us a ton of ammunition now going to the draft where there will be players available that aren't available on Trade Deadline Day."

Murray said it's important that players in the organization are battling each other for playing time. That goes for all positions from the forwards to the goaltenders.

In claiming, Conacher, who went undrafted out of Canisius College and played in Tampa Bay before being traded to the Senators, Murray feels he's added a player that will not only help his NHL roster, but make other players in the organization want to work that much harder.

"I want competition. I want one of our draft picks to say today that they're pissed off that we went and got Cory Conacher," Murray said. "And that's how you create competition."

At the goaltending position, Jhonas Enroth has started three of the team's four games since the Olympic break and will start again Thursday against the Lightning. He'll be playing to keep his No. 1 job now that Neuvirth is on the team.

Neuvirth, a second-round pick by the Capitals in 2006 (34th overall) has posted a 4-6-2 record, a .914 save percentage and a 2.82 goals against average in 13 games this season.

"For whatever reason, he's a backup there. He's just not as important as he wants to be," Murray said of Neuvirth. "I think when he gets to feel some love again or whatever you want to call it and has an opportunity, that he can get his game back."

The draft picks the team gave up for Deslauriers and Fasching were originally acquired by Buffalo in a trade with Los Angeles for Robyn Regehr and are for the 2014 and 2015 NHL Drafts.

Deslauriers, 23, switched from defense to forward this season and has led the Manchester Monarchs of the American Hockey League in goals and shots this season, totaling 39 points (18+21) through 60 games.

Before being selected in the third round (84th overall) of the 2009 NHL Draft, Deslauriers posted prolific numbers as a defenseman with Rouyn-Noranda and Gatineau of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League, recording 127 points (35+92) in 223 games.

Fasching, 18, is a 6-foot-2, 213-pound freshman with the Minnesota Golden Gophers. He was originally drafted by Los Angeles in the fourth round (118th overall) of the 2013 NHL Entry Draft and ranks third on the team and seventh in the conference with 27 points (12+15) through 31 games.

He also spent two seasons with the U.S. National Development Team, posting 32 points (11+21) in 62 games.

The second-round pick in 2014 that Minnesota gave to Buffalo for Moulson and McCormick originally belonged to the Winnipeg Jets.

Murray said that Klesla and Deslauriers will play in Rochester as the Americans prepare for the stretch run.

Moulson was traded for in October as part of the deal that sent Thomas Vanek to the New York Islanders. As a pending unrestricted free agent, Moulson knew that there was always a chance that he could finish the season on another team. Within the past week or so, that came more and more apparent and it just became a matter of where he might end up and when.

“You knew it was coming and Tim was pretty up front and honest about what was going on,” Moulson told reporters in Tampa. “It didn’t come as a shock, but it is definitely relieving, from sitting around for the last week as you see other guys get traded and wondering if you’re going to be or when you’re going to be.”

That sense of relief was shared by Halak, who also knew Buffalo might not be his final destination this season.

“The last four days have been crazy getting traded and all the rumors being out there that I’m going to get traded again,” he said. “I’m glad it’s over and I’m really happy I have a chance to make the playoffs and if I can help the team down the stretch, make it.”

Moulson and McCormick were at lunch with the rest of the Sabres when they heard the news that they’d been traded.

“I was a little taken back by it I guess. You can’t really prepare for it,” McCormick said. “I was right beside Matt Moulson, actually. We found out together. I got a call from Jason Pominville. He was excited and right there, it made me excited to join the Minnesota Wild. ”

While McCormick knows he’ll be going to a good team in Minnesota, he said he’ll miss his teammates in Buffalo. McCormick spent parts of five seasons in the Sabres organization.

“I learned a lot here. I’m looking at that dressing room and how tight the guys are,” he said. “I’m leaving that and it’s not fun. I’ve got a lot of friends in that room. I see a lot of upside with a lot of those players and the togetherness of that room is something that’s hard to describe as a hockey player. Leaving that behind, that’s not fun with the trades.”

For Murray, the day was all business. But when it was all over and he was able to look back on it, a faint smile came across his face.

“You know me, it’s what I have to do, right? I wish I could enjoy things more than I do, you know?” he said. “...It’s exhilarating. It was fast and furious. I’d be lying if I didn’t say I enjoyed 90 percent of it. ”