



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*April 10, 2014*

## **Sabres-Rangers Preview**

By Jordan Garretson

Associated Press

April 9, 2014

The New York Rangers have already clinched their eighth playoff berth in nine seasons, though they're still trying to nail down home ice for the first round.

A visit from the lowly Buffalo Sabres on Thursday night should help bring them closer to accomplishing that goal.

New York (44-31-5) is two points ahead of Philadelphia as it tries to hold off the Flyers for second place in the Metropolitan Division, though Philadelphia has a game in hand.

The Rangers took a 4-1 home victory over Carolina on Tuesday with Brad Richards scoring two power-play goals on the team's three chances. New York had totaled three goals on 38 chances with the man advantage over its previous 12 games.

Martin St. Louis assisted on both of those scores as well as Derek Stepan's third-period goal. He had totaled just four points over his first 17 games with the Rangers since being acquired from Tampa Bay.

New York has won eight of its last 11 contests.

"We talked before the game that we have been playing good hockey for a long time, and we want to go into the playoffs feeling good about our game," coach Alain Vigneault said.

The Rangers have won three straight over Buffalo, including two matchups this season, and can sweep their first season series since 2007-08.

Henrik Lundqvist, who is 10-4-1 with a 1.86 goals-against average and two shutouts over his last 15 starts, is scheduled to get the start. He has stopped 56 of 57 shots in the two games versus Buffalo this season.

The Sabres (21-49-9) have already guaranteed themselves a last-place finish and have dropped four in a row, marking their eighth losing streak of at least that many games this season. Their 51 points match their total from 1971-72 for their fewest in a season with at least 78 games, while their .323 winning percentage is the worst in team history.

Zemgus Girgensons scored 1:31 into the second period Tuesday to give Buffalo a 1-0 lead over Detroit before the Sabres surrendered the next three. Girgensons scored again late in the third before Pavel Datsyuk's empty-netter with five seconds left capped a 4-2 loss for the Sabres.

Cody Hodgson assisted on both goals and has three goals and four assists over his last six contests.

Buffalo is 2-13-0 away from home since Feb. 1 while being outscored 50-23.

Vigneault said Rangers defenseman Ryan McDonagh is expected to miss his fourth straight contest due to a shoulder injury, though he might play in Saturday's season finale at Montreal.

New York has limited opponents to just three power-play goals on 48 opportunities spanning its last 20 contests.

Rick Nash has five goals and two assists over his last five games versus Buffalo, while Richards has four goals in his last three meetings.

## **Hackett's rise to NHL starter caps 'weird year'**

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

April 9, 2014

It's Matt Hackett or Bust in goal the rest of the way for the Buffalo Sabres.

From top prospect to struggling backup in Rochester to the No. 1 man in the NHL, it's been one weird season for the 24-year-old Hackett.

But with Jhonas Enroth, Michal Neuvirth and now Nathan Lieuwen all injured, coach Ted Nolan said Wednesday Hackett is going to get the call in the Sabres' final three games of the season.

And Hackett was pumped to know he gets the start tonight in fabled Madison Square Garden against the New York Rangers.

"That's gonna be pretty cool," Hackett said after Wednesday's practice at First Niagara Center, the team's final one of the season at home. "I don't know if Henrik Lundqvist is starting so I'd get a chance to play against him, but just to play in that building where there's great history and great players have been will be a lot of fun."

As it turns out, Hackett will get his wish. The Rangers announced after practice Wednesday that Lundqvist will indeed get the start tonight. It will be his fifth straight start and 19th in the last 21 games.

Lundqvist has surrendered just seven goals in his last four games, going 2-1-1 with a 1.71 GAA and .948 save percentage.

Hackett, meanwhile, is 1-4-1 in his first six games with Buffalo, posting a 3.20 goals-against average and .909 save percentage, numbers bloated by the four-goal first period he endured March 27 at Nashville.

He stopped 68 of 71 starts in his first two starts before that and has had some up-and-down moments since. But his 33-save outing in Tuesday's 4-2 loss at Detroit was a good one, allowing his team a chance to stay close until the Wings clinched the game on an empty-net goal in the final four seconds.

"It's good to play against the top teams and to see I can play against these guys," Hackett said. "It's a big confidence boost for me to show I can compete."

Hackett's confidence was shaky when he arrived after a tough season in Rochester, where he was just 13-17-2, 3.07 and .898. Not the kind of numbers the Sabres expected when he was a key piece in last year's Jason Pominville trade with Minnesota.

“I was lucky to get a chance here with the injuries,” he said. “You don’t want that to happen but I really wanted to show I could work here. I’ve honestly never had a year with so many bad bounces. I know it sounds like an excuse but I’ve had a lot of pucks go off our team, a lot of broken plays. Bouncing pucks. It’s been a weird year.”

“I think sometimes a different set of eyes, different environment, different people and you can get different results,” said Nolan. “Some guys play better at certain levels. Maybe he feels real comfortable here.”

With so many players in Buffalo who have played in Rochester this year, there has been a comfort zone with both Hackett and Lieuwen in goal you wouldn’t normally get from a veteran team. And it should help Hackett in the likely event he returns to play the final week of the regular season and potential playoff games in Rochester.

“I’m really happy ‘Hack’ and ‘Looie’ both got a chance to show their skills here,” said rookie defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen. “You can see Hack’s confidence getting better. He takes every puck pretty easy into him.”

“This is great for Hackett,” noted veteran winger Drew Stafford. “I’m real happy he’s taking advantage of the opportunity. He deserves a chance. You look at the goaltending in this organization now and everyone has pretty much been tested.”

Hackett will be backed up by Andrey Makarov tonight but Makarov will then return to Rochester and the Sabres will need to make another move for the final two games, Saturday at Boston and Sunday here against the New York Islanders.

Nolan said he didn’t know if the team would simply call up Rochester backup Connor Knapp to Buffalo or perhaps go outside the organization for yet another goalie.

The Amerks seemed to prepare for that eventuality by signing goalie Kevin Kapalka to an amateur tryout contract Wednesday. He’s been playing for Idaho in the East Coast Hockey League.

## **Sabres send players to Amerks to boost playoff shot**

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

April 9, 2014

The Buffalo Sabres have been playing games that mean nothing to them in the standings for months. But the Rochester Amerks are playing games that mean everything every night.

General Manager Tim Murray and coach Ted Nolan have said on several occasions they want the Amerks to sneak into the AHL playoffs to give Buffalo prospects some postseason experience.

With the Sabres' roster getting healthier, the Amerks are bulking up for their final six games.

The Amerks entered Wednesday with a one-point lead and a game in hand on Rockford for the final spot in the AHL's Western Conference.

They have a one-point lead and two games in hand on Charlotte. They host Toronto Friday, play Saturday at Hamilton and Sunday at Lake Erie.

Rochester then has three games next week, Wednesday at Utica, the April 18 home finale against Syracuse and the April 19 season finale at Toronto.

Forwards Johan Larsson and Nicolas Deslauriers were returned to Rochester on Wednesday. Nolan said a defenseman should be heading to Rochester for the weekend as well, and that would likely be Mark Pysyk.

Goalie Andrey Makarov will back up Matt Hackett tonight in New York, then return to the Amerks. Rochester coach Chadd Cassidy said "absolutely" when asked by Rochester reporters Wednesday if Makarov could play all three games this weekend.

Defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen told The News after practice Wednesday that he's just going day by day, is planning on playing tonight in New York and will then take his next assignment from there.

"Hopefully they make it to the playoffs and I get a chance to play a little playoff hockey," Ristolainen said. "I'm going day by day right now. You never know what happens."

Ristolainen has gotten more than 20 minutes of ice time in six straight games and nine of his last 11. He played a career-high 24:50 Sunday in Philadelphia.

“I’m really enjoying my game now. The start of the season was tough, but I feel I’m getting better all the time. Hopefully I continue that next year and be a better player than now.

...

Winger Drew Stafford will play for the Sabres tonight after missing the last four games with an undisclosed injury. Defenseman Henrik Tallinder (lower body) is a game-time decision after missing four straight and could also play. Nolan has ruled Tyler Myers out for the final three games.

Stafford skated in practice on the top line with Tyler Ennis and Chris Stewart.

“We’re playing for pride. It’s a real test of character here, putting in the effort and playing to the end,” Stafford said. “It’s been frustrating for me. Hopefully now I’m back and will finish strong.”

“Drew had a real good practice today,” Nolan said. “He skated about 10 minutes, looked at me and said he’s ready to go. That’s a real big addition to our team for sure.”

...

Cory Conacher skated as an extra on the Ennis line in practice Wednesday and could be a scratch tonight along with John Scott.

The other lines in practice Wednesday had Zemgus Girgensons centering Cody Hodgson and Torrey Mitchell, Brian Flynn between Foligno and Matt D’Agostini and Matt Ellis between Ville Leino and Zenon Konopka.

Konopka has not played since his back tightened up on the cross-country flight from Vancouver to Montreal on March 24.

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Tonight’s game is the Rangers’ home finale and they enter it with a two-point lead over Philadelphia in the battle for home-ice advantage in the first round of the playoffs. They are 8-2-1 in their last 11 games.

The Rangers have won both meetings with the Sabres this year and have taken seven of the last nine. They have been red-hot on the penalty kill of late, going 43 of 46 in the last 18 games – and scoring seven short-handed goals.

## **Central Scouting confirms Bennett is top prospect**

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

April 9, 2014

Sam Bennett remains No. 1 in the eyes of NHL Central Scouting.

The league's prospect gurus released their final player rankings Tuesday, and Bennett topped their list again. The 6-foot, 178-pound center also was No. 1 for Central Scouting's Midterm Rankings.

Bennett recorded 36 goals and 91 points in 57 games with Kingston of the Ontario Hockey League, and he has five goals and nine points in seven playoff games.

"There are guys who elevate their game when it matters most, and you're looking to project which players will do that consistently at the next level," NHL Director of Central Scouting Dan Marr said. "The guys we have at the top all are in that mold, but when we look at Sam Bennett we see a guy who could potentially have a Jonathan Toews type of career."

The Buffalo Sabres, who will finish last, have the best chance of winning the draft lottery next week, giving them the best shot at selecting first overall in June.

Defenseman Aaron Ekblad moved up one spot to second overall in the rankings. The 6-3, 216-pounder had 23 goals and 53 points in 58 games with Barrie of the OHL. The Sabres are deep with defense prospects and need offense.

"I would describe Ekblad as one of the most solid NHL prospects you will find in this year's draft class," Marr said. "He is the best defenseman available and would be projected to vie for an NHL job a lot sooner than most."

Center Sam Reinhart moved from fourth in the midterm rankings to third in the final evaluations. The 6-foot, 185-pounder had 36 goals and 105 points in 60 games with Kootenay of the Western Hockey League. He's added five goals and 17 points in eight playoff appearances.

German-born center Leon Draisaitl, who recorded 38 goals and 105 points in 64 games with Prince Albert of the WHL, fell from second to fourth.

"I would compare Reinhart to Adam Oates," Central Scouting's B.J. MacDonald said. "He's a very cerebral player who takes what's given to him. He probably has the highest hockey IQ of any player in this draft, and he knows where to go with the puck even before he even gets it."

## **Rangers aim for season sweep of Sabres**

By Tal Pinchevsky

NHL.com

April 9, 2014

SABRES (21-49-9) at RANGERS (44-31-5)

TV: MSG-B, BELL TV, MSG

Last 10: Buffalo 2-7-1; New York 7-2-1

Season series: The New York Rangers look to sweep the Buffalo Sabres in their third and final game. New York took the previous two matchups, 3-1 in Buffalo on Dec. 5 and 2-0 at Madison Square Garden on Oct. 31. Goaltender Henrik Lundqvist stopped 56 of 57 shots in those two games for a .982 save percentage.

Big story: Looking to secure home ice in the Eastern Conference First Round of the Stanley Cup Playoffs, the Rangers face a last-place Buffalo team that will finish the season with the NHL's worst record. The Rangers sit in second place in the Metropolitan Division two points ahead of the Philadelphia Flyers, who have a game in hand.

Team Scope:

Sabres: With two regulation wins since the beginning of March and losses in eight of its past nine games, Buffalo is struggling through the final days of a difficult rebuilding season. Injuries to goaltenders Jhonas Enroth and Michal Neuvirth have forced the Sabres to answer with Nathan Lieuwen and Matt Hackett in net.

The Sabres received some good news this week when two of their veteran forwards returned from injury. Chris Stewart was back in the lineup against the Detroit Red Wings on Tuesday after missing 16 games with a leg injury. Drew Stafford, Buffalo's best offensive player the past several weeks, will return after missing four games because of an undisclosed injury. He skated on Wednesday alongside Stewart and top center Tyler Ennis.

Defenseman Henrik Tallinder also skated on Wednesday and will be a game-time decision after missing four games with a lower-body injury.

"It felt pretty good," Tallinder said. "I can still feel it a little bit, but it's not pain."

Rangers: New York appears to be getting hot at the perfect time. The Rangers have gone 8-2-1 since losing 1-0 to the San Jose Sharks on March 16, scoring 39 goals in that span for a per-game average of 3.55. They scored four unanswered goals in a 4-1 win against the Carolina Hurricanes on Tuesday, one day after officially clinching a spot in the playoffs. After collecting four points in 17 games since being acquired from the Tampa Bay Lightning on March 5, Martin St. Louis

enjoyed a breakout game as a Ranger with three assists, including a pair of great passes on goals by Brad Richards and Derek Stepan.

Defenseman Ryan McDonagh practiced Wednesday with a non-contact yellow jersey, marking the second straight day he has skated since injuring his shoulder on April 1. He remains day to day and won't play against the Sabres.

After practice, coach Alain Vigneault revealed that Lundqvist would start and McDonagh had a 50/50 chance of playing in the Rangers' regular-season finale Saturday against the Montreal Canadiens.

Who's hot: Sabres center Cody Hodgson has three goals and seven points in his past six games. ... Rangers forward Mats Zuccarello has four goals and eight points during his five-game point streak. Linemate Benoit Pouliot has six points in his current six-game point streak.

Injury report: Sabres goaltenders Enroth (lower body), Neuvirth (lower body) and Lieuwen (concussion) are all out. Defensemen Tyler Myers (upper body), Alexander Sulzer (upper body) and Chad Ruhwedel (concussion) also will not play, nor will forward Zenon Konpoka (back spasms). ... Rangers forward Chris Kreider (hand) and McDonagh (shoulder) are out.

## **Tough guy John Scott happy with larger role, wants to return to Sabres**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

April 10, 2014

BUFFALO – John Scott understands you can't always change your reputation in a few months. The Sabres tough guy believes anti-fighting fans might always consider him a goon.

"I guess the people who have that in their mind they don't really look at me as a hockey player ever," Scott said Wednesday inside the First Niagara Center. "So it doesn't really matter what I do. But I like to think I changed peoples' minds out there. You hope so."

Scott hopes fighting a career-low four times in a career-high 54 appearances has helped change some perceptions. For the first time in his six-year career, the 31-year-old has played regularly, mostly as a fourth-line winger. He even scored his second NHL goal and subbed at defense, his natural position.

"It's been really fun," Scott said after the Sabres prepared for tonight's road game against the New York Rangers. "I think I've played fairly well, pretty consistent, not really any glaring mistakes, kind of bringing something different every game. So it's been good."

Of course, a couple of high-profile incidents this season – he ignited a preseason brawl in Toronto getting retribution for a teammate and earned a seven-game suspension for elbowing Boston's Loui Eriksson in the head Oct. 23 – have hurt Scott's reputation.

But the 6-foot-8 Scott has only scrapped 33 times in his 234-game career. Sabres center Zenon Konopka once fought 33 times in a season.

"I don't fight that much," said Scott, a healthy scratch Tuesday following 25 straight appearances. "I don't really have that many opportunities. So to call me a goon who fights every game is not true. So I just think I'm big and when I do fight it's kind of like people notice. It gets a lot of publicity."

Fighting is down across the league. According to hockeyfights.com, there have been .39 fights a game in the NHL this season. That's down from .48 last season and the lowest total since the league averaged .38 a game in 2005-06.

What has happened?

Scott isn't exactly sure. But he thinks fewer fights have given tough guys a greater role.

“I think the guys who are tough guys realize we got to start playing a little more,” he said. “You can see they’re getting more ice time or starting to get a little more points, getting a little regular shift. It’s nice.”

Once they get that, Scott said, enforcers “feel like you don’t need to go out there and have a staged fight every game and just be pigeonholed in that category.”

“People are starting to realize they can play a little more,” he said. “I think that’s why it’s down a little bit.”

Scott said there will always be a role for someone to protect his teammates, although he believes “the days of the heavyweights are numbered.”

“That’s why guys are adapting and that’s why you see I’ve only fought (four) times this year but I’ve played in (almost) every game,” he said. “It’s one of those things where guys adapt and either sink or swim. That’s how it goes.”

Scott, an unrestricted free agent following the season, wants to play a third season with the Sabres.

“I love it here,” he said. “I don’t see myself playing anywhere else, hopefully.”

He added: “I’m not really a squeaky wheel. I just kind of go out there and bury my head and get the work done and wherever the coach puts me just do my best at it. Hopefully, they like what they see and they can extend my career here after this year. That’s the game and that’s the goal.”

The Sabres’ old regime signed Scott. Still, he has become a popular presence in the dressing room. For a rebuilding team, the veteran could be good for a group of youngsters.

“This is a situation where a lot of players on this team are given opportunities maybe they wouldn’t be given anywhere else,” Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. “So how you take advantage of it and what you do with it is totally up to the player. I played John a little bit more. ...

“This is the start of building a team for the future and (we’ll) see who fits in, who doesn’t fit in, put people in positions, see how they react and see how they seize opportunities.”

## **Healthy bodies mean Sabres can send youngsters back to Amerks for playoff race**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

April 10, 2014

BUFFALO – Slowly, the injury-plagued Sabres are starting to get some healthy bodies back.

Three injured players returned in Tuesday's 4-2 loss to Detroit. Now, they might have two more back for tonight's road tilt against the New York Rangers.

Winger Drew Stafford (undisclosed) pronounced himself ready during Wednesday's practice, Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. Meanwhile, defenseman Henrik Tallinder (undisclosed) said he's a game-time decision tonight.

"Hank, he gave me the old 95-percent sure look," Nolan said inside the First Niagara Center.

Center Zenon Konopka, a healthy scratch Tuesday after recovering from a lower-body injury, practiced on the fourth line Wednesday. Winger Cory Conacher appeared to be a spare.

With injured players back, the Sabres sent rookie forwards Nick Deslauriers and Johan Larsson back to Rochester on Wednesday.

Deslauriers, acquired from Los Angeles on March 5, scored one goal and was a minus-9 in his first 16 NHL games. The 23-year-old moved to the wing earlier this season.

"I thought Nick handled himself very well for a young kid," Nolan said. "We put him right into the fire. We give him 12, 15, 14 minutes a game coming right from the American League. Coming from a defensive player to a forward in this season, he's going to be proud of himself."

Nolan said the Sabres will likely assign rookie defensemen Mark Pysyk and Rasmus Ristolainen to the Americans soon.

"One will go back probably quicker," he said.

In other lineup news, Nolan said goalie Matt Hackett will start the final three games. Backup Andrey Makarov will return to the Amerks, who are battling for a playoff spot, Friday. Nolan isn't sure where the Sabres will find a new goalie.

Hackett struggled in Rochester, posting some poor numbers – 13-17-2, 3.07 goals-against average and a .898 save percentage – in 33 games. The 24-year-old has played much better during his six NHL appearances.

“Sometimes a different set of eyes, a different environment, different people get different results,” Nolan said. “Everybody says the definition of insanity is keep doing the same thing and expect different results. So by him coming here he had a different coaching staff to look at him, a different environment and some guys play better at certain levels better.”

In other news, Nolan said defenseman Tyler Myers, who crashed into the net March 25, won't play again this season.

“If I'm a betting man, he's not going to see any more game action until next season,” he said.

## **Sabres Stafford ready to play**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

April 9, 2014

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Sabres are getting healthier which is good news for the Amerks as they try to secure a playoff spot.

Ted Nolan said Drew Stafford is ready to play Thursday in New York. Nolan said, "Drew had a real good practice, skated for about 10 minutes, looked at me and said he's ready to go."

Henrik Tallinder said he felt good in practice and is a game-time decision. Nolan said, "Hank gave me the old 95 percent sure, so he'll come and probably be a game-time decision tomorrow."

With all the forwards healthy, Nic Deslauriers and Johan Larsson went back to Rochester.

Nolan said goalie Andrey Makarov will go back to Rochester after the Rangers game and will stay there as the Amerks have three games in three nights. Nolan did not know who would back up Matt Hackett on Saturday and Sunday. It could be Connor Knapp. He also said a defenseman, likely Mark Pysyk will go back down soon.

Nolan said since Tyler Myers isn't practicing yet it's doubtful he'll be back. The same goes for Jhonas Enroth, Michal Neuvirth and Alex Sulzer.

Sabres had a short practice at the arena and then an early plane to New York City.

## **Sabres' keyword: Optimism**

By Mike Schopp

WGR 550

April 9, 2014

I've been getting some interesting e-mails lately. Not many people send me e-mail anymore -- well, other than those who send me e-mail almost every day, like my wife, Nigerian princes and someone named Jason Korczak. But in the last few days, as the Sabres' season ends and perhaps a first overall pick awaits, certain fans are checking in and they are ... want to guess? ... anxious.

Let me say here that I really don't relate to this emotion at this time. To me the worst is over. The Sabres flipped their best players for youth, which was exactly the right move, if overdue, and watching them plummet in the standings along the way has been painful and sometimes even embarrassing. (It may not be better until the summer; how would it feel to watch Ryan Miller hold high the Stanley Cup?)

Sports is to be enjoyed. We in Buffalo know we don't need championships to enjoy sports. If we did we'd all have moved on to needlepoint by now. So what does it take to enjoy sports? For me, there at least has to be hope. For the Sabres it's been lacking.

But now that's about to change. This part is going to be fun -- almost as much fun as following a sports team can be.

There is hope.

Some people don't see it that way, it seems. This morning I read this e-mail from a fan that listed for me every Sabres draft pick since 2007, and players drafted afterward by other teams that turned out. Wait, sorry, no, it's not every pick. Good picks were omitted. And come to think of it, hasn't almost every player drafted in sports history had someone better picked after him? I suppose this fan considers the first 198 picks of the 2000 NFL Draft bad picks, as Tom Brady went 199th.

If you must be negative, be negative. But your timing is off.

I made a point on Twitter yesterday about the millions of dollars spent on scouting that may be entirely unnecessary. The NHL has something called Central Scouting, the bureau that publishes these prospect rankings we're always talking about. That's 30 or so scouts pooling their efforts to rank young players.

If my sports team spends millions to come up with approximately the same results as Central Scouting every year, well, this maybe is an area where corners

should be cut instead of charging that extra 25 cents for pop. (asterisk, footnote, "Thank you Fans!")

But one listener would hear none of that. He reasoned that because the Sabres cut back on scouting in recent years that this explains their descent in the standings.

I guess then if the Sabres pick high the next two years, even possibly twice up top in this year's draft with the Islanders' selection, and succeed, it's because the Sabres didn't settle for scouting them on video.

That, apparently, is how this fan is going to explain it if the Sabres become a good team: This time around they bothered to scout their picks.

Tell ya what. Give me the Central Scouting rankings come draft time and I'll pick along with the Sabres. I've never been to Kingston or Barrie or for that matter Saskatchewan or Manitoba. Or maybe I'll have my 2-year-old daughter do this. I'll cross off guys as they get taken and have her point at the highest name remaining on the list. We'll give the exercise a catchy name, like "2-year-old girl vs. the Buffalo Sabres in drafting". I have two months to figure out how to tear her away for a day from the Octonauts.

I've decided to back the idea of the Sabres picking center Sam Bennett out of Kingston -- if they get the first pick. If they pick second and Bennett goes first, I would like to see the Sabres take defenseman Aaron Ekblad out of Barrie. Yes, you're right, Central Scouting rates Bennett as the top prospect in the draft and Ekblad as #2. Should I put my YEARS OF WATCHING HOCKEY over theirs? You can, I won't.

The NHL regular season is ending, and around here this year that means hockey season is just getting good. This season has been miserable -- especially since the trade deadline as there's no more fun to have pondering moves -- and thankfully these wretched games will end.

Next year the Sabres will dress (probably) their top prospect in decades, maybe even their two best. I can't wait. Tickets have been a chore to have, or try to sell, for much of the last three seasons. I think next year they won't be. Mix in two or three interesting projects (Evander Kane?) and we'll see the building take shape. To me it seems the Sabres' building is well-aligned with the one happening across Perry Street.

I don't see much reason to be miserable about them right now.

There is another way.

## **STAFFORD SET TO PLAY AGAINST RANGERS**

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

April 9, 2014

At forward, the Buffalo Sabres are close to full strength.

Drew Stafford is set to return to the lineup when the Sabres take on the New York Rangers on Thursday at Madison Square Garden at 7 p.m. He's missed the past four games due to injury, but practiced with the team at First Niagara Center on Wednesday and said he feels like he's ready to go.

He skated on a line with Tyler Ennis and Chris Stewart with Cory Conacher rotating in and out of line rushes.

Stafford has battled injuries in the second half of the season, but when he's been on the ice, he's been productive.

Stafford has averaged 20:04 of ice time and posted 20 points (11+9) in 26 games since the season's halfway mark. In the 41 games prior to the midway point, Stafford had 13 points (4+9) in and averaged 17:36 per game.

He's hoping to finish the last three games of the season off strong.

"It's been like that for a while. With us being out of the playoffs, we're playing for pride, playing to just get a little bit of respect and hopefully finish the year strong," he said. "Have a healthy, productive summer and just get ready for next year. It all starts with just trying to have a good finish."

Chris Stewart, Torrey Mitchell and Marcus Foligno each returned from injury Tuesday night against Detroit. Zenon Konopka is also healthy.

Since they're back, the team sent Nicolas Deslauriers and Johan Larsson back to the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League.

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On defense, the Sabres are without Tyler Myers, Alexander Sulzer and Chad Ruhwedel. Henrik Tallinder has also missed the past four games, but hopes to play on Thursday as well. He and Sabres coach Ted Nolan have deemed him a gametime decision.

"You can still feel it a little bit, but it's not pain so that's good," Tallinder said. "... If it's going to be worse tomorrow then I'm not going to play, but we'll see how it feels tomorrow."

Once Tallinder is ready, the team will send Mark Pysyk back to the Amerks. Nolan said they haven't decided if Rasmus Ristolainen will play out the season in Buffalo because it depends on the number of healthy bodies they have available.

Nolan also said that with only three games remaining and with Myers not practicing with the team, that it's likely the defenseman's season is over. Myers got hurt on March 25 when he crashed into the goal post after getting tripped up on an offensive rush.

The team would rather see him condition in the offseason than rehab.

"We're going on the road for two games and we come back for one and he hasn't stepped on the ice for a week so, I'm a betting man, he's not going to see any more game action until next season," Nolan said.

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In goal, Nolan plans to start Matt Hackett the rest of the way out.

Andrey Makarov has been recalled to back him up, but he'll return to the Amerks to play Friday night. The Amerks play games on Friday, Saturday and Sunday this week as they try to clinch a playoff berth.

Makarov has been solid for the Amerks since he was called up from the ECHL on March 17. In six games with Rochester, he's posted a 3-3-0 record and registered a 2.70 goals-against average and .912 save percentage.

"I'll just enjoy my moment right now and be on the bench and help my teammates and just support my teammates," Makarov said. "I think it's a great feeling."

The Sabres will have to find another back-up goaltender for their games on Saturday and Sunday once they send Makarov back to Rochester.

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82 Marcus Foligno – 65 Brian Flynn – 27 Matt D'Agostini  
37 Matt Ellis - 24 Zenon Konopka – 23 Ville Leino

10 Christian Ehrhoff – 55 Rasmus Ristolainen  
6 Mike Weber – 4 Jamie McBain  
29 Jake McCabe – 3 Mark Pysyk

31 Matt Hackett  
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