



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Islanders-Sabres Preview

By Tom Castro
Associated Press
April 12, 2014

The New York Islanders moved into playoff contention with a hot stretch in late December and January, only to suffer an untimely slump and a critical injury that contributed greatly to them missing the playoffs.

The Islanders can at least complete a surge to the finish Sunday when they visit the Buffalo Sabres in a season-ending matchup of last-place teams.

New York (33-37-11) won 10 of 13 from Dec. 29-Jan. 21 and looked poised to make a run to the playoffs for the second straight season. It didn't work out that way, as the Islanders then went 1-6-1 just before the Olympic break.

It got much worse during the Sochi Games, as captain John Tavares was lost for the season with a knee injury he suffered playing for Team Canada.

Despite being out of the postseason picture and missing Tavares, who is still second on the team in points, New York has gone 7-2-2 in its last 11 and can close the season with a third straight victory. The Islanders defeated New Jersey 3-2 in a shootout Friday as they continued to give time to younger players.

"It's important," rookie defenseman Scott Mayfield said. "It's a great experience and we're all getting an opportunity, myself included, and it's a lot of fun and you kind of want to learn as much as you can going into summer and know what you have to do this summer to get better and make a push for it next year."

New York has allowed two goals over the last two games after giving up four in each of the previous three, all losses. Both wins have come on the road, and the club will be looking to extend a remarkable 16-5-2 surge away from home Sunday.

The Islanders dealt the Sabres (21-51-9) a 4-1 loss in their last matchup March 15 that evened the season series at 1-all. The defeat was part of a seven-game skid for Buffalo, which has gone 2-16-1 in its last 19 and dropped its past six.

The Sabres, finishing a turmoil-filled season with by far the worst record in the league, have scored 154 goals - a total that's easily the lowest in the NHL.

Cody Hodgson scored for Buffalo in a 4-1 loss to Boston on Saturday. The Sabres have managed 27 goals in the last 19 contests.

Goaltender Matt Hackett suffered a serious injury to his right leg, though it's not broken, after Bruins defenseman Torey Krug fell on him with 11:35 left. The

Sabres also lost forwards Chris Stewart (ankle) and Brian Flynn (lower body) along with defenseman Christian Ehrhoff (concussion).

"I've never seen anything like that," forward Drew Stafford told the team's official website. "You know to go through that on the bench that's quite a bit of a challenge; just add it to the list this year. I mean we don't want to use any excuses at all for what's going on, but I don't know if that's our ninth goalie or whatever it is, and we are playing basically with two lines for the last half the period."

Hodgson has four goals and four assists in his last eight games.

Bruins clinch NHL's top record, beat Sabres 4-1

By Howard Ulman

Associated Press

April 12, 2014

BOSTON (AP) -- Cheering fans stood and waved gold and black towels as the Boston Bruins claimed the Presidents' Trophy for the NHL's best regular-season record.

The celebration will be a lot bigger if the Bruins achieve their ultimate goal, winning the Stanley Cup.

"We've still got to do some work here in order to get the trophy that we all really want," Boston coach Claude Julien said.

David Krejci scored two goals, Patrice Bergeron netted his 30th of the season, and Gregory Campbell got his eighth as the Bruins dominated the Buffalo Sabres 4-1 Saturday in a game between teams at opposite ends of the standings.

It's the second time the Bruins have won the Presidents' Trophy, which gives them home-ice advantage throughout the playoffs, since the award was instituted for the 1985-86 season.

The Bruins have 117 points, third most in team history behind 121 in 1970-71 and 119 when they won the Stanley Cup in the 1971-72 season. Buffalo's 51 points are tied for its fewest in a season not shortened by a lockout. Each team has one game left.

"We need to play a really strong game and feel good about our game going into the playoffs," Krejci said.

Boston will end its regular-season schedule at New Jersey on Sunday. Buffalo will finish at home against the New York Islanders.

Boston's first-round playoff opponent was still unknown, with Philadelphia, Columbus and Detroit all possibilities.

Cody Hodgson scored for the Sabres, but Buffalo sustained another blow in a frustrating, injury-plagued season. Starting goalie Matt Hackett was taken from the ice on a stretcher after Boston defenseman Torey Krug fell on his right leg in the crease with 11:35 left.

"It doesn't look good right now," Buffalo coach Ted Nolan said.

Hackett's leg wasn't broken, and he was to return with the team to Buffalo to be examined by club medical personnel.

He was replaced by Connor Knapp, the seventh goalie to dress for the Sabres this season. He made his NHL debut and allowed Krejci's second goal one minute later.

"Some nerves, for sure, especially with the crowd definitely into it," Knapp said. "And they're on a power play, too."

Hoping for another long postseason run after losing last year's Stanley Cup finals in six games to the Chicago Blackhawks, the Bruins got back on track after losing four of their previous five games. That followed a streak in which they won 15 of 16.

"We were pretty reckless with the puck the last couple games," Krug said. "That's not something our team wants in our identity."

It was more of the same for the Sabres, who lost for the 17th time in 19 games with just 27 goals during that slump.

"A good clean bill of health in the summertime (and) we'll go forward to next year," Nolan said. "Whether we missed the playoffs by one point or we missed it by 30, 60 points, it doesn't matter."

The Bruins scored twice in a span of 1:29 late in the first period.

Campbell tipped in a pass by Jordan Caron from the left boards at 16:54. Krejci made it 2-0 at 18:23 after Zdeno Chara's shot off the backboards ricocheted to him at the left corner of the net. Krejci easily backhanded the puck into the open side.

Bergeron made it 3-0 at 11:43 of the third period, taking a pass from the right corner from Brad Marchand and putting a shot from the top of the right circle through Hackett's legs.

Tuukka Rask, who leads the NHL with seven shutouts, missed out on another when Hodgson converted a rebound of Marcus Foligno's shot at 13:58 of the third period.

"My focus has been a little bit (on the playoffs) already," Rask said, "but I'll rest a couple of days and crank it up."

Krejci was credited with his 19th goal when his shot off the backboards hit the back of Knapp's left skate and went into the net.

NOTES: Bruins fourth-line right wing Daniel Paille was helped from the ice after falling hard when he collided with Jake McCabe, who received a major penalty for interference and was ejected with 12:43 left. Paille didn't return, and the Bruins had no update on his condition. ... Besides Hackett, four other Sabres left the game with injuries - Christian Ehrhoff (concussion), Chris Stewart (leg), Matt D'Agostini (lower body), and Brian Flynn (lower body). ... Boston is 14-2-1 in afternoon games with one remaining. ... Hackett is 1-6-1 since being recalled from the AHL on March 17. ... The Bruins were eliminated on home ice in the playoffs the past two seasons, by Chicago last year and by Washington in Game 7 of the opening round in 2012.

Sabres G Hackett taken off ice on stretcher

Associated Press

April 12, 2014

BOSTON (AP) -- Buffalo Sabres goalie Matt Hackett has been taken off the ice on a stretcher after a collision with Boston Bruins defenseman Torey Krug.

Krug was skating toward the net when he was upended by Buffalo defenseman Jamie McBain and fell on Hackett's right leg with 11:35 left in the third period on Saturday.

Hackett remained sprawled on the ice, face down, as medical personnel came to his aid. After more than five minutes, he was carefully placed on a wheeled stretcher.

Hackett, who had been recalled from the AHL on March 17, was replaced by Connor Knapp with Boston leading 3-1.

Scott's history brings more misconducts

By John Vogl
Buffalo News
April 12, 2014

BOSTON – One of the most common occurrences for Buffalo this season, aside from losses of course, is John Scott getting escorted to the dressing room by an official. The NHL sent him a message during the preseason that indiscretions would not be tolerated, and the league has stayed true to its word.

Scott received two 10-minute misconducts Saturday during a 4-1 loss to Boston, with both getting disbelieving glances from folks in Sabreland. Scott said through the Sabres' media relations staff he had nothing to say.

Scott has four misconducts this season, tied for eighth in the NHL, and served a seven-game suspension.

“Some guys are labeled for certain things, and they want to get that out of the game,” Buffalo coach Ted Nolan said in TD Garden. “I understand that, but sometimes he's picked on unfairly.”

Scott picked up his first misconduct midway through the second period. Right after Boston's Milan Lucic left the penalty box for roughing up Matt D'Agostini – an encounter that had Lucic knock down D'Agostini again from behind on his way to the box – Scott made a beeline for Lucic.

Scott grabbed Lucic, who threw a left hand at the 6-foot-9 forward. Scott dropped the gloves, but Boston captain (and fellow 6-9 player) Zdeno Chara jumped in with a high-stick to Scott's nose. Lucic received no penalty, Chara got four minutes for high-sticking and Scott picked up two minutes for roughing, two minutes for unsportsmanlike conduct and a 10-minute misconduct.

“I don't know exactly what happened over there,” Chara said. “I just saw gloves off and Looch kind of standing there, so I kind of wanted to move in and jump in.”

Chara and Scott got tossed with matching 10-minute misconducts with 3:40 to play after conversing prior to a faceoff.

“I think it was more of a precaution,” Chara said. “It's something that the referee decided to do, maybe send a message, maybe prevent any unnecessary things from happening.”

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The officials ejected Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe with 12:43 to play. He stood up Boston's Daniel Paille with a crushing hit near the blue line as Paille, who'd chipped the puck forward, attempted to get it back.

Paille stared blankly at the ceiling, wobbled when he got up and needed teammates' help to get off the ice. The Bruins had no update on the condition of the former Buffalo player, but a source in the Sabres' organization said Paille passed his concussion testing.

The referees tagged McCabe with an interference major and game misconduct.

"My intentions were my shoulder to the chest. I don't think I raised my elbow at all," McCabe said. "I got called for interference. I don't think it was too late. He tried to go through me. I kept my hands down. It's just kind of an unfortunate play. I think his head was down. It's too bad.

"I knew right away that it probably didn't look good that he dropped like that. I hope the guy's OK. I think he's got concussion history in the past, a couple guys are telling me. Best wishes for that, but I wasn't trying to be dirty at all. I was trying to play hard."

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Cody Hodgson scored the Sabres' lone goal, reaching 20 for the first time in his four-year career. He totaled 19 goals in 2011-12, scoring 16 times in 63 games with Vancouver and three times in 20 games with Buffalo after getting traded.

"It's nice personally, but it doesn't mean much when you don't win," Hodgson said. "You can't even enjoy it."

...

The Sabres' forgettable 2013-14 season gasps its last breath today when the team hosts the New York Islanders at 5 p.m. in First Niagara Center. "Fan Appreciation Night" will include a party in the plaza beginning at 2:30 p.m., a pregame tribute to retiring broadcaster Mike Robitaille, team awards, a "Jersey Off My Back" ceremony following the game, a balloon drop and select concessions at a discount.

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There's a saying that a two-goal lead is the hardest to hold. The Bruins have single-handedly proved that to be a myth. Since the start of the 2010-11 season, Boston is 133-7-6 during games in which they have held a two-goal lead. The Bruins led, 2-0, after one period Saturday.

The victory earned them the Presidents' Trophy for the best regular-season record and home ice throughout the Stanley Cup playoffs.

"It's a nice achievement, for sure, but that wasn't our goal going into the season," forward David Krejci said. "We're trying to accomplish something different."

Sabres lose five players and game; Hackett carried off on stretcher

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

April 12, 2014

BOSTON — The Sabres' record-setting injury problems in goal had reached a laughable state at the start of Saturday's game. When Buffalo athletic trainer Tim Macre called for a stretcher to get Matt Hackett off the ice, the situation wasn't funny anymore.

The goaltender suffered what appeared to be a major leg injury with 11:35 left in a 4-1 loss to Boston. The Bruins' Torey Krug, skating toward the net at full speed, tripped over Buffalo defenseman Jamie McBain and flew into Hackett's right leg.

"For a second I thought he was OK, and then he started screaming," Krug said. "You never want to see stuff like that happen, no matter how it happens. It's tough."

Hackett stayed facedown for several minutes as seven people tended to his injury. They eventually lifted the goalie onto a stretcher as he covered his face in pain.

Hackett flew home with the Sabres after getting medical attention in TD Garden.

"We're going to wrap him up as best as we can, get him back home, get our doctors to look at him, but it doesn't look too good," said Nolan, who added the leg wasn't broken.

While Hackett's injury was the most serious, it was far from the only one. Four other Sabres left the penultimate game – defenseman Christian Ehrhoff (concussion) and forwards Chris Stewart (ankle), Brian Flynn (lower body) and Matt D'Agostini (lower body). None will be available for today's season finale against the New York Islanders in First Niagara Center.

"It's a tough enough year on us in our situation with the standings, but also to lose bodies the way we've been doing is an unfortunate thing, too," McBain said. "I've never seen anything like it in my career. I've never heard of anything like it."

The undermanned Sabres had a nearly empty bench by the end of the game. Officials ejected Jake McCabe with 12:43 remaining with a major interference penalty after a hit on Daniel Paille, who wobbled off the ice with help from teammates. John Scott followed McCabe to the dressing room with 3:40 remaining with a 10-minute misconduct for talking with Bruins captain Zdeno Chara, who also got booted.

"We were playing with basically two lines the last half of the period, guys dropping with injuries and penalties," right wing Drew Stafford said. "That's a

heck of a team over there. It's going to be a challenge with four lines and six D, let alone we've got two lines and four D."

There was no word on who would be the Sabres' second goaltender today. The Rochester Americans, who are in a playoff battle, also have a 5 p.m. start, with their game in Cleveland against Lake Erie.

Connor Knapp replaced Hackett, and the backup's first appearance on an NHL roster sheet was one for the books. Knapp became the ninth netminder to dress for the injury-plagued Sabres, who set an NHL record for most goalies used in one season.

"I'm setting records right away when I get in," the goalie said with a grin before the game. "It's a crazy year, for sure, within the organization."

It got crazier with Hackett's departure. "All the guys feel pretty terrible about something like that happening, especially with everything that's happened already," Knapp said. "Definitely not the way you want to play your first NHL minutes. To see Hack go down like that, it's tough.

"That's probably the majority of how injuries happen. We're so focused on the puck, and a lot of times our save selections put us in a vulnerable position to get hit. It's not a great defensive posture to be down on your knees like that. There's really not much you can do."

Ryan Miller, Jhonas Enroth, Ryan Vinz, Jaroslav Halak, Michal Neuvirth, Nathan Lieuwen, Hackett and Makarov were the other eight goalies to dress for the Sabres this season.

Knapp stopped six of seven shots, and the goal he allowed officially made him part of the Sabres' lost season. David Krejci's point blast bounced off the back boards, hit Knapp's leg and went in the net.

"Jeez, I've watched so many Bruins games that I should have figured it was coming right back out," Knapp said. "Unfortunate bounce. It's tough to let in an early one in your first NHL game."

Fortunately for the Sabres, the bad bounces and terrible luck will soon be over. Today is their last 2013-14 game.

"We couldn't have turned it around no matter what," Nolan said. "Sometimes a clean bill of health in the summertime and we'll go forward the next year."

No doubt about it, the Sabres are cursed

By Kevin Oklobzija
Democrat and Chronicle
April 12, 2014

The Buffalo Sabres season can't end soon enough.

For the fans. For management. For the players; definitely for the players. And for the medical staff. Especially the medical staff.

Oh, and for the Rochester Americans.

The Amerks lineup for Sunday's 5 p.m. game against the Lake Erie Monsters in Cleveland could be severely impacted because of five more significant injuries to Sabres players this afternoon in Boston.

Goalie Matt Hackett suffered what appears to be a serious injury to his right knee and/or leg. His season would appear to be over.

Also ruled out for Sunday's Sabres finale: Defenseman Christian Ehrhoff suffered a concussion. Winger Chris Stewart reinjured his ankle. Winger Brian Flynn suffered a lower-body injury. Winger Matt D'Agostini also suffered a lower-body injury.

That means at the very least the Sabres will need a goalie and perhaps two forwards. Zenon Konopka and Ville Leino didn't play in Boston. Scott could move back to take Ehrhoff's place on defense.

It's everything the Amerks don't need as they continue their fight for a playoff spot in the AHL's Western Conference.

Heading into tonight's action, the Amerks are seventh with 78 points and five games to play. Oklahoma City is eighth at 77 (four left), Charlotte ninth at 77 (three left), Rockford 10th with 75 (four left) and Utica 11th at 75 (four left).

In action: The Amerks are in Hamilton for a 7:05 p.m. faceoff. Iowa is at Rockford.

But then there's that issue of Sunday's Sabres game and who will fill the Buffalo lineup.

Connor Knapp replaced Hackett after the injury and allowed one goal on seven shots in a little under 12 minutes. He was on recall as an emergency backup; he went up Friday morning so Andrey Makarov could return to the Amerks and play this weekend.

The Sabres may be able to have somebody, anybody, dress as the backup for the finale against the New York Islanders. The game is totally meaningless so who sits as the backup -- even if they are pressed into duty -- doesn't matter one iota.

But the goalie situation for the Amerks is not muddled for the Calder Cup playoffs. They have Makarov and then Knapp will return. Hackett is now done and there are concerns that Nathan Lieuwen won't be able/allowed to play again this spring due to the concussion he suffered last weekend in Philadelphia.

As for forwards, certainly guys in Rochester would like to go up. Many have earned it. But the two points also are critical in the playoff chase.

The simple solution: if forwards are needed, call up Shawn Szydlowski and Colin Jacobs from the ECHL. Ryan Vinz, director of hockey technology at the HarborCenter, can be the backup goalie again.

So far, the Amerks haven't been notified of pending moves. Their bus will be driving right through Buffalo around midnight after tonight's game in Hamilton, so it will be a convenient handoff of players.

Amerks coach Chadd Cassidy will likely say a prayer for their health before letting them off the bus.

Sabres, Islanders try to end on positive note

By Davis Harper

NHL.com

April 12, 2014

ISLANDERS (33-37-11) at SABRES (21-51-9)

TV: MSG PLUS, MSG-B, BELL TV

Last 10: New York 6-2-2; Buffalo 1-8-1

Season series: This is the third game of the season between the Buffalo Sabres and New York Islanders, and the only one at First Niagara Center. The in-state rivals split the first two, with the Islanders winning 4-1 in the most recent meeting, at Nassau Coliseum on March 15.

Big story: The Islanders and Sabres hope to head into an early offseason on a high note when they face off Sunday. The Islanders enter the game with consecutive wins over the Montreal Canadiens and New Jersey Devils despite dressing 11 rookies in both games. The injury-riddled Sabres have lost six straight and 18 of their past 21.

Team Scope:

Islanders: The Islanders have reeled off two straight road wins, giving them 20 victories away from Long Island for the eighth time in franchise history.

New York scored a 3-2 shootout win Friday against the Devils. The Islanders fought back with a third-period goal from Ryan Strome, then took the shootout courtesy of back-to-back spin-o-rama moves by Josh Bailey and Strome.

"In a shootout, guys use their skill," coach Jack Capuano said. "After we watched Steven Stamkos beat us down in Tampa, guys worked on it [the move] in practice."

Sabres: The Sabres have lost 288 man-games to injury this season, and after a 4-1 loss to the Boston Bruins on Saturday, they can add some more to that total. Goaltender Matt Hackett, who has been playing due to injuries to Jhonas Enroth and Michal Neuvirth, left the ice on a stretcher after colliding with Boston defenseman Torey Krug.

"It doesn't look good right now," coach Ted Nolan said of Hackett's right leg injury. "We're going to wrap him up as best as we can and get him back home, get our doctors to look at him, but it doesn't look too good right now."

Connor Knapp, who was called up on Friday, made his NHL debut after Hackett was injured. Knapp is the sixth goalie to play for the Sabres this season.

The Sabres also lost forwards Chris Stewart (ankle), Brian Flynn (lower body) and Matt D'Agostini (lower body), and defenseman Christian Ehrhoff (concussion) to injury on Saturday. None is expected to play against the Islanders, according to the Buffalo News.

Who's hot: Strome has two goals in his past two games. ... Sabres forward Drew Stafford has three points (one goal, two assists) in his past three games, and has an assist in each game against the Islanders this season.

Injury report: The Islanders are without center John Tavares (knee), forwards Johan Sundstrom (neck), Cal Clutterbuck (upper body), Michael Grabner (concussion) and Kyle Okposo (lower body), and defensemen Calvin de Haan (leg) and Lubomir Visnovsky (concussion). ... In addition to the players injured Saturday, the Sabres are missing goaltenders Neuvirth (lower body), Enroth (leg) and Nathan Lieuwen (concussion), center Zenon Konopka (back), and defensemen Chad Ruhwedel (concussion), Tyler Myers (middle body) and Alexander Sulzer (upper body).

Bruins win to clinch Presidents' Trophy

By Matt Kalman

NHL.com

April 12, 2014

BOSTON -- The Boston Bruins have bigger goals they hope to achieve in the next couple months, but Saturday afternoon at TD Garden they checked off their last accomplishment of the regular season.

Bruins center David Krejci scored twice and goaltender Tuukka Rask stopped 24 of 25 shots in a 4-1 win against the Buffalo Sabres that clinched the Presidents' Trophy for the second time in franchise history.

Boston (54-18-9), which played its final home game of the regular season, will have home-ice advantage as long as it lasts in the 2014 Stanley Cup Playoffs. The Bruins won the Presidents' Trophy in 1989-90 and have finished first 13 times.

The Bruins, the Atlantic Division champions and top seed in the Eastern Conference, know the road ahead is going to be more difficult than what's in the past.

"I think that after [Sunday], every team is going to start from zero," Bruins captain Zdeno Chara said. "It's something that we certainly are proud of, if you want to say that. We worked really hard this season and we wanted to play as best we could. And I think we accomplished that.

"But after [Sunday] it's going to go back to square one. No matter what you do in the regular season, you still have to play a certain way to be successful. And you know it's something that you for sure want to follow up on. But you can't be thinking that now you're going to get more room or more respect. It's going to be, I think, even tougher."

Gregory Campbell and Patrice Bergeron, who reached 30 goals for the second time in his career, scored for the Bruins. Bergeron, who scored 31 goals in 2005-06, didn't play in the third period for an undisclosed reason.

"I think we're really proud of what he's accomplished this year," Bruins coach Claude Julien said of Bergeron, who has a plus-38 rating. "Thirty goals is quite a feat, and for a guy who excels at both ends of the ice even more so. It takes a heck of a player to be able to score 30 and be so reliable defensively and be as strong at both ends of the ice. That's an incredible player in my mind."

The Sabres (21-51-9) lost their sixth in a row. Goaltender Matt Hackett sustained a leg injury in the third period and was taken from the ice on a stretcher.

Hackett, who stopped 20 of 23 shots, collided with Bruins defenseman Torey Krug at 8:25 of the third. Hackett was replaced by Connor Knapp, who made six saves in his NHL debut. He is the sixth goalie to play for the Sabres this season.

The Sabres also lost forwards Chris Stewart (ankle) and Brian Flynn (lower body), and defenseman Christian Ehrhoff (concussion) to injury.

"I've never seen anything like that," Buffalo forward Drew Stafford said. "You know to go through that on the bench that's quite a bit of a challenge; just add it to the list this year. I mean we don't want to use any excuses at all for what's going on, but I don't know if that's our ninth goalie or whatever it is, and we are playing basically with two lines for the last half the period."

The Bruins lost their prior two games in shootouts and managed to prevent their first three-game losing streak of the season.

Campbell opened the scoring at 16:54 with an aggressive drive to the net. Jordan Caron drew two defenders to him on the left wall and fed a pass to the front, where Campbell tipped the puck past Hackett for a 1-0 lead.

The Bruins took a 2-0 lead on a goal by Krejci at 18:23. He backhanded a shot past Hackett after a Chara shot rebounded off the end glass and landed out front.

Boston went ahead 3-0 at 11:43 of the second period. Bergeron and Brad Marchand cycled the puck around the right circle. Bergeron completed the play with a one-timer from above the right dot that beat Hackett high to the glove side.

Cody Hodgson scored for the Sabres at 13:58. Mike Weber won a battle along the right wall and fed Hodgson in front for a backhand that beat Rask high.

Krejci's second goal, his 19th of the season, came on a power play at 10:35 of the third period.

"[The Presidents' Trophy] is a nice achievement, that's for sure, but that wasn't our goal going into the season," Krejci said. "So one thing that's good about it is as long as we're in the playoffs we'll be starting at home, so that's good. But we're trying to accomplish something different, so we have one more game [Sunday]. We need to play a really strong game and feel good about our game going into the playoffs."

The Bruins play at the New Jersey Devils on Sunday; the Sabres host the New York Islanders.

Buffalo Sabres GM Tim Murray 'open for business' when it comes to dealing players

By Bruce Garrioch

Ottawa Sun

April 12, 2014

Tim Murray will be a busy man in the off-season. He's willing to play Let's Make a Deal just about anybody.

The Buffalo Sabres' GM has hung the 'For Sale' sign outside the club's office and he's willing to move just about anybody as the off-season officially gets underway Monday for non-playoff teams.

Sources say Murray has been shopping RW Chris Stewart, D Christian Erhoff, C Luke Adam and RW Drew Stafford.

It doesn't stop there, either. The Sabres will also listen to see what they can get for LW Marcus Foligno, LW Johan Larsson and D Chad Ruhwedel.

The last three are young players that are still considered prospects so it's a little surprising Murray would be willing to move any of those guys given the club's current state and direction.

"He's just open for business," said a league executive about Murray before the weekend. "He hasn't drafted any of these current guys."

Murray was amongst the NHL's busiest GMs at the deadline by dealing goalie Ryan Miller and captain Steve Ott. The Sabres aren't done by any stretch and are moving into the next rebuild phase.

THIS N' THAT

The Buffalo search for a GM this winter — when former president Pat LaFontaine interviewed about 15 people before settling on Ottawa assistant Tim Murray — has got the NHL rethinking allowing executives to just move out of their current roles because they're getting a promotion. That means not only will the Canucks have to pay off former GM Mike Gillis after giving him the boot, they'll also likely have to surrender a draft pick if president Trevor Linden doesn't choose either of the club's assistants — Laurence Gilman and Lorne Henning — as one of the replacements. A name that has surfaced as a top candidate is Phoenix assistant Brad Treliving. There are lots of ties between Treliving and the Vancouver organization plus he may get the backing from the NHL office after working for the league-owned Coyotes for three years ... Pittsburgh and Chicago were both close on deals for Vancouver C Ryan Kesler at the deadline. You'd have to think if he still wants to be moved the new GM of the Canucks and Linden will revisit that possibility before the draft in June ... Sure sounds like there will be a lot of change in Carolina in the off-season if Hurricanes' management has its way.

Coach Kirk Muller hasn't made the impact expected and he'll likely be thanked a few days after the season.

OFF THE GLASS

Lots of talk the heat is on Pittsburgh coach Dan Bylsma to go deep this spring. The Penguins lost the East final last year against the Bruins in four straight and Bylsma was under the microscope then. Sure looks like he's got to at least get back there with this team ... You have to wonder where Calgary captain Mike Cammalleri will end up when he hits the UFA market on July 1. The Flames offered him a new deal before the deadline, he turned it down and the thinking was he'd be moved. Brian Burke, the club's director of hockey operations, wasn't going to swallow the third-round pick he was being offered in return and kept Cammalleri instead. The Kings are a good bet as a landing spot ... A league executive wonders how Brendan Shanahan will handle daily criticism from the Toronto media in his new role as president. He's widely regarded by GMs as not taking kindly to being called out when acting as the VP of discipline. If Shanahan thought he was taking it on the chin there, wait until the Leafs miss the playoffs for the first time under his tutelage.

RUMOURS DU JOUR

The NHL will do a search for a replacement for Shanahan now that he's officially left his role. A top candidate will be San Jose Sharks director of pro scouting John Ferguson Jr. He's a former player, GM, alternate governor, agent and has a law degree. He interned in the NHL office for two years while in law school and has as much knowledge of the game as anybody being considered for the job ... It would be hard to believe legendary G Martin Brodeur has played his last game in a New Jersey uniform but that certainly may be the case. He wants to play next year and the Devils may be willing to hand the reins to G Cory Schneider. If New Jersey wants a chance of keeping Schneider past next summer when he becomes a UFA, letting Brodeur walk might be the only option. Keeping him around would be distraction unless he agrees to a reduced role. One option being suggested: Brodeur going to Pittsburgh to help mentor No. 1 Marc-Andre Fleury as a backup. The Isles also need a goalie ... The talk won't go away that Florida GM Dale Tallon, who fired assistant Mike Santos a couple of weeks ago, isn't exactly on solid footing either. The new ownership group of the Panthers wants results and Tallon could come under the microscope as the off-season gets underway. Here's an idea if the the owners want to give Tallon a little help: Bring in Doug MacLean as president. He makes his home in the area and has knowledge of the market.

Have a nice Sunday.

Season filled with turmoil about to end for reeling Sabres

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

April 12, 2014

Mercifully, 193 days after it started, the most tumultuous season in Buffalo Sabres history will end around 7:30 p.m. Sunday inside the First Niagara Center.

The finale can't come quickly enough for the reeling Sabres, losers of six straight games and 17 of their last 19.

In a season filled with turmoil, the Sabres endured arguably their roughest game this afternoon in Boston, losing five more players to injury, including goalie Matt Hackett, in the 4-1 setback to the Bruins.

Eleven players are injured right now. Four goalies have gone down in the last 16 games.

Hackett suffered a ghastly injury 8:25 into the third period when Jamie McBain knocked Boston's Torey Krug into the goalie, making his right leg bend awkwardly. He stayed on the ice for several minutes in apparent pain before being stretchered off.

"It doesn't look good right now," Sabres coach Ted Nolan told reporters in Boston. "Wrap him up as best as we can, get him back home, get our doctors to look at him."

Connor Knapp replaced Hackett, becoming the sixth goalie to play for the Sabres this season, tying the team record from 1988-89. Knapp, who spent most of this season in the ECHL, set a new NHL mark earlier in the day by becoming the ninth netminder to dress for the club this season.

It's unclear if Knapp will start his first NHL game Sunday. The Sabres also need to find another goalie. They recently sent Andrey Makarov back to Rochester to help the Americans fight for an AHL playoff spot.

The new injuries, according to Nolan:

- After barely three games back, winger Chris Stewart re-injured his right ankle during his first shift.
- Christian Ehrhoff suffered a "mild concussion." It appeared defense partner Rasmus Ristolainen hit Ehrhoff in the head behind the net.
- Forward Brian Flynn suffered a lower-body injury.
- Winger Matt D'Agostini tweaked something on his lower body.

The players are out Sunday against the New York Islanders. Expect more recalls from the Amerks, who play Sunday in Cleveland.

With game misconducts to rookie defenseman Jake McCabe and tough guy John Scott, the Sabres finished the contest with only 13 players.

McCabe appeared to hit Daniel Paille legally. Paille left the game woozy.

Scott, meanwhile, was tossed with Zdeno Chara for simply talking to the Boston captain. Scott was given a 10-minute misconduct earlier in the game after a little scrum with Chara.

“Some guys are labeled for certain things,” Nolan said about Scott. “They want to get that out of the game. I understand that. Sometimes he’s picked on unfairly. But, hey, that’s just the way it is.”

If you’re keeping track, the Sabres have 147 goals and need five to pass the 1997-98 Tampa Lightning and avoid becoming the lowest-scoring NHL team ever. The hapless Isles are one of only five clubs allowing more than three goals a game.

HAMILTON: Sabres Ehrhoff has a rough afternoon

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

April 12, 2014

Boston, MA (WGR 550) -- The Sabres were cruising along playing the Bruins evenly for the first 16 minutes, but Boston scored two goals in a span of 1:29 for the 2-0 lead.

It started with Christian Ehrhoff just gliding over to a wide open Gregory Campbell who tipped a Jordan Caron pass through Matt Hackett's pads. Right after that, Zdeno Chara's shot went high and wide, but came out front thanks to the lively boards. Ehrhoff froze and never reacted. David Krejci anticipated and was in perfect position to tap home his 18th into the empty net.

Boston had a great chance for a third goal on the power play, when Patrice Bergeron set up Reilly Smith who had a wide open net, but Smith fanned on the shot.

Buffalo had some very good chances before that. Drew Stafford made a great backhand pass to Matt D'Agostini on a 2-on-1 and Tuukka Rask robbed him right from the crease. Zemgus Girgensons led another 2-on-1, but waited too long and had his shot blocked by Torey Krug.

Both goalies made seven saves in the period.

Chris Stewart only played the first shift and 20 seconds before limping to the room. That messed up Ted Nolan's lines. He put Marcus Foligno with Girgensons and Cody Hodgson and Cory Conacher moved up with Brian Flynn and Torrey Mitchell.

Buffalo fans almost got the thing they've been wishing for, John Scott in a fight with Milan Lucic. Lucic went after D'Agostini early in the second and then knocked him down after the scrum was over.

Lately the Sabres have not been standing up for each other, but Scott went after Lucic the first time he could. Both were ready and facing each other, but the linesman got between them and then Zdeno Chara cross checked Scott in the face and bear hugged him. Because Scott was cut, Chara got a double minor. Scott got unsportsmanlike conduct for what I don't know, along with a 10 minute misconduct. Chara was also defending a teammate that didn't need defending and should have gotten 10 minutes too since Scott did.

This is exactly what I told everybody when they signed Scott two years ago. He will not be fighting Lucic. Lucic has been told in no uncertain terms by Claude Julien that he's not to fight a guy like John Scott. Chara made sure that didn't happen.

Buffalo did get on the board after the Bruins had made it 3-0. Mike Weber made a great pinch along the wall. Foligno won the battle behind the net and found Hodgson, who's turnover led to the third Boston goal. Hodgson scored his 20th goal for the first time in his career. Weber now has points in four consecutive games.

Christian Ehrhoff was on the ice for all three Boston goals and is minus six in his last four games.

Right off the bat in the third, Rask had to be sharp stopping Matt Ellis on a 2-on-1.

Brian Flynn left the game with an upper body injury followed by an injury to Ehrhoff. Matt D'Agostini also suffered a lower body injury and headed to the dressing room early.

Jake McCabe appeared to catch Dan Paille under the chin and pretty much knocked him out. He got a major penalty and a game misconduct.

During the power play, Jamie McBain tripped Krug on top of Hackett who grabbed his knee right away. Hackett was taken off on a stretcher.

"It doesn't look good right now," said Ted Nolan. "We're going to wrap [Hackett] up as best we can, get him back home, get our doctors to look at him, but it doesn't look too good right now."

Enter Connor Knapp for his first NHL action. "You never want to see [Hackett's injury] happen," said Knapp. "Obviously it was bad. I know all the guys feel pretty terrible about something like that happening, especially with everything that's happened already. Definitely not the way you want to play your first NHL minutes, seeing Hack go down like that. It's tough."

The only goal against him was a Krejci shot off the back wall that hit Knapp's skate and went in. Right before that the kid made a great save on Iginla in front.

In all the years I've covered hockey, I've never seen the Sabres lose their top four goalies to injury.

"I've never seen anything like that," said Stafford. "To go through that on the bench, that's quite a bit of a challenge. Just add it to the list this year. We don't want to use any excuses at all for what's gone on, but I don't know if that's our ninth goalie, or whatever it is."

"It's bizarre," said Hodgson about the goalie injuries. "I don't know what to say."

Sabres Decimated By Injuries in 4-1 Loss in Boston

WGR 550

April 12, 2014

Matt Hackett was one of five Sabres to leave Saturday's 4-1 loss to the Bruins with an injury, but his appeared to be the most serious of them all. The Buffalo netminder was taken off on a stretcher after suffering a gruesome leg injury.

In addition to Hackett, Chris Stewart, Brian Flynn, Matt D'Agostini and Christian Ehrhoff headed to the dressing room early. Jake McCabe and John Scott also headed to the dressing room before the final horn, but they were on the receiving end of misconducts. McCabe was tossed in the third period after leveling Daniel Paille with what looked to be a clean hit. Paille was groggy when trying to get back on his feet and McCabe was slapped with an interference major and a game misconduct. Scott was ejected along with Zdeno Chara late in the game after the two were jawing at each other.

The Bruins jumped out to a 2-0 lead with a pair of goals late in the opening period. Gregory Campbell struck first, redirecting a Jordan Caron pass into the Buffalo net. About a minute and a half later, David Krejci put Boston up by two. The puck bounced off the backboard and Krejci backhanded the rebound over Hackett for his 18th of the season.

Patrice Bergeron made it 3-0 at 11:43 of the second, one-timing a Brad Marchand pass from the near faceoff circle. The Sabres got on the board just a little over two minutes later on Cody Hodgson's 20th. Marcus Foligno found Hodgson in front of the Bruins' net and Hodgson lifted a backhand shot into the net, making it 3-1.

Hackett went down about midway through the final period after Torey Krug was tripped up by Jamie McBain, landing on Hackett's outstretched right leg. The Buffalo netminder stayed down in obvious pain and was eventually taken off the ice on a stretcher. Hackett's injury cleared the way for Connor Knapp to make his NHL debut, but it didn't take long for Knapp to surrender his first NHL goal. Krejci's power play shot boomed off the back wall, deflected off Knapp's left skate and into the net, putting Boston ahead 4-1.

Knapp finished with six saves on seven shots in his first-ever NHL action. Hackett stopped 20 shots before his injury. The win wrapped up the Presidents' Trophy for the Bruins, who are now guaranteed home-ice advantage throughout the Stanley Cup playoffs. The Sabres finish their season tomorrow at First Niagara Center at 5 p.m. Hear the call on WGR 550 and the Buffalo Sabres Radio Network.

1st Period

Goals

16:54 - BOS - Gregory Campbell (8) (Jordan Caron, Shawn Thornton)

18:23 - BOS - David Krejci (18) (Zdeno Chara, Milan Lucic)

Penalties

14:22 - BUF - Cory Conacher (2 min., tripping)

2nd Period

Goals

11:43 - BOS - Patrice Bergeron (30) (Brad Marchand, Torey Krug)

13:58 - BUF - Cody Hodgson (20) (Marcus Foligno, Mike Weber)

Penalties

7:40 - BOS - Milan Lucic (2 min., roughing)

9:58 - BUF - John Scott (2 min., unsportsmanlike conduct)

9:58 - BUF - John Scott (2 min., roughing)

9:58 - BOS - Zdeno Chara (4 min. double minor, high sticking)

9:58 - BUF - John Scott (10 min. misconduct)

3rd Period

Goals

10:35 - BOS - David Krejci (19) (PPG) (Torey Krug, Tuukka Rask)

Penalties

7:17 - BUF - Jake McCabe (5 min. major, interference)

7:17 - BUF - Jake McCabe (10 min. game misconduct)

7:17 - BOS - Gregory Campbell (2 min., roughing)

12:42 - BOS - Shawn Thornton (2 min., tripping)

16:40 - BUF - John Scott (10 min. misconduct)

16:40 - BOS - Zdeno Chara (10 min. misconduct)

Goaltending

BUF - Matt Hackett (20 saves, 23 shots)

BUF - Connor Knapp (6 saves, 7 shots)

BOS - Tuukka Rask (24 saves, 25 shots)

Power Plays

BUF - 0 of 2

BOS - 1 of 3

Three Stars

1.) BOS - David Krejci (2 G, 0 A)

2.) BOS - Tuukka Rask (24 saves)

3.) BOS - Brad Marchand (0 G, 1 A)

Bruins win Presidents' Trophy with victory over Sabres

By Amalie Benjamin

Boston Globe

April 12, 2014

Their last two games resulted in disappointing shootout losses to Minnesota and Winnipeg, but with the Bruins returning to TD Garden for their final regular-season home game of the season on Saturday, all returned to normal.

They beat the Buffalo Sabres, 4-1, giving them 31 wins at home, and clinched the Presidents' Trophy, giving them home-ice advantage throughout the playoffs.

The Bruins looked better right from the beginning, registering the first five shots on goal of the game, and continued as they built a three-goal lead by midway through the second period.

The third goal came courtesy of Patrice Bergeron, who reached 30 for the second time in his career with his one-timer from the right circle at 11:43 of the second. It gave him 11 goals in his last 13 games, as Bergeron capped a regular season that should garner him some support for the Hart Trophy.

Bergeron played the first two periods but did not return for the third. The reason was not announced during the game.

Boston started the scoring with two goals in the first period, the first coming from Gregory Campbell, who tipped a feed from Jordan Caron past Sabres goalie Matt Hackett at 16:54. That was followed by a goal from David Krejci, who cleaned up at 18:23 after a Zdeno Chara shot hit off the glass.

Daniel Paille had to be helped off the ice at 7:17 of the third period after a hit by Jake McCabe sent him to the ice, where he appeared to hit his head. Paille already has had two concussions this season.

And that wasn't the only injury. With 11:35 to go, Torey Krug fell onto the right leg of Hackett, who had to be stretchered off the ice and was replaced by Connor Knapp.

Krejci added his second of the game at 10:35 of the third period on a power play, assisted by Krug and Tuukka Rask.

Bruins OK With ‘Nice’ Presidents’ Trophy Win, But Have Eye On Much Bigger Prize

By Mike Cole

NESN

April 12, 2014

BOSTON — The Bruins’ season of superlatives continued on Saturday afternoon as the Black and Gold notched their latest regular-season accomplishment.

The B’s clinched the Presidents’ Trophy as the NHL’s best team for the regular season with a 4-1 win over the Buffalo Sabres at TD Garden. The B’s have one more game to play, but Saturday’s win means they will have home-ice advantage throughout the entire Stanley Cup playoffs.

The Presidents’ Trophy doesn’t mean much in the scope of hockey history — quick, name two of the last three winners — but being the league’s top-ranked team does represent remarkable consistency. That was one of the Bruins’ biggest strengths in a regular season that will come to a close on Sunday afternoon in New Jersey. Saturday’s win snapped a two-game (shootout) losing streak and ensured the B’s won’t have a three-game losing streak all season. You’d have to go all the way back to the 1977-78 season to find a Bruins team that went the entire season without losing three in a row.

“It’s a nice accomplishment,” Boston defenseman Torey Krug said. “Obviously it’s not our main goal, but along the way you’re going to pick up things like that. It’s good; obviously the best record in the NHL speaks for itself. Now we’re onto our main goal and we’re going to have a lot of fun with it.”

The 117 points the Bruins now have are also good for third-most in franchise history, and Boston can tie the 1971-72 Stanley Cup-winning club at 119 points with a win on Sunday.

Nice accomplishments, sure, but the Black and Gold already have its eyes set on bigger things than just a Presidents’ Trophy and regular-season consistency. To a man, the Bruins spoke about the more important tasks at hand once the playoffs begin.

“The Presidents’ Trophy identifies a team who’s been good for the regular season,” Bruins coach Claude Julien said. “The other thing is, it also guarantees home ice as long as you’re in the playoffs. So, those are two things we’re really proud of, but that’s where it stops. The next step is we still got to do some work here in order to get the trophy that we all really want here.”

Maybe the even better news for the Bruins is that they were able to correct some mistakes after a couple of bad losses in Minnesota and Winnipeg earlier in the week. The B’s dominated the Sabres from puck drop on Saturday. While that was

expected of the B's, it's a good way to get back on track before Sunday, which will probably prove to be a day of rest for a handful of Boston veterans.

And after that, it's time for the real hockey to be played.

“That’s been a great regular season, but we’ve got one more game left and then we all know that what everybody calls the real season is right around the corner,” Julien said. “I’m going to tell you that I’m really happy with the way we handled these 81 games and hopefully these 82 by tomorrow. But that’s all going to be pushed aside starting Monday.”

B's beat Sabres 4-1; capture President's trophy

By Joe Haggerty

CSN New England

April 12, 2014

BOSTON – The Bruins took care of business against Buffalo and captured their first President’s Trophy in nearly 25 years, but it came at a considerable pre-playoff cost for the Black and Gold. A wobbly Dan Paille needed to be helped off the ice after a hard, clean hit from Jake McCabe in front of the Buffalo bench, and Patrice Bergeron was also removed from the game before the start of the third period in a 4-1 win for the Black and Gold at TD Garden.

David Krejci scored a pair of goals courtesy of wild bounces off the end boards, and both Patrice Bergeron and Gregory Campbell also added to the scoring barrage for the Black and Gold in victory. The Bergeron goal was a sniper shot from the right wing circle, and gave the B’s center 30 goals on the season for the second time in his career after an eight year gap between the last time in 2005-06.

Cody Hodgson got the only goal for Buffalo, but the Sabres didn’t go down without a “fight.” John Scott made himself a factor once again despite his limited abilities as a hockey player, and the Sabres coaching staff allowed it to happen by their usage of him. The Buffalo goon went after Milan Lucic as retribution for an earlier hit on Matt D’Agostini in the second period, but was greeted by a Zdeno Chara high stick after going in stick high on the B’s left winger. Scott was bounced with a 10-minute misconduct as a result of the play, and then was slapped with another 10-minute misconduct in the third period after getting into another tiff with the B’s 6-foot-9 captain.

Eventually the game mercifully ended, but not before Buffalo goalie Matt Hackett was also carted off the ice in a stretch after a gruesome sequence where Torey Krug fell on his leg. There were no further injuries in the game for the Bruins, but one is already enough with less than a week until the Stanley Cup playoffs open.

Men of steel race elements and time as work accelerates at HarborCenter

By Jonathan D. Epstein

Buffalo News

April 11, 2014

Looking at the HarborCenter construction site in downtown Buffalo, it is hard to imagine Canisius College will play hockey there in six months.

Nine months into building the \$172.2 million sports and entertainment facility, next to the First Niagara Center, the site is a mass of steel girders, concrete and cranes.

In one of the biggest, fastest construction projects in Buffalo history, the Buffalo Sabres are marshaling an army to take their HarborCenter project – which includes two NHL-sized ice rinks perched six stories high – from ground-breaking to occupancy in just a year and a half. Laborers have been on the job on Saturdays almost from the start of construction last April, and general contractor Mortenson Construction added a second seven-hour shift on the project in January. Work is now being done 15 hours a day, six days a week. That includes three operators of the two tower cranes on each shift.

The project site has averaged 150 to 160 workers a day during the winter. That will jump to more than 200 in the next few weeks, plus another 15 to 20 whenever concrete is being poured, “which is pretty much almost every day, given that we’re working in multiple areas of the building,” said Ryan Poropat, lead project supervisor for Mortenson.

Even more significantly, the project has reached the point where work on several different areas can proceed at the same time, without having to wait for the previous task to be completed. With the garage structure complete and steel rising, workers can turn their attention simultaneously to the main rink, the secondary rink, the hotel tower and the pre-cast walls of the parking ramp.

So despite delays caused by a harsh winter, the Sabres expect it to be completed by October, in time for Canisius’ hockey home opener on Oct. 5. That’s slightly later than the original goal of late September for the rinks, five-level garage, the (716) Food & Sport restaurant, Tim Hortons Cafe & Bake Shop and other retail space along Main Street.

The 205-room Marriott Buffalo HarborCenter hotel, rising 12 stories above the northwest corner of the 850-space garage and rinks, is still slated to open in May 2015.

“I’m not going to tell you we’re exactly on schedule. It was too tough of a winter,” said John R. Koelmel, president of HarborCenter.

But have faith, the builders say.

“The name of the game here is basically trying to separate each of the crews so each one is independent from the other and I’m no longer waiting on this guy to be done,” said Poropat. “We’re at the point when a whole lot of work is breaking free.”

Said Koelmel: “After this, it just goes.”

A ‘resume-builder’

Sabres officials unveiled plans for HarborCenter in August 2012, heralding it as a major private investment by team owners Terry and Kim Pegula. The center is connected to the First Niagara Center, creating a sports and tourism destination. It will be the first three-rink facility in the National Hockey League.

The project is complex. HarborCenter has a concrete garage with a hotel on top, surrounded by structural steel ice rinks elevated six stories in the air, plus a two-story sports bar and other retail space – all built on a lot that actually isn’t large enough to support it. Hence the need to transfer some weight over Perry Street to connect it to the First Niagara Center.

“This project is hands-down the most complicated job I’ve ever personally done. ... It’s got a little bit of everything,” Poropat said. “I volunteered to move my family to Buffalo and build this job, because of what the job was. This is a resume-builder. It’s a once-in-a-career type job, no doubt.”

Heavy and continuous snow, bitter cold temperatures and brisk winds teamed up during the past few months to slow down construction work. Work was suspended altogether on just two days because of separate blizzards, although conditions were far from ideal on many other days. But Poropat said Mortenson officials had anticipated and planned for weather challenges, and are accustomed to dealing with them, noting that the company is based in Minneapolis and he’s from Chicago.

“The project’s always been in Buffalo,” he said. “We have a lot of experience relative to cold weather, and winter does come every year. So we put a lot of plans in place early in the season.”

The contractor signed a contract with a heating unit supplier in July, and began assembling heaters, blankets and tarps as early as September, when National Fuel Gas Co. hooked up gas lines. They knew they would be building the structure “in temperatures that aren’t conducive to concrete,” Poropat said.

He said there are no hard-and-fast rules about not pouring concrete below a certain air temperature, but the liquid mixture has to be at 70 degrees upon arrival at the job site, and the temperature of the steel rebar used for tension in

reinforced concrete has to be at least 30 degrees at the point where the concrete is going. So Mortenson set the minimum air temperature at 20 degrees and above.

When the temperature dropped below that, they had to adjust plans on the fly. When temperatures fell to 11 degrees, managers brought in concrete to test conditions and found they could still pour. So the company changed the guidelines for the job to a minimum of 10 degrees, “and basically kept it there all winter,” Poropat said.

Officials are quick to credit the attitude of the predominantly local workforce for keeping the project on track.

“We know how tough this winter has been, and it’s a little bit tougher six stories up, with the wind at 30 miles per hour, and the attitude they have is unbelievable,” said the Sabres’ chief development officer, Cliff Benson. “Honestly, I stand there some days and I wonder how they do it, and they’re doing it every day.”

At ice level

Workers are now tackling what Koelmel calls the “ice level” of what will ultimately be a 20-story building. That’s the sixth floor, where the rinks will provide a venue for youth, college and amateur hockey games and events.

Koelmel said crews are forming the “bowl” of the main ice rink on the south end of the building, across Perry Street from the First Niagara Center where the Sabres play. Above that, he said, steel is “taking shape” to create the barrel roof to enclose the feature rink. And the steelwork is also in place to support the bleachers and other seating around that rink, which will ultimately seat 1,800 spectators.

The slabs and metal deck are being installed for the second rink, enabling more work to start there. The pre-cast concrete panels that will form the exterior of the parking ramp will be brought in and installed, starting at the corner of Washington and Perry streets, and moving clockwise around the building.

Additionally, now that the Sabres’ season is over, a nearby parking lot at Perry and Michigan can be used as a staging ground to assemble the long-span wood trusses for the barrel roof over the main rink. Once built, they will be driven over and picked up by the tower crane and set into place.

Construction of the concrete hotel tower will begin shortly, and five or six stories should be completed by late May using a different system to build it than the slow process that was needed for the garage. As each floor of the hotel core is poured and hardens, hydraulic jacks below will push it up and set it into place before

moving up to that floor to start the process again. Meanwhile, workers can pour the rest of the floor at their own pace.

“It offers us the opportunity to build it a little bit quicker, since we’re kind of in control of our own destiny,” Poropat said.

Once the floors are poured, the glass and metal frame walls for the hotel can be built from the inside, and the tower will be enclosed before next winter. “The hotel won’t be weather-dependent by next year,” Koelmel said. “This was the winter to get through.”

By late June, the south tower crane will be taken out piece by piece over three to four days with an erection crane, after it’s used to place some large mechanical units inside the structure during the weeks of June 9 and June 16. The other tower crane will be dismantled in a similar fashion by early September, and most of the facility will open in October.

“Six months from now, not only will we be ready to open, but the structure itself will be very, very visible in terms of its impact on the skyline,” Koelmel said.

By then, the hotel elevators should also be operating, so crews will remove the exterior construction elevators and reopen Main Street. Then “we’ll be working exclusively on the inside, just fitting out the upper floors and finishes,” Poropat said. “By the springtime of next year, it’s bringing beds in, tables and chairs.”