



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Sabres-Red Wings Preview

Associated Press

April 4, 2014

DETROIT (AP) -- - Gustav Nyquist is in impressive company. The Detroit Red Wings forward has scored 23 goals in 28 games after having just 63 NHL games of experience.

"I don't know how many players in the history of the game have done that," general manager Ken Holland said.

Not many: Washington Capitals superstar Alex Ovechkin and former NHL star Pavel Bure are the only two other players who have pulled off that feat since the 1989-90 season, according to STATS. Nyquist said the only thing that matters to him is helping the Red Wings make the playoffs, a quest that continues Friday night against the visiting Buffalo Sabres.

Thanks to the Swede's breakout performance after starting the season in the minors, the short-handed team has a good chance to extend its postseason streak to 23.

Nyquist has made the most of his opportunity, helping a banged-up and offensively challenged team stay competitive and recently surge into a wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference with six games left in its regular season.

Nyquist scored nine times in a nine-game stretch just before the Olympic break, earning a spot on Sweden's team at the Sochi Games to replace injured Red Wings teammate Johan Franzen.

"The experience of playing with and against the best players in the world in Russia has only added to his confidence," Holland said.

He had the game-winning goal in Wednesday night's comeback win over the NHL-leading Boston Bruins, blowing past star defenseman Zdeno Chara after getting to a turnover near Detroit's blue line and racing the puck up the ice.

Nyquist has scored 12 times in his last 10 games - the most by any player this season in a 10-game stretch - and has a league-high 23 goals since Jan. 20.

Suddenly, he's a big part of opponents' scouting report and they still can't seem to slow him down.

"When a guy is that hot, you want to be aware of him and finish when you can on him," Bruins forward Brad Marchand said. "You have to know where he is because he's a very skilled player with a lot of speed. He's a threat, for sure."

Nyquist, though, insists he doesn't know what all the fuss is about.

The humble 24-year-old politely answers every question asked of him - and there seem to be more reporters wanting some of his time every day - but he won't buy into the hype.

"You guys are making a bigger deal out of it than I am," he said with a shrug. "The only thing that matters is to get in the playoffs."

Red Wings forward Luke Glendenning, whose locker stall is next to Nyquist's in Detroit and was his roommate last season in Grand Rapids, said the team hasn't had to keep Nyquist's ego in check because he takes care of that himself.

"He's been great about all of this," Glendenning said before a swarm of reporters engulfed Nyquist. "He is keeping his humble attitude and the great work ethic that got him here."

Nyquist didn't have a point in either of the Red Wings' two matchups with Buffalo this season - he was in the minors for the first one - but Detroit won both to extend its win streak in this series to six.

The Red Wings are 21-2-1 with one tie in the past 25 meetings, including 12-0-1 in Detroit. The Sabres' only win there in that span came in 2006 and they haven't had a regulation victory at Joe Louis Arena since March 6, 1994.

While the Red Wings have won three straight, the Sabres have dropped five of six after a 2-1 loss at Western Conference-leading St. Louis on Thursday.

Elliott helps Blues defeat Sabres

Associated Press

April 4, 2014

ST. LOUIS (AP) -- Brian Elliott stopped 24 shots, and the St. Louis Blues beat the Buffalo Sabres 2-1 on Thursday night for their franchise-record 52nd victory.

Maxim Lapierre and Brenden Morrow scored as St. Louis improved to 14-2-0 in their last 16 games against Buffalo. The previous record for wins in a season belonged to the 1999-2000 Blues, who won 51 games on its way to its last Presidents' Trophy.

Elliott's shutout string ended at 166 minutes, 33 seconds, but he still moved to 18-5-2 overall and 10-1 at home this season. He was coming off a 1-0 win at Pittsburgh when he had 33 stops.

St. Louis (52-17-7) also moved into a tie with Boston for the most points in the league with 111. The Bruins lost 4-3 to Toronto in overtime.

Lapierre scored his eighth goal of the season at 1:59 of the second period, giving St. Louis a 1-0 lead. Parked in the slot, Lapierre took a pass from Ryan Reaves and sent a wrist shot past Buffalo goalie Nathan Lieuwen, who was making his sixth career start.

It was Lapierre's first goal in 23 games. It was the first point by Reaves in 26 games.

St. Louis added its second goal at 18:08 of the third period. Morrow stuffed in a loose rebound for his 13th of the season.

Buffalo's Cody Hodgson cut the Blues' lead to 2-1 with his 18th goal at 19:04. He took a pass from Tyler Ennis and one-timed it past Elliott.

Ryan Miller, St. Louis' No. 1 goalie, got the night off after shutting out Philadelphia on Tuesday. Miller and Steve Ott, who was Buffalo's captain, came to St. Louis on March 1 in a trade that sent goaltender Jaroslav Halak and forward Chris Stewart to the Sabres.

Buffalo then dealt Halak to Washington. Stewart played two games with the Sabres before sustaining a lower-body injury that likely will keep him out for the remainder of the season.

This was Buffalo's only trip to St. Louis this season. The Blues beat the Sabres 4-1 in Buffalo on Nov. 19.

Buffalo fell to 1-13-0 against the Central Division this season.

NOTES: Buffalo LW Marcus Foligno got hurt less than two minutes into the first period and did not return. ... Blues LW Alexander Steen and D Barret Jackman sat out. Steen has an upper-body injury while Jackman has a lower-body injury. They are day to day. ... Sitting out for Buffalo was D Tyler Myers, and G Michal Neuvirth, both with lower-body injuries. ... Actor Lou Ferrigno watched the game and when the scoreboard showed a picture of the Incredible Hulk, it split the screen and Ferrigno appeared. He flexed his muscles to draw cheers from the fans.

McCabe springs into action for Sabres

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

April 4, 2014

ST. LOUIS — Talk about a tough spot. Defenseman Jake McCabe made his NHL debut for the Buffalo Sabres here Thursday night. Against the St. Louis Blues, who have been singing a sweet tune all season to get to the top of the Western Conference.

Buffalo's second-round pick in 2012 seamlessly fit in. Although he couldn't play the final five minutes of the 2-1 loss in Scottrade Center due to leg cramps, McCabe posted 23 shifts totaling 16 minutes, 20 seconds.

He was strong in his own end, joined the rush a couple of times and seemed right in sync with partner Chad Ruhwedel.

"I think I got better as the game went on," said McCabe, a 6-foot, 185-pounder. "I felt more comfortable. Early on, I was definitely gripping the stick a little hard. Throughout the game, I had more confidence in my plays, skating abilities and battles.

"It was exciting out there. I realized I could play in this league and I'm not out of place."

McCabe, 20, decided to forego his senior season at Wisconsin and signed a three-year deal Wednesday, making the rookie max of \$925,000 per season.

As expected, McCabe said the last couple days were "a real whirlwind." When Wisconsin, a top seed, was upset in the NCAA Tournament by North Dakota, McCabe turned his attention to the Sabres.

He flew from Madison to Buffalo through Chicago on Tuesday, took some testing and joined the Sabres on their flight here Wednesday.

"It's starting to set in now, being out there with the guys and putting on Buffalo gear," McCabe said. "So it's definitely exciting. ... This is a whole new level of anything I've ever been to."

"I liked him," said coach Ted Nolan. "He got a little tight at the end, probably nervous, but he played well for his first game. To come into the National Hockey League and playing against arguably one of the best teams in the league, it was a good first impression."

The Sabres played most of the game a man short after Marcus Foligno left just 1:58 into the contest with what looked like a severe right knee injury following a

collision in front of the Blues' net. Nolan said the injury is "not as 'bad bad' as we think" but that Foligno would miss the final six games.

Henrik Tallinder (lower body) and Drew Stafford (undisclosed) also missed this one, and Nolan is pessimistic about Stafford playing tonight, when the Sabres meet the Detroit Red Wings in Joe Louis Arena. A forward may be recalled from Rochester.

It was a good effort by the Sabres against a St. Louis team that's tied with Boston for the Presidents' Trophy and won its franchise-record 52nd game. St. Louis got goals from Maxim Lapierre at 1:59 of the second period and Brenden Morrow at 18:08 of the third as Nathan Lieuwen made 26 saves in the Buffalo net.

Cody Hodgson scored on a power play for the Sabres at 19:04 to snap Brian Elliott's shutout and the Sabres pressed for the equalizer but couldn't produce it.

McCabe, the franchise-record 44th player to suit up for the Sabres this season, is almost certain to get a long look over the final six games. He was drafted under the Darcy Regier regime, but new General Manager Tim Murray is certainly high on him as well.

"He said, 'You're in right away. Be simple, have confidence' kind of thing and that's what I'm doing," McCabe said. "I'm not trying to think too much out there."

Rochester coach Chadd Cassidy coached McCabe for two years when both were part of the U.S. National Team Development Program.

"I really like Jacob a lot," Cassidy said after practice Thursday in Rochester. "I thought he was a great pick. He's a guy that's got a little bit of offense. He's very similar to Brayden McNabb. He's got some offense there, but he also likes the physical game. He likes to get involved and plays the body really well."

McCabe said he had some long talks with Wisconsin coach and ex-NHLer Mike Eaves about turning pro. The Sabres' willingness to give him a max contract and NHL spot certainly helped move things along.

"Giving away that senior year was a big, big decision," he said. "It was an all-around awesome experience and I would suggest to anyone to go the college route."

McCabe also said he's felt comfortable with the Sabres since he was drafted. "This is a great organization," he said. "We've been in talks the last couple years. We've been in contact. The development camps have been great. This is the place I wanted to go. It's exciting to finally be here."

News Sports Reporter John Vogl contributed to this report.

Sabres notebook / Ott sees great future for Sabres 'kids'

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

April 3, 2014

ST. LOUIS — Steve Ott's work for the morning with his new team was done. But he wanted to make sure to stick around long enough to salute his old one.

As the Buffalo Sabres were opening their morning skate Thursday in Scottrade Center, their former captain stood on a vacant bench in the empty arena. Coach Ted Nolan came over to greet him and chat. Several former teammates, who had just started laps around the ice, made a quick right turn to stop and shake Ott's hand, too.

"When Ryan and I went to dinner with a lot of the boys last night, we reminisced on some good times," Ott said, referring to former Buffalo goalie Ryan Miller. "There's a lot of close friends I'll have for life over there. But once it's game on, game on."

"Steve's such a character guy," Nolan said. "I'm sure he adds quite a dimension to this St. Louis team. He's a very competitive soul. To go on a competitive team with Ryan Miller, St. Louis is well taken care of."

Ott has only two assists in 16 games for the Blues after collecting nine goals and 11 assists in 59 games for the Sabres. But he's not here to score. St. Louis has plenty of other guys who can do that.

"I've never been on a team with this amount of depth in my life," Ott said. "The depth is really scary. The forwards, one of the best defense groups I've ever seen and the goalies. When we get going and really play our game, it's just wave after wave stuff the way we go."

Ott said he and Miller were immediately welcomed into what was a close-knit St. Louis locker room. He has been telling St. Louis reporters since he arrived how much promise he sees in the Sabres' future and reiterated that stance Thursday, especially when discussing young defensemen Rasmus Ristolainen and Nikita Zadorov.

"The sky's the limit for those kids. I truthfully believe they're going to be phenomenal talents," Ott said. "Once I came here and you see Alex Pietrangelo, Jay Bouwmeester and Kevin Shattenkirk and see the level these guys are playing at, then you look back and say, 'Wow, that Zadorov kid and Ristolainen are pretty good players at that young age.'"

"Wait until they put 5-6 years on them like these guys have. Watching how they develop in the NHL is going to be scary."

Asked to reflect on his time in Buffalo, Ott said he was proud to get the chance to wear the “C” on his sweater.

“If I could help just one guy on the team or he took one thing from me, I felt I did my job,” he said. “They’ve got a lot of great kids over there who are going to be great hockey players for years to come in this league.”

...

Big winger Chris Stewart, out since suffering what the Sabres expected to be a season-ending ankle injury March 6 at Tampa Bay, was a surprise participant in the morning skate and now thinks he’ll play again this year.

“He’s way ahead,” said Nolan. “We thought for sure he wouldn’t be touching the ice until mid-summer. That shows you kind of the rehab he’s been getting by our medical team.”

“The training staff has been working wonders so far,” Stewart said. “You get traded, you get hurt and they’re on a two-week road trip and you’re alone in Buffalo. You’re kind of down. This is the stuff you miss. Locker room camaraderie, joking around with the boys.”

Stewart was KO’d by Tampa goalie Anders Lindback, who bowled right into his ankle as they were chasing a loose puck that would have been a breakaway. Think of it as the reverse Milan Lucic.

“They try to protect the goalies at all costs. Next time, I’m going to probably keep my head down and go through him,” Stewart said. “I came out on the short end of the stick. Next time I’m not going to err on the side of caution.”

...

A stormy night in Missouri featured tornado warnings that had arena officials on edge and ushers preparing to evacuate spectators and media to safety areas.

Late in the second period, an announcement was made over the public address system about the weather and a scoreboard message instructed fans to stay in their seats away from glass walls in the concourse. There were 75-mph winds, hail and heavy rain but no twisters downtown. Loud thunder booms outside were audible during play.

It was similar to what happened in the morning. Around 5:30 a.m., the Sabres’ traveling party had been roused from their rooms at the downtown Westin hotel by tornado sirens. Guests at the property across from Busch Stadium were instructed to go to the basement but no twister struck. There was, however, a small one that caused some damage in the first-ring suburb of University City.

“You usually get fire alarms but never get tornado warnings,” Nolan said. “It was certainly something different.”

“Millsy and I are up in an apartment right now and Millsy said I wasn’t in the basement sitting beside him,” joked Ott, referring to Miller’s nickname.

“So I think he was hiding for cover. I’m kind of used to that Southern, Midwest weather from Dallas.”

...

A smiling Nolan, when asked if he was disappointed Miller wasn’t starting in goal for the Blues, “Not at all. We’ll save that for another day. I’m just glad he’s going to do the job with St. Louis.”

...

Nolan said Matt Hackett will play goal for the Sabres tonight in Detroit, and Hackett will be greeted by the return of one of the NHL’s top playmakers.

Pavel Datsyuk will play for the Red Wings, ending a five-week absence nursing a left knee that has nagged him since December. Veteran Daniel Alfredsson (back), who hasn’t skated in four days, will try this morning and could also return.

Grigorenko, Armia get AHL seasoning

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

April 3, 2014

ROCHESTER — After experiencing the NHL twice and getting a taste of the American Hockey League, Mikhail Grigorenko had no doubt he was above junior hockey. But when the Sabres sent him back to Quebec in January, the prospect had a decision to make.

“I could go out there and play really hard and try to score as many goals as I can – or just go out there and chill,” Grigorenko said Thursday as a smile spread across his face. “I chose to go out there and do my best.”

Grigorenko, as expected, dominated in Quebec. He totaled 16 goals and 48 points in 28 games, numbers bolstered by an impressive run of 10 goals and 35 points in the final 17 appearances.

“It still takes some time to adjust because it’s different hockey and a little slower,” the 19-year-old said. “In the NHL and AHL, you don’t possess the puck that much. It’s more skating and passing, but there it’s different. You keep the puck, no one pressures you. At the beginning I was passing and skating, and I wasn’t able to get as many points as I did at the end.”

Buffalo, however, did not send Grigorenko to junior solely for stats. The Sabres didn’t feel the 2012 first-round pick belonged in their lineup, and they wanted him to develop a better work ethic and establish a two-way game. So how was the experience?

“It was better than sitting in the press box,” he said. “I was battling really hard, which is what the coaches mentioned in Quebec.”

With his junior team eliminated from the playoffs, Grigorenko is back in Rochester. He played two postseason games for the Amerks last year, and he made his regular-season debut Wednesday. He had an assist and two shots in a 5-2 win over Syracuse, the Amerks’ first victory in 10 games.

He wants to keep it up for the final eight outings because he wants to be back in Buffalo.

“I’m going to work in the summer and hope this AHL experience is going to help me a lot next year,” Grigorenko said. “I hope to have a good preseason and stay with the Sabres. Every player wants to play in the NHL.”

While Grigorenko looked comfortable and confident leaning against the wall in Blue Cross Arena, a fellow top prospect is still looking to find himself.

Joel Armia, the top pick in 2011 and considered the best sniper in the organization, has just seven goals and 25 points in 49 games with the Amerks. Folks hoped for more during the Finnish winger's first season in North America.

"He shows signs," Amerks coach Chadd Cassidy said. "Still needs to build his consistency. He's just got to keep building it up."

"He's a confidence player. He's a guy that when things are going well and he gets rolling, he'll dominate. He's just got to make sure that he puts the work in to dominate like that every night. I think that's what a lot of young players struggle with."

Cassidy made Armia a healthy scratch recently, and the winger has responded with a goal and three points in the last two games.

"It's been up and down, but right now I feel pretty good," said Armia, who broke his hand in training camp and struggled with the injury until January. "I haven't played that bad after I got my finger fixed. The injury has played a lot of part in it. You couldn't start the season, and I wasn't 100 percent healthy."

In addition to the injury, Armia has had to handle a new country, language, lifestyle and brand of hockey. Like Grigorenko, he's also had to learn that players don't get to just play in the NHL. They have to earn it, which is what rookie defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen found out after getting sent from Buffalo to Rochester and working his way back.

"Like any kid, when you get drafted what do you think?" Cassidy said. "I don't care if you're first round or seventh round, you think you're going to play in the NHL. You're ready."

"I think the best thing for Rasmus was coming here and figuring out not just how hard that league is but how hard it is here. If you can't do it every night here, you're definitely not doing it every night there. He had to build that up, and it's the same with Joel. They've just got to learn to do it here every night, and then that transition's going to be a lot easier."

Datsyuk set to return for Red Wings vs. Sabres

By Mike Battaglino

NHL.com

April 4, 2014

SABRES (21-46-9) at RED WINGS (36-26-14)

TV: MSG-B, BELL TV, FS-D+

Last 10: Buffalo 2-7-1; Detroit 6-3-1

Season series: The Detroit Red Wings defeated the Buffalo Sabres twice before Thanksgiving, outscoring them 5-2. They play twice in five days.

Big story: Forward Pavel Datsyuk will be in the Red Wings' lineup for the first time since Feb. 27. He missed 16 games with a left-knee injury; Detroit was 8-6-2 without him.

"It's been long time [not playing]. I forget I'm a hockey player," Datsyuk told the team website Thursday. "[It's] exciting to come back."

Team Scope:

Sabres: Buffalo lost 2-1 at the St. Louis Blues on Thursday, starting a stretch of six straight games against likely Stanley Cup Playoff participants.

Defenseman Jake McCabe, who signed Wednesday, made his NHL debut. He's the 44th player to get in a game for Buffalo this season, a franchise record.

"I've just been here for a couple weeks, but it's been up and down," forward Nicolas Deslauriers, who made his NHL debut March 7, told MSG Network. "A lot of guys are coming in. Everybody's just trying to pitch in, and I think everybody's doing a good job."

If the Sabres do not win out, they will have their fewest wins in a full season since they were 16-43-19 (ties) in 1971-72, their second in the NHL. Buffalo was 27-45-10 in 2002-03.

Goalie Matt Hackett will start after Nathan Lieuwen made 26 saves Thursday.

Red Wings: Datsyuk is likely to play wing on a line with two players who recently returned from injury: Darren Helm (concussion) and Justin Abdelkader (finger).

"I wouldn't spend too much time worrying about the lines in practice today," coach Mike Babcock said. "I've still got 24 hours to decide what I'm doing. I think [Pavel] will probably start on the wing, to be honest with you, because that's what

he normally likes to do when he comes back. I'll talk to him tomorrow morning and kind of get a read on where we're at."

Forward David Legwand was moved back to a line with Johan Franzen and Gustav Nyquist.

Detroit, coming off a 3-2 win against the Boston Bruins on Wednesday, its third in a row, holds the first Eastern Conference wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Who's hot: Sabres forward Tyler Ennis has three points in the past two games. Forward Cody Hodgson has a three-game point streak, and forward Ville Leino has an assist in two straight. ... Nyquist has a three-game goal streak after a six-game streak ended; he has 12 goals in that span, 28 for the season. Forward Tomas Tatar has four two-point games in the past six. Legwand has three points in the past two games. Goalie Jimmy Howard has a .935 save percentage winning his past two starts.

Injury report: Sabres forward Marcus Foligno (lower body) was injured on his first shift Thursday and did not return. Defenseman Henrik Tallinder (lower body) did not play. Forward Chris Stewart (ankle) skated with the team and may play again this season. Forwards Torrey Mitchell (undisclosed), Kevin Porter (lower body), Drew Stafford (undisclosed) and Zenon Konopka (back), defensemen Alexander Sulzer (upper body) and Tyler Myers (midsection) and goalies Michal Neuvirth (lower body) and Jhonas Enroth (lower body) are out. ... Red Wings forward Daniel Alfredsson (back) stayed off the ice for a fourth consecutive day, but Babcock said he may be available. Forwards Daniel Cleary (knee), Mikael Samuelsson (shoulder), Stephen Weiss (hernia) and Henrik Zetterberg (back) and defenseman Jonathan Ericsson (finger fracture) are out.

HAMILTON: Sabres McCabe seemed calm

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

April 3, 2014

St. Louis, MO (WGR 550) -- In the first period rookie Jake McCabe did not look out of place at all.

He didn't seem all that nervous in his first NHL game. Early in the first period, McCabe joined the rush and planted himself in front and just missed a pass through the crease. He hustled to get back and was never out of the play.

Another shot got through and was tipped by Matt D'Agostini and it went wide of Brian Elliott.

I was impressed with McCabe's battles against Max Lapierre, Dmitrij Jaskin and Magnus Paajarvi. He took a hit from Paajarvi in the last minute, but got up and stayed with him right to the net. I think it was a good start for McCabe playing with Chad Ruhwedel. Through 20 minutes, he had nine shifts for 6:42 with one hit.

"[McCabe] was very steady," said Nathan Lieuwen. "He just went out there and played his game, and that's exactly what we needed him to do. He was awesome."

McCabe wasn't quite as active in the second period, but I did like his outlet passes. His vision was good and the passes were tape-to-tape. He had a real good one to Johan Larsson in the second. I also loved how he read a play at center ice, stepped up and hit Max Lapierre and got himself back into position.

"I think I got better as the game went on, I got more comfortable," said McCabe. "Early on, I was definitely gripping the stick a little hard. Throughout the game, I had more confidence in my plays, my skating ability and the battles. It was exciting out there. We were right there. We were right there all game."

After two periods McCabe had 17 shifts for 13:00, and finished with 16:20 total over 23 shifts. He left the game late in the third period, but said afterward that he was being bothered by leg cramps.

I thought the game was more than a solid first outing for the 20-year-old defenseman. He stayed cool under pressure, moved the puck well and showed pretty good vision and very little nervousness. That's why the article is so brief, very little to talk about when a defenseman plays under control.

"I liked [McCabe]," said Ted Nolan. "He got a little tightened up at the end, probably nervous, but I really liked him. He played well for his first game. To come into the National Hockey League in your first game and play against arguably one of the best teams in the league...that was a good first impression."

Blues Hold Off Sabres 2-1

By Dan Cave

WGR 550

April 3, 2014

The Blues set a new franchise mark with 52 wins on Thursday, beating the Sabres 2-1. Cody Hodgson scored Buffalo's lone goal -- a late power play tally -- and Nathan Lieuwen stopped 26 shots in the loss.

The Blues opened the scoring about two minutes into the second period on Maxim Lapierre's eighth goal of the season. The St. Louis forward let a shot rip from the slot and beat Lieuwen to put St. Louis ahead 1-0. Brenden Morrow made it 2-0 with just 1:52 remaining in regulation. Morrow was credited with the goal after his rebound attempt slid over the goalline following a scramble in front of the net.

Cody Hodgson's power play goal less than a minute later cut the deficit in half, but the Blues held on for the win. Elliott made 24 saves in the victory, getting the start over Ryan Miller. Former Sabres captain Steve Ott was held to just one shot on net with zero hits. Derek Roy registered two shots over 13:52 of ice time.

The Sabres travel to Detroit on Friday for a 7:30 p.m. start against the Red Wings. Hear the call on WGR 550 and the Buffalo Sabres Radio Network.

1st Period

Goals

None

Penalties

None

2nd Period

Goals

1:59 - STL - Maxim Lapierre (8) (Ryan Reaves)

Penalties

3:57 - BUF - Brian Flynn (2 min., interference)

8:14 - STL - Brenden Morrow (2 min., high-sticking)

11:08 - STL - Vladimir Sobotka (2 min., holding)

3rd Period

Goals

18:08 - STL - Brenden Morrow (13) (Vladimir Sobotka, Jaden Schwartz)

19:04 - BUF - Cody Hodgson (18) (PPG) (Tyler Ennis, Ville Leino)

Penalties

3:12 - BUF - Matt D'Agostini (2 min., slashing)

18:50 - STL - David Backes (2 min., interference)

Goaltending

BUF - Nathan Lieuwen (26 saves, 28 shots)

STL - Brian Elliott (24 saves, 25 shots)

Power Plays

BUF - 1 of 3

STL - 0 of 2

Three Stars

1.) STL - Brian Elliott (24 saves)

2.) STL - Maxim Lapierre (1 G, 0 A)

3.) STL - Brenden Morrow (1 G, 0 A)

Two former Sabres are enjoying their new team

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

April 3, 2014

St. Louis, MO (WGR 550) -- Ryan Miller won't be in goal against his old team tonight in St. Louis. Miller said this was his coach's original thought and he agrees, "The schedule is a little bit strange and I wanted to come back and play Philly. The way Hitch setup the games ahead, he had me playing Philly and not playing Buffalo, so it wasn't something where I thought I needed to challenge the coach, so just looking ahead, it would've been nice to play, but it was also good to catch up with some of the guys last night, just having a quiet dinner, so that's a positive in itself to catch up with friends."

Miller has played 14 games for St. Louis going 10-3-1 with a 2.01 goals against and .920 save percentage. He's enjoyed his short time there so far, "It's been good, a positive experience. It's a good group of guys, a good organization, we're playing good hockey so it's been fun."

You would think by his numbers and playing on a good team it would be pretty easy, but Miller said he's had his moments, "There's been some moments for adjustment, there's been a lot of new things to learn, but I'm just trying to enjoy it and take it as a new adventure."

Miller likes a lot of communication on the ice. He said that's one of the adjustments he's talking about, "Just getting familiar with the guys on the ice, the kind of style the team's playing, you have to get up to speed with everybody."

Steve Ott still hasn't scored with the Blues and has just two assists. Ott was a big supporter of the Sabres in his brief time here and always said he would've like to have stayed. He was sad when he left, but going to a team that's winning is always a plus. Ott also enjoyed the time he had last night to catch up, "Ryan and myself went to dinner with a lot of the boys last night and reminisced on some good times and there are a lot of good, close friends that I'll have for life over there, but when the game's on, it's game on and I wouldn't expect and less from them than to play me hard and I hope they would expect the same from me."

One thing Ott believes is the Sabres are doing things the right way. He said, "The sky's the limit for those kids, I really, truthfully believe they're going to be phenomenal talents. Once I came here and I see the Pietrangelo's and the Bouwmeester's and the Shattenkirk's and see the level that these guys are playing at and then you look back and say wow, that Zadorov kid and that Ristolainen at that age, they're pretty good players at that young age, wait until they put five, six years on them and watch how they develop in the NHL is going to be scary for those guys."

It's a draft-a-palooza for the Sabres

By Howard Simon

WGR 550

April 3, 2014

Tonight's game with St. Louis got me thinking about the draft because the outcome of the Blues season will have an impact on the Sabres off season.

In case you forgot, when the Sabres traded Ryan Miller to St. Louis, the deal included an important condition. The Sabres get the Blues first round pick in this year's draft if they reach the Western Conference Finals (and Miller plays most of the minutes). Even if the Blues don't get that far in the playoffs, Buffalo would still get the pick, which will be at the bottom of the round, if Miller re-signs or is traded before the draft.

If any of those conditions are met, the Sabres will have two first round picks this year. They might have three depending on what the Islanders do with the pick due the Sabres from the Thomas Vanek deal.

As miserable as this season has been, if the Sabres can take advantage of their stockpile of draft picks, they can set themselves up for a long run of success.

Thanks to former General Manager Darcy Regier and current GM Tim Murray, the team has done something no other franchise has done in 40 years. When you take into account the last two drafts and add in the next two, the Sabres have a total of 17 picks in the first or second round. It will be 18 if the conditions are met from the Ryan Miller trade.

No franchise has had that high a number of early picks in the draft since the Montreal Canadiens in the 1970's.

Here is a recap:

In 2012, Buffalo used first round choices on Mikhail Grigorenko and Zemgus Girgensons. The second round pick was Jake McCabe, who will make his Sabres debut tonight.

Last year's draft produced Rasmus Ristolainen and Nikita Zadorov in the first round with J.T. Compher, Connor Hurley and Justin Bailey coming in round two.

In this year's draft, the Sabres have their own first round pick but might have two more from the Islanders and Blues. Buffalo has three picks in round two.

For the 2015 draft, the Sabres have their own first round selection and another from St. Louis and a third if the Islanders defer. The Sabres have two second round choices as well.

Add it all up and its eight first rounders and nine second rounders for sure with the possibility of one more first rounder.

This is also unprecedented as far as franchise history goes. The Sabres have never had more than 14 early picks over a four year stretch of the draft.

Sabres have more injuries on D

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

April 3, 2014

St. Louis, MO (WGR 550) -- The Sabres have more juggling to do thanks to injuries.

Newly signed Jake McCabe is going to play in his first NHL game. Ted Nolan said Henrik Tallinder is out while Mike Weber and Drew Stafford are game time decisions. McCabe said, "I'll have some nerves, that's for sure. I went out for the pregame skate and I'm sure my heart rate was getting up there. This is a whole new level than I've ever been to so, it's exciting."

Nic Delauriers is back so we'll see who's scratched.

Nathan Lieuwen will start his second straight game. Nolan said Matt Hackett likely to start Friday in Detroit. Lieuwen is 1-2-0 with a 2.70 goals against and .913 save percentage.

The Sabres win over New Jersey was their first in five games.

Chris Stewart skated with the team for the first time this morning. Nolan said the winger's ahead of schedule, but he won't play unless he's 100 percent healthy.

The Sabres were awoken in their hotel this morning at 5:45 due to a tornado warning. Everybody had to leave their rooms and go to the basement. Nothing hit in the city, but there was damage in the suburbs.

The Blues at 109 points are on top of the Western Conference and are one point in back of Boston for the President's trophy.

Former Sabres Steve Ott, Derek Roy and Jordan Leopold will play while Ryan Miller will backup Brian Elliott.

Miller played against Philadelphia and got a 31 save shootout shutout. He and Ken Hitchcock thought it was more important for him to play against the Flyers and then this weekend's back to back against Colorado and Chicago.

Ott has not yet scored for St. Louis. In 16 games he has no goals and two assists.

Leopold has been hurt most of the season and has only played 24 games.

In 70 games Roy has nine goals and 28 assists for 37 points.

Elliott's last game was also a shutout as he made 33 saves to blank the Penguins in Pittsburgh. The former Senator is 17-5-2 with a 1.97 goals against and .921 save percentage.

The Blues have won four of five games.

For St. Louis, Alexander Steen has three goals and four assists in his last four games.

Captain David Backes has seven points in five games.

T.J. Oshie has six points in four games.

SABRES PUT IN STRONG EFFORT AGAINST LEAGUE'S BEST

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

April 4, 2014

ST. LOUIS – The Buffalo Sabres hung with the National Hockey League's best Thursday night and while they were unable to come away with a victory, there were a lot of things in the game they were proud of.

The St. Louis Blues defeated the Sabres 2-1 at Scottrade Center with a late third-period goal by Brendan Morrow proving to be the difference.

Rookie Nathan Lieuwen made 26 saves in his second straight start for Buffalo while Brian Elliott turned aside 24 shots for the Blues.

Cody Hodgson scored the Sabres lone goal, breaking the shutout with less than a minute to play in regulation.

"It's tough to lose that way but considering all the stuff we've been through this year and other games we've played, this was one of our better games," Hodgson said.

Sabres coach Ted Nolan liked the effort from his club, particularly how they've responded to all of the injuries that have hit the team over the past few weeks. They lost Marcus Foligno to a lower-body injury on his first shift of the game. It will likely end his season.

"That was a real gusty performance and I'm really proud of the way the guys competed," Nolan said.

St. Louis is battling for the President's Trophy and another two points certainly helps their cause. The Sabres, on the other hand, are eliminated from the playoff picture but still have a lot to play for.

"Considering that's the best team in the League right there, that's a heck of an effort," Lieuwen said. "I thought we were right there with them and we could've taken this game to overtime."

Buffalo has put forth three consistent efforts as a response from an effort in Nashville that no one was happy with.

"The one thing our team is starting to do is we are to learn how to battle," Nolan said. "Once we get going here, we're going to be OK."

Nolan was also pleased with how some of the younger players on the roster have responded to the bigger roles that they have had to fill. He was particularly happy with Hodgson, Tyler Ennis and Rasmus Ristolainen.

“You really like the young guys are starting to respond,” Nolan said. “It’s really good to see some of those young guys taking some leadership responsibility because that’s where it’s going.”

Offensive chances were pretty limited throughout the game. After two periods, the shot total favored St. Louis 16-13. The Sabres did, however, match the Blues’ physical tone for much of the game.

“They come at you. They play a physical-type game, too, not just big guys that are out there. They finish their checks and they come hard,” Hodgson said. “I thought we did a good job keeping pressure on them, trying to keep the puck in their end and making plays down there.

St. Louis took a 1-0 lead 1:59 into the second period when Maxime Lapierre capitalized in the slot from a corner feed by Ryan Reaves.

The Blues took a 2-0 lead with 1:52 to play when Brendan Morrow capitalized on a miscue behind the Buffalo net. Lieuwen went to play the puck, but with the forecheck coming, scrambled to get back into his crease. He made the initial save, but Morrow was able to put the puck home.

Lieuwen will look to improve his puck-handling skills.

“I tried to do my best to get back in the net, but I thought my puck play tonight was pretty poor. It’s definitely one thing in my game I need to work on but as far as stopping the puck was concerned, I felt really good tonight.”

With 55.1 seconds remaining in the game, Buffalo found the back of the net while on the power play. The Sabres called a timeout in order to set up a play with Lieuwen on the bench in favor of the extra attacker. In the 6-on-4 situation, Ennis wired a cross-ice pass to Hodgson who one-timed the puck past Elliott for his 18th goal of the season.

Foligno landed awkwardly in front of the Blues net and had to be helped off the ice 1:58 into the contest. He did not return to the game due to what was announced as a lower-body injury.

Drew Stafford and Henrik Tallinder joined the Sabres injured list as well. Neither took the ice for the morning skate and both missed the game against St. Louis. They, along with Mike Weber, were considered game-time decisions but only Weber suited up.

Nolan hopes Stafford is ready to play in Detroit on Friday but said they’ll likely have to call someone up from the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League.

The Sabres are also without goaltenders Jhonas Enroth and Michal Neuvirth, defensemen Tyler Myers and Alexander Sulzer and forwards Chris Stewart, Zenon Konopka and Torrey Mitchell. Stewart skated with the team for the first time Thursday morning, but is not yet ready to return.

“I actually thought we pulled together really well considering everything and Marcus going down. No one wants to see that,” Hodgson said. “We had a depleted lineup already but that looked really bad for Marcus and it was good for the team to band together and try to pull one out. I thought we played pretty well too pretty the whole game.”

With Stafford and Tallinder out, Hodgson and Ennis served along with Christian Ehrhoff as alternate captains.

Defenseman Jake McCabe, a second-round pick of the Sabres in the 2012 NHL Draft, made his NHL debut and logged 16:20 of ice time. He said he was able to settle in a bit as the game wore on, but missed his last few shifts due to cramping.

“Early on, I was definitely gripping the stick a little hard but throughout the game, I had more confidence in my plays and my skating ability and the battles,” he said. “It was exciting out there. And to be right there, we were right there all game.”

Buffalo continues its three-game road trip with a game against the Detroit Red Wings on Friday at Joe Louis Arena at 7:30 p.m.

McCABE READY TO DEBUT AGAINST BLUES

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

April 3, 2014

ST. LOUIS – The Buffalo Sabres are facing more injuries to their defensive corps and it looks like the situation will lead to Jake McCabe making his NHL debut Thursday night against the St. Louis Blues.

Mike Weber and Henrik Tallinder did not partake in Buffalo's morning skate at Scottrade Center. Right wing Drew Stafford also did not skate.

Sabres coach Ted Nolan declared all three as game-time decisions, but made it sound like Tallinder is the least likely of the three to play. With McCabe and Nicolas Deslauriers available and John Scott able to play both forward and defense, they should be able to field a full squad.

The Sabres announced Wednesday that McCabe, 20, had signed a three-year, entry-level contract and he joined the team for its three-game road trip that starts at 8 p.m. EST in St. Louis on Thursday.

“Yeah, I think I’ll have some nerves, that’s for sure. Even out in the pregame skate, I’m sure my heart rate was getting up there,” McCabe said after the morning skate. “This is a whole new level than anything obviously I’ve ever been to so it’s exciting. The guys have been great so far. I can’t wait to get out there tonight.”

McCabe, at 6-feet, 195 pounds, just wrapped up his junior season with the University of Wisconsin. He by registering a career-high 25 points (8+17) through 33 games and earned first-team All-Big Ten honors.

His point total was fifth-best for the Badgers, who captured the Big Ten conference tournament championship, and fourth-best among defensemen in the Big Ten. In 2013, he served as captain of Team USA at the IIHF World Junior Championship in Ufa, Russia, where the United States took home the gold medal.

“He’s going to be full of energy and full of enthusiasm, but especially against the first team he plays against, St. Louis Blues, they’re the cream of the crop of the National Hockey League right now,” Nolan said. “So he can’t be admiring his passes and he can’t be going back on a normal college speed. He has to jump right in with them with the best in the League.

Forgoing his senior season at Wisconsin was not one McCabe took lightly. He had discussions with both his family and the Badgers coaching staff, including coach Mike Eaves. All supported his decision to go pro.

“I think giving away that senior year was a big, big decision. I can’t talk enough about Coach Eaves and the coaching staff there,” he said. “It was an all-around awesome experience and I would suggest anyone to go the college route.”

Injuries to Tyler Myers and Alexander Sulzer have required Buffalo to field a young crop of defensemen on the blue line. Rookies Rasmus Ristolainen and Chad Ruhwedel are already up with the team on an emergency basis.

“There’s quite a few young guys up right now so it’s fun just talking to them, seeing how things work,” McCabe said. “The veteran guys have been great as well, kind of showing me the ropes. It’s been a welcoming experience so far.”

Buffalo’s schedule down the stretch isn’t an easy one. Following the game against St. Louis, they’ll face Detroit twice, Philadelphia, the Rangers, Boston and the Islanders to close out the season. McCabe said he checked out the schedule almost immediately.

“I looked there right way. The only way I’m looking at it is, it’s exciting to get my feet wet a little bit and see what it takes to play up here at this level and work my butt off over the summer to try to stay up at this level,” he said.

McCabe will wear No. 29.

Nathan Lieuwen will start in goal against the Blues and Nolan plans on playing Matt Hackett in Detroit on Friday.

Lieuwen earned his first career in a shootout against the Devils on Tuesday.

“He has to try to do the extraordinary thing again and that’s how you make a name for yourself,” Nolan said. “We’re putting a kid in a real tough situation, but we’ll see how he responds.”

The Sabres received an unexpected early-morning wakeup call on Thursday. At around 5:30 a.m., a tornado warning was issued for the St. Louis area. Everyone at the team’s hotel was then instructed to head down to the basement until the warning expired. By 6 a.m., everyone was back in their rooms.

“You usually get fire alarms at that time in the morning, never a tornado warning,” Nolan said. “It was something different but I think everybody went to bed, I hope half-decently.”

Chris Stewart made the trip and skated with the team for the first time since sustaining a lower-body injury on March 6 against Tampa Bay. It was thought that he could miss the rest of the season, but he's progressing ahead of schedule and there's a chance he could see some game action before the season ends on April 13.

Stewart was acquired by the Sabres on Feb. 28 as part of the deal that sent Ryan Miller and Steve Ott to the Blues.

He said he's been skating for the past five or six days and looks forward to pushing harder every day. What he didn't realize was how much he missed being around his teammates.

"You get traded and then you get hurt and then they're on a two-week road trip so you're sitting there in Buffalo by yourself for a little bit," he said. "You're kind of down and this is the stuff you miss – just the locker room camaraderie and joking around with the boys and the chirps here and there and just having fun. It's the little things that you miss and you don't think about."

He was also able to meet up with some old friends on the Blues. Kevin Shattenkirk invited Stewart over for dinner, but things didn't go accordingly to plan.

"You can tell he's a bachelor; He was out of propane five minutes into the barbecue," Stewart said. "[So] he put it in the oven. He said that's what they used to do in the college days so it must have been a [Boston University] thing."

Bluenotes: Stewart says he was 'voted off the island' in Miller trade

By Dan O'Neill

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

April 3, 2014

There were lots of surprises at Scottrade Center on Thursday morning. Perhaps the biggest, literally and figuratively, was the presence of Chris Stewart.

The 6-foot-2, 230-pound Stewart was traded to the Buffalo Sabres with goaltender Jaroslav Halak on March 1, with the Blues getting goalie Ryan Miller and center Steve Ott in return.

Not that long ago, Stewart was on the cover of local publications, considered to be the Blues' next 40-goal scorer.

Now he has shuffled off to Buffalo and was in town for the Sabres' game Thursday night against the Blues. He was stunned by the trade, but has come to accept it.

"It was pretty plain and simple," Stewart said. "They wanted the big goalie and I got voted off the island. I was the casualty. It (stinks), but that's the business. I had a lot of good times here in the 3½ years. I made good friends, but I'm just trying to turn the page and I'm in Buffalo now and excited for the opportunity.

"I was a little disappointed at first. You go from being ranked to win the Stanley Cup to being out of the playoffs in a day. Initially it (stunk), but I wasn't necessarily happy with my role on the team. I'm happy with my role here and I'm going to get an opportunity to play big minutes and be the player I can be."

That is, if he plays any minutes. Stewart was not expected to be on the trip with the Sabres. He played just two games for Buffalo before suffering a high-ankle sprain.

It was speculated he would not play again this season. But there he was on Tuesday, skating on familiar ice.

It represented Stewart's first actual practice with the Sabres. He didn't play against the Blues, but there is a chance he'll be back before the season ends.

"The training staff has been working wonders and I'm ahead of schedule," Stewart said.

Stewart's presence wasn't the only surprise Thursday.

The Blues' Barret Jackman and Alexander Steen missed the skate and were out of the lineup. Jackman's spot was taken by Jordan Leopold, who was playing for the first time suffering a high-ankle sprain on Feb. 8.

Steen's spot was taken Dmitrij Jaskin, who started on a line with David Backes and T.J. Oshie.

Going into Nixon White House mode for the playoffs, coach Ken Hitchcock revealed a limited amount of information on the casualties.

He indicated Steen has an upper-body injury and Jackman has a lower-body injury. The ailments are not considered serious. But how serious is open to interpretation. The situation is fluid.

"We'll see whether they're going to play on the weekend or not," Hitchcock said. "They're not going to miss a lot of time, but they're going to miss some time here."

Leopold missed 18 games because of the ankle injury, on top of 26 games he missed because of a hand injury. As the Blues played their 76th game, Leopold was participating in his 25th.

"It's been a long year and I am excited to go out and play a hockey game," Leopold said. "I haven't played a lot of games. To go out and build on something would be good."

Blues claim team-record 52nd victory

By Dan O'Neill

St. Louis Post-Dispatch

April 3, 2014

The Blues defeated the Buffalo Sabres 2-1 in front of 16,146 at Scottrade Center on Thursday, becoming the winningest regular-season team in the 46-year history of the franchise.

The victory also pulled the Blues even in points with Boston atop the NHL standings. They have played one less game than the Bruins.

With its 52nd victory, the club (52-17-7) climbed over the 1999-2000 Blues with six games still to play. Keep in mind, the NHL did not adopt the overtime shootout concept until 2005. Before that, ties were not broken.

This edition of the Blues has nine wins in shootouts and 11 in overtimes. The 1999-2000 team, coached by Joel Quenneville and anchored by the dynamic defensive duo of Al MacInnis and Chris Pronger, had five overtime wins and 11 ties in its record.

“I think it’s a nice record but it’s an improper evaluation,” Blues coach Ken Hitchcock said, mindful of the environmental change. “I don’t think it’s fair to that group that got those 51 wins.

“Because I know that group, they were not fun to play against. I coached against those (Blues) teams that got the big points, and they were awesome teams here, awesome.”

The 1999-2000 team also finished with a franchise record 114 points. These Blues are at 111 points. Interestingly enough, if they can beat the visiting Colorado Avalanche on Saturday, they would play in Chicago on Sunday with a chance to surpass the points mark against Quenneville’s Blackhawks.

One is hard-pressed to get a member of the organization to crow about the record win total. The mission this spring has only a loose association with regular-season achievements. As “awesome” as the 1999-2000 team was, it is most notable for two things: It won the Presidents’ Trophy for the best regular-season record in the NHL, and it was eliminated by San Jose in the opening round of the playoffs. The Blues appreciate the ambiguity.

“(The record) is a special thing, but tomorrow it really means nothing,” said goaltender Brian Elliott, who made 24 saves Thursday. “We have to keep going, get better tomorrow and get ready for these last few games.”

The Blues set the record on a night in which they played the Sabres, a team with just 21 wins in 76 games — a team much like the one with which the Blues began their ascent in 2005-06. That team won 21 games, then took defenseman Erik Johnson with the No. 1 pick in the NHL draft.

The Blues got goals Thursday from Maxim Lapierre and Brenden Morrow. Elliott, whose last start was a 1-0 victory over Pittsburgh, got to within 55 seconds of another shutout. But Cody Hodgson's power-play goal in the final minute spoiled that. Still, Elliott has stopped 77 of the last 80 shots he has faced.

"I've been around Brian for three years and this is the best I've ever seen him play," Hitchcock said. "He's playing terrific and I'm really happy for him.

"He's a great example of what happens when you work and compete, focus and give value every day."

Perhaps because it was the lowly Sabres, perhaps it was uninspired Blues, but the action lacked the drama that characterized the Blues' 1-0 shootout victory over Philadelphia on Tuesday.

The teams skated through a penalty-free, excitement-neutered first period that featured nine shots, six by the Blues, and no goals.

The Blues broke the spell with a goal some two minutes into the second. Ryan Reaves skated around the back of the Buffalo net and fed Lapierre, who rifled a shot past goaltender Nathan Lieuwen. It was Lapierre's eighth of the season and first in 23 games. Reaves got the assist, his first point in 26 games.

The points notwithstanding, Lapierre shared a consensus with his teammates. They weren't happy with the performance.

"I think if we're pretty honest with ourselves, we got a goal, but we can play way better," Lapierre said of his line, his team. "There's no way we're happy with our effort tonight. We're going to have to fix it."

With 8:52 to play in the second period, some loose play in the Blues' end allowed Brian Flynn a wide-open chance in front. But Elliott made the save of the night, sprawling to rob Flynn.

As the period ended, a severe weather warning was given and fans were encouraged to stay in their seats. It's possible some might have dosed off anyway.

A 1-0 lead going into the third certainly favored the Blues. They are 33-0-4 when leading after two.

But as time evaporated in the final segment, it appeared that one goal was going to be it. Then with 1:52 remaining, Morrow banged in a shot from a scramble in front for his 13th goal of the season.

Right around the same time, Toronto completed a 4-3 overtime win over the Bruins and the night got even better for the Blues.

Sabres TV ratings continue slide as nightmare season nears end

By Alan Pergament

Buffalo News

April 3, 2014

How low can the Buffalo Sabres go?

We're not talking about in the National Hockey League standings. They can't get any lower than 30th place out of 30 teams.

We're referring to the team's television ratings.

After the NHL lockout ended in January of 2013, 13 of the Sabres' first 23 TV games last season had ratings of 10 or higher. The Sabres reportedly averaged about an 8 rating in the shortened season for games carried on the Madison Square Garden Network.

Because of this season's pitiful start under former Coach Ron Rolston, TV ratings dropped early in the season to average about a 6 rating. There was a brief surge when Ted Nolan was named interim coach. His first game against Toronto had a 10.3 rating, the second game the next night a 7.9 rating.

But as the nightmare season thankfully nears its end, the Sabres are getting ratings that would appear to be at or near the historically low end since the advent of people meters in the Buffalo market in 2000. I say "appear" because statistics from all the years are unavailable.

Things have gotten so bad that the Sabres could have used a boost from St. Louis Thursday night if the Blues had used ex Sabre Ryan Miller in goal instead of his backup. Yes, it has come to the point that former Sabres may be the one ratings draw for the team.

Over the 10 games before the game in St. Louis Thursday, MSG averaged a 4.6 rating, which is about a 40 percent drop from the overall average a year ago.

There should be an asterisk in those figures. Three of the 10 games on the West Coast had late starts on MSG and averaged a lowly 3.3 rating. However, by comparison two West Coast shutout victories last season had ratings of 8.0 and 5.4 despite the late starts.

When the team returned from its West Coast trip this March, ratings still suffered. A March 25 game at Montreal had a 3.8 rating and a March 27 game at Nashville an incredibly low 2.5 rating.

The Sabres loss to Tampa Bay on the night former goaltender Dominik Hasek was honored had a 4.4 rating. The Hasek ceremonies before the game had a solid

2.5 rating and undoubtedly were watched by many more viewers on the team's website or via social networks after the game. I watched it via a post on Twitter.

The shootout victory over New Jersey Tuesday night had a 4.6 rating, with it hitting a high of 7.0 during the shootout when Ville Leino scored the game-winner. Many hockey purists hate the shootout, but it does deliver TV fans.

Fans aren't happy. Sponsors can't be happy. Indeed, the only people who seem to be happy about the Sabres' woes are the snarks on Twitter, who usually provide more entertainment than the games.

Advertisers most likely are asking for make goods – free ads -- for this year or reduced rates next season.

If the Sabres can't find some ways to give fans and advertisers hope next season, they risk losing even more TV viewers and fannies in the seats.

Why HARBORCENTER's Tim Hortons store matters

By Andrew Kulyk

Artvoice

April 2, 2014

Go back to February 21, 1974... The Buffalo Sabres are hosting the Atlanta Flames at Memorial Auditorium, coming home after a loss up in Toronto a night earlier. But this was no ordinary night. Hearts were heavy. Fans, players, everyone associated with the Sabres were shaken and devastated. In the wee hours of that very morning, Buffalo defenseman Tim Horton had perished in a car crash on the QEW just outside of St Catharines, Ontario while driving back from the game at Maple Leaf Gardens by himself. The grief hung throughout the Aud as people came to grips with what had happened. The players of both teams wore black armbands. Second year defenseman and Horton's line mate Jim Schoenfeld wept openly as the building descended into a moment of silence. It remains the saddest story in Sabres' history.

Horton played but 124 games in a Buffalo Sabres uniform. He tallied one goal during that time. But the mark he made on the franchise was so substantial, so indelible, his leadership willed the up and coming expansion team into the Stanley Cup playoffs in 1972-73, and cemented the love affair between a city and its hockey team which endures to this day. His retired number hangs from the rafters at First Niagara Center, as well as in Toronto's Air Canada Centre, in a city where he helped lead the Maple Leafs to four Stanley Cups in the 1960s.

Yet while Horton was putting a period on a stellar hockey career cut too short, he was also building a business, that nobody could ever believe would become a world wide brand. He and partner Ron Joyce opened their first coffee and donut shop in the 1960s in Hamilton, Ontario. Tim Horton's Donuts, took off. He opened his first American based store right here in the Buffalo area on Niagara Falls Boulevard while he was with the team. At the time of his death there were 30 locations. Fast forward to today, and the Tim Horton's Cafe and Bake Shop chain boasts a footprint all across North America and as far away as Kandahar, Afghanistan. It is a true corporate success story, and one that has many of its roots right here in Buffalo.

And that's what makes yesterday's announcement significant, that a "destination" Tim Horton's Cafe and Bake Shop will be opening at HarborCenter as part of the center's retail storefront mix.

The honoring of Horton, both as a player and businessman, is a story that should be told, and enshrined. Following the pattern that HarborCenter has put forth as they have unveiled every piece of this dynamic and exciting project, this Tim Horton's will not be your ordinary template coffee shop which one can find on any street corner in Ontario, across Canada and at locations throughout Western New York. This store will bear exhibits and displays from Horton's playing days, artifacts and memorabilia from the Aud, and other exhibits showcasing the Horton chain's corporate success story.

Local urbanists and armchair planners have watched the emergence of the HarborCenter with a bit of a wary eye and some trepidation. Issues such as the

architecture and fenestration, some opinions that the building will be nothing more than a “glorified parking ramp”, and the bridging of the structure over Perry Street have drawn criticism in some circles.

So that is why the announcement of this Tim Horton’s certainly has to be viewed as a win by those very same circles. And why not? The interior design will mimic the look and feel of the historic Erie Canal period; chairs and furniture will replicate the old Aud’s blue seats. Buffalo’s Memorial Auditorium was for sure a beloved and cherished building among local preservationists, an arena which was demolished in 2009. More good news – some of the limestone saved from the Aud will actually be used in the construction of the restaurant. Also, there will be no suburban style drive-thru, which would definitely not be appropriate for this site or this structure.

Some might decry the presence at Canalside of “corporate chains”. And what exactly is a “destination” Tim Horton’s anyway?

The best answer would be to cite a peer example. How about a “destination” Kentucky Fried Chicken?

In Corbin, Kentucky, there is a Kentucky Fried Chicken fast food restaurant, one that looks virtually identical to any one of the thousands one would find anywhere across America, and a menu which is also identical. But in Corbin, this KFC is anything but ubiquitous.

Attached to this fast food outlet is the original “Sanders Cafe”, where Colonel Harlan Sanders perfected his secret recipe that became a worldwide phenomenon. There are exhibits, artifacts, displays, even the old tables and booths, and a statue of the Colonel which makes for a perfect photo opp for visitors and tourists.

And guess what? People come. They come from all over. And while at most locations patrons would just buy their chicken and fries and skeedaddle, over there in Corbin tourists stay a while to check the place out, to take photos, to savor the experience.

There is absolutely no reason that visitors to Canalside might not want to take in the very same experience when it comes to the story of Tim Horton and Tim Horton’s. It is not at all crazy to say that this restaurant will be another component that is making the emerging and growing neighborhood at the foot of Main Street a very cool place to be.

Welcome to HarborCenter, Tim Horton’s. And if you are old enough and lucky enough to have had the chance to actually see Horton play, make sure you raise a cup of coffee and toast the old guy on your first visit to the location at the corner of Main and Scott. Tim Horton, the player, and Tim Horton, the entrepreneur, deserves that tribute for sure.