



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Grigorenko makes push for Sabres job

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

September 22, 2014

A lot more veterans will be on the ice for the Buffalo Sabres tonight in their home preseason opener than played in Sunday's exhibition inaugural in Washington. But it's the big-name kids who will still get the bulk of the attention.

No. 1 draft pick Sam Reinhart will play again in the 7 p.m. game against the Carolina Hurricanes (Radio 550 AM). So will former No. 1 Mikhail Grigorenko, who has been an early talking point in training camp for the way he's trying to push aside what seemed like an inevitable assignment to Rochester.

Over the weekend, coach Ted Nolan raised more than a few eyebrows when he shot down the assumption that Grigorenko was ticketed to start the season in the AHL.

Nolan said he was impressed with the 20-year-old's fresh approach to his third pro season and reiterated that stance Monday.

"We had a good talk after the season about departing last year, having a good offseason workout, coming into camp in shape and trying to compete for a job," Nolan said. "That's the way he came to camp. He's competing for a job.

"The first practice I saw was by far the best I've ever seen him skate and pay attention in practice. He played a pretty good game and today he was pretty good in practice. He's got some good skill sets that a lot of people would die for, so we've just got to get it out of him."

Grigorenko played 12:06 in Sunday's 1-0 loss at Washington and had two shots on goal. He tied for team-high honors with three hits and was 7-1 on faceoffs, the best percentage on either team.

"I thought I was really involved in this game and our line made things happened," said Grigorenko, who played between Brian Flynn and second-round pick Vaclav Karabacek. "We were really good on the forecheck and I thought we had pretty good chances."

The 6-foot-3 Grigorenko has pushed his weight up to 219 pounds, about 10 pounds over his previous figure, in an effort to compete against the NHL's older players.

"It's a really big difference from last year to this year," he said. "I worked really hard this summer. My conditioning got better. I feel faster on the ice, better in battles. I actually gained a little bit of weight, gained muscle, lost fat."

Grigorenko said Nolan has been as positive with him on the ice at practice as the coach has been with reporters when discussing his play.

"He just told me he likes what he sees, to keep going and do what I'm doing," Grigorenko said. "He said every shift needs to be the best shift. You need to be good every day all day.

"Since the beginning of the camp, I'm trying to do everything good. I want to skate my hardest. When I pass, I want to make a perfect pass. When I shoot, I want to score. Same thing in a game. I take faceoffs and I focus on winning this faceoff."

Grigorenko has played 43 games with the Sabres the last two years, scoring just three goals. The team sent him back to junior hockey last year and he had 39 points in 23 games for Quebec, with nine more points in five playoff games for the Remparts.

With his junior eligibility finally over, the Sabres were able to send Grigorenko to Rochester and he did not score in 14 combined games in the regular season or playoffs.

Still, the word from down on the farm was Grigorenko was skating better and playing more of a two-way game that could eventually translate in the NHL.

Ultimately, of course, Grigorenko has to score. He said having more young players in camp helps him cut down the spotlight on his play. And he also said one aspect of his maturity is not being afraid to make mistakes.

"I feel like I'm more involved in games," he said. "I'm not afraid to go and put pressure on the 'D', go in the corners. Even sometimes if it's not the right play, it's still better than sitting back and waiting for something to happen. I'm trying to make something happen.

"I really want to play in the NHL. I'm doing everything I can and hopefully the coaches see it. I want to stay here."

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The players taking part in tonight's game will have a morning skate today at 10:30 a.m. Those not playing will skate at 9. Both sessions are open to the public.

Sabres' Reinhart reins in his emotions

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

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It was a quick baptism under fire Sunday for Sam Reinhart in his first NHL preseason appearance. Just over three minutes into the game in Washington, Chad Ruhwedel was sent to the penalty box and Sabres coach Ted Nolan sent Reinhart, the team's No. 1 draft pick, over the boards to take a defensive zone faceoff.

Across from Reinhart on the draw was Caps veteran Nicklas Backstrom. On the wing was Alexander Ovechkin. Reinhart lost the draw in his welcome-to-the-league moment but the 18-year-old felt he improved in his first appearance.

"As the game goes on, you don't focus on things like that," Reinhart said after practice Monday in First Niagara Center. "You know your surroundings, you know who you're out against. You kind of have to know and have a sense of who you're up against. As the game went on, I started handling it a little bit better."

Nolan smiled when the subject of Reinhart's first faceoff was broached Monday.

"I believe in putting kids in the fire right off the hop," Nolan said. "You don't put kiddie gloves on them and walk them through and hold their hands. We're in a man's game now so we've got to put them out there."

"There's no better place than a defensive zone draw your first shift against one of the most experienced guys in the league and he did pretty well."

Reinhart played 16:53 in the game, the second-highest ice time for Buffalo forwards, and got time on both the power play (1:38) and penalty kill (1:12). He won three of five faceoffs but did not have a shot on goal and was on the ice for the lone goal in Washington's 1-0 victory

"I thought at the beginning he was a little bit tentative as all first year players would be," Nolan said. "As the game went along, I thought he got more comfortable. he was a little bit more loose on the bench."

"The biggest thing that I'm focusing on is feeling comfortable out there," Reinhart said. "It's an adjustment but I felt confident I can say I began the process last night. Especially going into the third, the puck wasn't on my stick as much but I started getting it a little more and started to create more in the offensive zone. I'd like to build off that a little bit more."

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The Sabres will have their annual "Blue and Gold carpet" walk prior to Friday night's preseason game against Toronto. Pregame festivities in Alumni Plaza begin at 5 p.m. in advance of the 7 p.m. game.

Players will be dropped off in the plaza and conduct interviews with Sabres broadcasters Brian Duff and Danny Gare as they walk the carpet into the arena.

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NHL Network will televise the CCM/USA Hockey All-American Prospects Game here Thursday night at 7. The game will be replayed Friday and Sunday, both at 1 p.m.

The on-air crew will be NHL Live co-hosts Steve Mears (play-by-play) and E.J. Hradek (analysis), as well as analyst Dan Bylsma, the former coach of the Pittsburgh Penguins and the 2014 U.S. Olympic team. Mark Roe will be the sideline reporter.

The coaches in the game will be former Sabres forward and current Chicago scout Mike Grier and NBC analyst Ed Olczyk. Grier's team is scheduled to include Boston University freshman forward Jack Eichel, expected to be one of the top two picks in next June's draft.

The Sabres are giving season ticket-holders the option to donate their tickets to the game if they are not going to use them. Fans can go to Sabres.com/donate to gift their tickets for local non-profit organizations.

Impressive training camp could earn Sabres prospect Mikhail Grigorenko roster spot

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

September 23, 2014

BUFFALO – The Sabres have a slew of shiny new prospects in their arsenal competing for jobs this training camp. No. 2 pick Sam Reinhart's gunning to make the team out of junior. Rasmus Ristolainen appears to have the inside track for a defense spot.

Meanwhile, Mikhail Grigorenko, the team's top prospect less than two years ago, has been battling out of the spotlight.

"I can just focus on my game a little bit more," the Russian said Monday inside the First Niagara Center after the Sabres prepared for tonight's preseason game against the Carolina Hurricanes.

A stronger, more mature Grigorenko has quickly become one of the camp's early surprises, impressing coach Ted Nolan, who said the center has "looked tremendous."

"The first practice I saw him (was) by far the best I've ever seen him skate and pay attention in practice," Nolan said.

After shuttling between the NHL and junior for two seasons, many expected the Sabres would assign Grigorenko to the AHL, a league he wasn't old enough to play in until late last season, to begin 2014-15. In Rochester, the 20-year-old would quietly development against men.

Not so fast.

The Sabres haven't ticketed Grigorenko, the No. 12 pick in 2012, for the minors. They'll award him a spot if he earns one.

"Why not?" said Grigorenko, who will play tonight. "They always say that the best guys get a job. Hopefully, I'll be the best guy for a job. I'm trying to do that. I just want to do my best and do everything I can every day."

Clearly, Grigorenko, who started his first two seasons in the NHL, has matured in recent months. Remember, in January he briefly refused an assignment back to his junior club, the Quebec Remparts, before accepting it a day later. The Sabres then sent him to Rochester to close the season.

"We had a good talk (before) departing last year," Nolan said. "We talked about having a good offseason workout, coming to camp in shape and trying to compete for a job."

Following an unimpressive run as a rookie in 2012-13, the Sabres' old regime guaranteed Grigorenko a job last season.

Grigorenko owned up for his past struggles in July, saying, "It was no one's fault but mine." He responded to Nolan's workout challenge, adding muscle. He's listed at a sleek 6-foot-3 and 218 pounds.

"I think it's a really big difference from last year and this year," Grigorenko said. "I worked really hard this summer. My conditioning got real better. I got really stronger. I feel a lot stronger on the ice, better in battles and stuff."

The new Grigorenko was on display in the preseason opener. In 12 minutes, six seconds on the ice, he possessed a willingness to battle he hadn't showcased much during his 43-game NHL career, registering three hits.

"I thought I was really involved in the game," Grigorenko said. "My line, we made things happen. We were really good on (the) forecheck. I thought we had pretty good chances and we had a good game. I felt really good out there, too. I think just from the start of the camp I'm feeling pretty well."

Grigorenko also won seven of the eight faceoffs he took. He won 51.5 percent of his faceoffs last season.

He's trying to zero in on each task he has this camp.

"Every time I skate, I try to skate my hardest," Grigorenko said. "Every time I pass, I try to make a perfect pass, and every time I shoot, I try to score. Same thing in the game. I take faceoffs, I focus on this faceoff. I need to win this faceoff, and after I think about other stuff."

Nolan added: "I think we're all creatures of habit, and he's just got to create himself some good habits. He's got good some good skill sets a lot of people would die for. So we just got to get it out of him somehow."

Before Sunday's game, new assistant coach Bryan Trottier, a Hall of Famer, gave Grigorenko a message.

"He told me to work hard and have fun, don't be afraid to make plays, try to take care of your own end and everything will take care of itself," Grigorenko said.

Those words relaxed him. He wasn't fretting about making a mistake.

"Because of that I feel like I'm more involved in the games," he said. "I'm not afraid to go and put pressure on Ds and stuff, go in the corners. Even sometimes if it's not the right play, it's still better than just sitting back and waiting for something to happen. I try to make something happen."

Sabres' Nolan not a fan of analytics

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

September 22, 2014

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- We've hit the age of analytics in all sports. Some teams have resisted it, but in the past year several have embraced it.

This past summer our Matthew Collier told you how Tim Murray uses analytics, but Ted Nolan doesn't think of it in the same way. Nolan is old school, "The information I've used is with my eyes and my soul and my heart. If I see someone who's competing and I know he's competing, that's good enough for me. I don't need a machine to tell me how hard he worked, I can see it for myself, but there's some of that data that you can use for how many calories they burn, but my number one analytic is you score one more goal than the opposition, you win." Nolan added, "In modern day hockey there's a lot of emphasis put on analytics and how much possession time, but you can never underestimate the human aspect of the game. Hockey's not all that difficult, there's a science to it, but it's not rocket science."

There's a Corsi number and a Fenwick number and possession numbers that have become quite popular in the last year or so. None of that is popular with the Sabres head coach, "If you have a Crosby on your team, they're going to have a little bit more zone time. If you have a Kopitar on your team, they're going to have a little bit more zone time. You look at all the teams that make the playoffs, they make it for a reason, they're better teams. What we want to do is become a better team and you do that you get better players and it hasn't changed since the 50's and 60's, you get better players, you have a better chance of winning."

The Sabres face Carolina on Tuesday and that game will feature more of the veterans than the game in Washington did. Nolan said "A little bit more experience in the lineup tomorrow than we did last game. We're going to try to stagger it where they get one game now and then get two of the last three games coming up so we'll get a lot of the veterans in tomorrow, we'll give them a couple of games off and then come in the last two or three with them."

The game group will skate at 10:30 on Tuesday while the rest of the team will go at 9:00. Both sessions are open to the public.

Shouldering the load

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

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A shoulder injury hampered his play for pretty much all of the 2013-14 season, but after a summer of rehab, Marcus Foligno is back and he hopes he's better than ever.

He had shoulder surgery in the offseason and he's eager to test it out again in game action, whenever he gets his first game in.

"I'd like to say I'm stronger than I was before, but you can only really know that until you get into a game situation," he said. "It feels good to get some bumps out there and starting working with the guys and get physical again."

Foligno's game has been the strongest when he's around the net and also taking the body. The injury last season prevented him from consistently doing many of the things that make him successful.

"If I'm not hitting or finishing checks, it's noticeable out there. It's noticeable to the coaching staff and everyone," he said. "To be healthy again, it's great and I'm looking forward to going out there and being physical again."

The new assistant coaching staff consisting of Bryan Trottier, Danny Flynn, Tom Coolen and Arturs Irbe has received high praise from the players – including Foligno – in the early stages of training camp. Foligno said that the positive feedback they've been getting from the coaches has been very helpful.

In addition to tips and tricks when it comes to improving play on the ice, Trottier also has the players' ears when it comes to stories and anecdotes he's wont to share.

"You listen to a guy that has seven Stanley Cup rings. If you don't, you're stupid," Foligno said. "He's got stories upon stories. When you play for that long, you've got good stories."

A HUMAN TOUCH

Sabres coach Ted Nolan said that Trottier will work a lot with Marcus this season and that in addition to building his game, they'll look to limit the lapses in focus that can affect every young player. A lot of that, according to Nolan, can come from connecting with a player on a personal level.

"In modern day hockey, there's a lot of emphasis put on analytics and how much possession time. You can never overestimate the human aspect of the game," he said. "Marcus is a good citizen. He's a good man. He pays attention."

The Sabres front office features a few employees dedicated to tracking statistics and trends, but during a game or in the moment, Nolan trusts his gut more than anything.

"The information I use is with my eyes and my soul and my heart," he said. "If I see someone who's competing and I know he's competing, that's good enough for me. I don't need a machine telling me how hard he worked. I can see it for myself."

"...My No. 1 analytic is, you score one more goal than the opposition, you win."

When asked about possession time and Corsi numbers, Nolan said in most cases, the best teams in the League often rank high in those statistical categories because of the talent on the roster. He also made a point later on to mention that a good mix of skills – and not just raw talent – is necessary in building a winning team and culture.

“Building a team and assembling talent, I always believe, are two separate things. Because talent doesn’t necessarily mean that you have a better team,” he said. “We need to make sure that we have the best group of guys to make the city of Buffalo proud to watch on a nightly basis.”

WHO'S PLAYING TUESDAY?

The lineup for Buffalo’s home game Tuesday night against the Carolina Hurricanes will have a more veteran presence than the squad Buffalo dressed for their first preseason game on Sunday, according to Nolan. Sam Reinhart will play again and it’s looking like Jhonas Enroth will start in goal.

Reinhart has been skating on a line with Foligno and Chris Stewart, but that might not necessarily be the line that takes the ice on Tuesday.

“With Sam, it’s another young kid coming in. He’s a great person off the ice and he’s got the right attitude,” Foligno said. “He’s eager to learn and he’s got a great skill set. There’s a reason he was a first-round pick.”

AND NOW, TRAFFIC

In anticipation of the first home preseason games of the 2014-15 season, the Buffalo Sabres are reminding fans about the limited traffic patterns surrounding First Niagara Center due to the construction of HARBORCENTER.

The following street restrictions are in effect until further notice:

- Washington Street (between Scott and Perry streets) is closed to traffic in both directions
- Scott Street (between Washington and Main streets) is closed to traffic in both directions
- Main Street (between Scott and Perry streets) is closed to traffic in both directions
- South Park Avenue is open eastbound only (between Main and Illinois streets)

All normal event parking – in both the arena ramp and the surrounding surface lots – will remain open.

Fans that plan on visiting First Niagara Center while the limited traffic routes are in effect should plan on using Michigan Avenue instead of Washington Street. It is strongly suggested that fans plan ahead and leave extra time for traveling to and from the arena.

During First Niagara Center events, the Buffalo Police Department Traffic Division will control all affected intersections and will direct traffic accordingly.

Earning his keep

By Joe Ray

Sabres.com

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After spending parts of eight seasons in four different professional leagues, defenseman Andre Benoit finally earned a full-time position in the NHL last season. The amount of work required to get to this point is a point of pride for the 30-year-old defenseman.

"It was nice to have a year to adjust and get comfortable and play a bigger role on a team," Benoit said. "Going through the places we've been through, me and my family, we appreciate it a lot and it gives me a reason to work hard every day because I want to stay."

Benoit's playing career includes three seasons of European experience, including one year in each of the Swedish Elite League, Finland's SM-Liiga, and the KHL.

The extensive experience of playing on the European ice surface and being able to adjust between that and North American ice consistently, has helped Benoit mold an offensive game fit for the NHL.

Benoit appeared in 33 games for the Ottawa Senators at the end of the 2012-13 season, posting three goals and seven assists.

Ottawa did not retain Benoit, and he signed with the Colorado Avalanche in hopes of staying in the NHL for a full season. Benoit did just that, finishing with seven goals and 21 assists in 79 games, while playing over 20 minutes per game for the Avs.

Benoit was a part of last season's monumental turnaround for Colorado. After finishing dead last in the Western Conference during the lockout-shortened 2012-13 season, Colorado jumped all the way to second place in the conference with 112 points.

"Last year was fun," Benoit said. "We accomplished what we set out to do."

"Here, it's an exciting opportunity too. There are a lot of good young players too and the Sabres signed a lot of veteran guys, which will bring the level up right away," Benoit explained. "It's exciting to be a part of it, and I can't wait to see how it shapes up."

Benoit made his preseason debut with the Sabres in Washington on Sunday, playing 23:11 on a pairing with 2013 first-round pick Rasmus Ristolainen. He also served as an alternate captain.

Sabres coach Ted Nolan said Benoit has been as good as advertised so far through camp and expects him to mentor the younger players on the team the same way new additions Brian Gionta and Josh Gorges are.

"He fits that same type of mold. He's a veteran presence and he's got some maturity, especially with some of the young kids we have on our team," Nolan said. "He's a real good character guy that is coming here looking for a fresh start. I see him as one of those guys that's just going to have an impact on some of our young players."

Along with Gorges and Andrej Meszaros, the Sabres' veteran acquisitions along the blueline will collectively serve as a beneficial learning asset to the younger players in the organization.

"We all know there's a lot of young guys, and it's a question of showing the way by example. I don't know that any of us are big rah-rah guys, but I think we can lead by example and show the way."

Benoit is a familiar face for Sabres general manager Tim Murray, who made Benoit part of the Calder Cup-winning Binghamton Senators team back in 2010-11. That organizational familiarity was a large consideration for Benoit when he chose to sign with Buffalo as an unrestricted free agent back in July.

Nolan's new coaching staff -- Bryan Trottier, Danny Flynn, Tom Coolen and Arturs Irbe -- has been working diligently the past two days to instill a strong culture with this young team.

Having a strong veteran presence helps that cause, and Benoit acknowledged the combination of coaching, youth, and experience on display through the start of Sabres training camp.

"We've had good practice days, I think the guys are working hard," Benoit said. "Good things happen when the guys buy in. We respect Ted, how successful he's been, and he knows what it takes. I think we're going to buy in early, and that helps."