



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

October 17, 2014

Sabres demote defensemen McCabe, Pysyk to AHL

By Staff Report

Associated Press

October 16, 2014

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — The Buffalo Sabres have assigned defensemen Jake McCabe and Mark Pysyk to their American Hockey League affiliate in Rochester.

The moves do not come as a surprise after both players opened the season on the Sabres' injured list. Pysyk sustained what the team called an "upper body" injury during a 2-0 preseason win over Carolina on Sept. 23. McCabe was sidelined by what the team called a "middle body" injury before the start of the season.

McCabe was Buffalo's second-round pick in the 2012 draft and had an opportunity to make the Sabres' season-opening roster before getting hurt.

Buffalo (1-3), coming off a 4-3 shootout victory at Carolina on Tuesday, hosts Florida on Friday, and then Boston on Saturday.

Shot barrage pains Sabres' defense

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

October 16, 2014

The Sabres' plan was to have the puck more. One look at all the ice bags being placed on Buffalo's defensemen shows the plan is off to a terrible start.

If things don't improve, the blue-liners should probably ask for a blindfold and a cigarette to go with the ice.

All four of the Sabres' games have featured Buffalo at one end and a firing squad at the other. The Sabres' Corsi rating, which measures shots directed at the opponent's net versus attempts taken on a team's own goal, is a ridiculous minus-153. That's far and away the worst in the NHL, with Calgary (minus-110) the only other team worse than minus-68.

The Sabres enter tonight's home game against Florida (7 p.m., MSG, Radio 550 AM) allowing 74.5 shot attempts per game. They're attempting only 36. Buffalo is getting blown away in shots on goal, averaging 39 against and 20.8 for – both worst in the league.

"We want to cut down the shots we allow," defenseman Andre Benoit said Thursday in First Niagara Center. "You want to play as little as possible in your zone. That's the goal, and that's what we have to work toward."

There's a lot of work to do. Even during their only victory Tuesday, the Sabres lost the puck-possession game by a large margin. Carolina attempted 70 shots while the Sabres took 41.

Buffalo should have an easier night tonight, with "should" being the operative word. Florida ranks 22nd in shots on goal (26.7) while attempting 44.3 per game.

"It's pretty hard to play a game without the puck," said Sabres coach Ted Nolan, who wants his players to improve their faceoff percentage (league-low .385), play harder along the boards and communicate better while passing. "If we do all those things, we'll have the puck more."

Defenseman Josh Gorges says the Sabres' inability to get into the opponents' zone starts in their own.

"The biggest thing is just to be smart in our end," Gorges said. "If we can be efficient and smart, get that puck and get it out, we can spend more time in the offensive zone."

Once down there, Gorges said, the Sabres need to stay there. They need to tire out the opponents by controlling play, which would eventually force them to chip the puck back to Buffalo.

More time in the offensive zone would mean less time with the ice bags.

Buffalo has blocked 71 shots through four games, the fourth-highest total in the NHL. Gorges is second with 19, Benoit is fourth with 12 and blue-liner Mike Weber ranks in the top 15 with nine.

"That's the price you pay to win," Gorges said. "Winning's hard, and it's supposed to be that way. If it was easy, everyone could go out there and do it."

"For us to be successful, you need guys paying the price. You need to take hits to make plays. You need to block shots. All those little things, I thought that was something we did a lot better in Carolina."

Blocking shots is nothing new to Gorges. While playing for Montreal in 2011-12, He led the league with 250 blocks. He's on pace for an astounding 390 this season. There's little chance anyone could survive that barrage without suffering an injury.

"A lot of times as a D, you can block five, six shots that don't hurt," Gorges said. "Our forwards do a good job of rushing the D-men at the point, and they throw wristers at the net. The way I play, you can knock those down and get blocks for it and you're really not paying much of a physical toll.

"Then there's those games where you may only get one block or maybe two, but they catch you at a bad spot and those hurt."

That happened in Chicago when Gorges took one off the foot. He'll have less to worry about if the Sabres can control the puck.

"If we can figure out how to do that more consistently," Gorges said, "we'll spend a lot more time in the offensive zone and we won't be pressing to have that many shots against."

Sabres notebook: Zadorov can only watch and wait for now

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

October 16, 2014

There are three places where Nikita Zadorov could play hockey today. He's not going to play in any of them.

Obviously, no one is happy about that.

The Sabres, who lived through the Mikhail Grigorenko saga the previous two seasons, have another dilemma regarding a junior-eligible player. The 19-year-old Zadorov will be a healthy scratch for the fifth time in Buffalo's five games tonight when Florida visits First Niagara Center. Players certainly can learn by watching, but development comes from being on the ice.

That's where the Sabres' dilemma comes. They don't think Zadorov is ready to play in the NHL, but they've said the 6-foot-5, 238-pound defenseman is too big for junior hockey. The Sabres could loan Zadorov to a team in Russia, but they would have no control over his development. Losing the skills of the 16th overall pick in the 2013 draft would significantly hurt the Sabres' future.

So for the moment, Zadorov gets to practice with the Sabres and play for no one.

"The player just wants to play," Zadorov's agent, Rolland Hedges, told The Buffalo News by phone Thursday. "It's up to Buffalo how they're going to deal with that."

It's not clear how they're going to deal with it. They could keep Zadorov in Buffalo, but what are the benefits to that?

"I can't answer that question straight up, but we're trying to do our best with the situation," coach Ted Nolan said. "We're going to keep working at him, get his conditioning a little better. He's another promising young prospect that we have to make sure we do the best for him."

The Sabres could send Zadorov back to the London Knights of the Ontario Hockey League, where he spent the previous two seasons. There have been no discussions between the clubs.

"We have room for him and we'd welcome him back, but at the end of the day it's up to Buffalo and what they want to do," London Assistant General Manager Rob Simpson said by phone. "They make all the decisions on that."

The Sabres could loan the Russian-born Zadorov to his homeland. Grigorenko tried going to a European club last year, but the transfer was blocked because the Russian had a contract with the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League. Hedges said Zadorov's OHL deal is on a year-to-year basis and hasn't been renewed.

The American Hockey League is not an option because of Zadorov's age and junior eligibility.

"He would have to go back to Russia, so that's the dilemma," Hedges said. "That's probably what the concern of Buffalo is."

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The right side of Patrick Kaleta's face is essentially all new, but he's got the same old sense of humor.

"My fiancée is still around, so I guess that's all that matters," the right wing said after practicing for the first time since taking a slap shot to the face Sept. 28. "I got three plates and 14 screws, so I broke a bunch of things in there."

"I went through all the tests with my eyeball, and I'm blessed and lucky my eyesight is good, knock on wood, so far. Everything else was pretty much crushed, I guess."

There is no timetable for his return. He practiced with a full face shield. Kaleta's right eye is still red, his reconstructed face moves stiffly and his mouth opens only about an inch, which has impacted his diet.

"Milkshakes and French fries, the diet of an athlete," he said. "I'm probably going to let the plates and the screws settle a little bit. Other than that, once I get the green light, I'm ready to go whether my face is broken or not."

Mark Pysyk and Jake McCabe also practiced Thursday morning, but the defensemen were sent to Rochester in the afternoon after being cleared to return from upper-body injuries.

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Defenseman Andrej Meszaros will return to the lineup after a one-game benching.

"It's always tough when you're not playing," he said. "On the other hand, you've got to work hard and play better otherwise you're going to be out of the lineup. It's as simple as that."

Meszaros practiced on the Sabres' second power-play unit. Center Cody Hodgson manned the blue line alongside Tyler Myers' on the first unit.

"We have one of the better shooters in the game in Cody Hodgson," Nolan said, "so we've got to spring him and have him in position to shoot that puck."

Sabres assistant coach Bryan Trottier enjoying new NHL life

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 17, 2014

BUFFALO – Two men who had spent their entire lives in hockey never met until a chance encounter almost 19 years ago outside Memorial Auditorium.

It was 1995-96, Ted Nolan's first year as Sabres coach. Hall of Famer Bryan Trottier, an assistant coach with the Pittsburgh Penguins, was walking outside the Aud in a snowstorm when Nolan spotted him.

Nolan pulled over and offered a lift.

"We had a five-minute chat," Trottier, one of Nolan's new assistant coaches, recalled last week inside the First Niagara Center. "That's the first time I ever met Ted."

Over the years, Nolan and Trottier, a seven-time Stanley Cup winner, talked whenever they ran into each other.

"Once you say that first 'hello,' next time you feel a little bit more comfortable," said Nolan, whose Sabres host the Florida Panthers tonight.

The two found they had a lot of similarities. Both have aboriginal roots and come from large families.

Eventually, Nolan and Trottier worked together a bit during Nolan's two-year stint with the New York Islanders, where Trottier, an Isles legend, was director of player development.

"We always had lots to talk about," Trottier said.

Still, they never phoned each other to chat.

"It's just one of those things where more in the last five, six years we'd see each other more often, for whatever reason," Trottier said.

But Nolan called Trottier this spring looking for help contacting an assistant coach candidate.

Over several conversations, Nolan noticed Trottier, who hadn't coached since the New York Rangers fired him just months into his first head job in 2002-03, had an itch to get back in the NHL.

Nolan asked Trottier if he wanted to join the Sabres.

"It was kind of fun, because when he brought it up, he said, 'I got a question for you, do you want to get back in it?'" Trottier said. "I said, 'Oh, player development, I'd love to help you in player development, work with your young kids or whatever.'"

Nolan told Trottier he wanted him to be a regular assistant coach. Trottier, while honored, had reservations. Nolan told Trottier, who was living in Pittsburgh, to think it over.

"I wanted to make sure I could do the job, I was prepared work the hours and bring something to the table," Trottier said.

Trottier accepted the job a few days later.

"I was kind of hungry to get back in, but not at the coaching level," Trottier said. "I really wanted to get back into the player development level and work with the young kids, and recognizing that Buffalo has a lot of young kids was another little key in the excitement that hopefully it'll all work out. I'm enthused about the whole thing. 'Re-energized' is probably the better word."

Trottier said getting back into coaching is "like riding a bike."

"I mean, (Nolan) kind of sold me really well," he said. "His confidence was kind of the convincing thing."

Of course, there have been adjustments. Trottier spent the first week of training camp "recognizing the lingo all over again."

"That was a huge adjustment, because there's so many new catchphrases in the game now that I haven't been around for a while," he said.

Other than that, the transition has gone smoothly. Trottier, who scored 524 goals and 1,425 points over his illustrious career, is in the charge of the power play.

Trottier has quickly earned the players' respect.

"He always seems to have a positive attitude," Sabres winger Matt Moulson said. "He brings that to the rink every day. He always has a little bit of advice for us. When he talks to you, you always listen. He's been through it all."

Sabres defenseman Tyler Myers added: "Whenever you have that many Stanley Cups, it's hard not to focus a little bit more and your attention is a little stronger when he speaks."

Nolan believes Trottier possesses a quiet "don't-mess-that-guy" aura.

"You can understand why he won the Stanley Cup seven times," he said. "He's a quiet, very intelligent, intense individual that players love to be around and listen to and gain a little bit of knowledge of. Brian gives a little tip here and there. ..."

"Here's a guy with vast experience, and he's talking from a winning background, not talking about I've been in the game for X amount of years. He's been in the league for a long time and he's won."

Sabres notes: Patrick Kaleta back practicing, anxious to return

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 17, 2014

BUFFALO – Patrick Kaleta's face was mangled.

"Broke a bunch of things in there," the oft-injured Sabres winger said Thursday following practice inside the First Niagara Center.

Kaleta said doctors inserted three plates and 14 screws after a shot hit him in the face during a Sept. 28 preseason game in Toronto. The 28-year-old has experienced blurred vision and migraines.

Still, less than three weeks after the scary incident, the Angola native is on the road back to game action. He skated with his teammates for the first time Thursday with a red non-contact jersey and a full face shield. He has no timetable for a return.

"Once I get the green light, I'm ready to go, whether my face is broken or not," said Kaleta, whose right eye still has blood in it.

He added: "It was a rough spot there for a little bit, but I'm fortunate to be OK and be able to play hockey."

Kaleta, who had surgery two weeks ago, said "everything else was crushed."

"My fiancée's still around, so that's all that matters," Kaleta joked.

Sabres coach Ted Nolan said Kaleta "came out of it as good as you can."

"We're just really glad he's back on the ice," he said. "He loves to play. He loves to play in Buffalo. He's a Buffalo kid, so he's all excited again."

Kaleta tore his ACL last season and hasn't played an NHL game since last October.

In other news, the Sabres assigned defensemen Jake McCabe and Mark Pysyk to Rochester on Thursday. Both youngsters have recovered from preseason injuries and practiced with the big club before getting sent down.

Pysyk said he injured his shoulder during his first preseason shift.

"Very frustrating, just waiting, watching things in camp," Pysyk said.

Meanwhile, Nolan said struggling defenseman Andrej Meszaros, a healthy scratch Tuesday, will play tonight against the Florida Panthers.

"He's going to be back," he said. "It's one of those things where certain people just need a little reminder how good they can be. So we never lost faith in his ability."

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In his fourth NHL appearance, top prospect Sam Reinhart skated only six minutes, 39 seconds on the fourth line between Nick Deslauriers and Cody McCormick in the Sabres' 4-3 shootout win against Carolina on Tuesday.

Why did Nolan slash the 18-year-old's minutes?

For three regular-season games and the entire preseason, Nolan threw Reinhart "right into the fire" to see how he would react. So the slick center, the No. 2 pick in June, played about 11-15 minutes on a scoring line.

Now, the Sabres are "taking a different approach, cutting back on the minutes, letting him watch game action more so than throwing him right into the fire," Nolan said.

"I thought last game he was almost chomping on the bit to get out there more versus playing more and the game being a little bit too fast," Nolan said. "One thing about Sam, his hockey intelligence and his brain for the game is NHL-caliber. We just got to get everything else matched up to it."

Reinhart has zero points, two shots and a minus-1 rating this season. The Sabres can play him five more games before his contract kicks in.

If Reinhart faces Panthers defenseman Aaron Ekblad tonight, it will be the earliest meeting of the No. 1 and 2 draft picks since 1997, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

xxx

Why are the Sabres keeping 19-year-old defenseman Nikita Zadorov, the No. 16 pick in 2013, if he's not playing?

"I can't answer that question straight up, but we're trying to do the best with the situation, keep working at him, get his conditioning a little better," Nolan said. "He's another promising young prospect that we have to make sure we do the best for. So right now, we're working him as hard as we can in practice, make him a little angry, make him want to play us now."

xxx

Rip Simonick, the Sabres' equipment manager all 44 seasons, was inducted into the Greater Buffalo Sports Hall of Fame on Thursday.

What does Nolan think of when he hears Simonick's name?

"I think of Gilbert Perreault, Rene Robert, the French Connection," he said. "I think of the Aud, and Rip Simonick is right in that group. You think of hockey in Buffalo, you think of Rip Simonick. I think it's a great honor. Some of those people you meet in hockey, the legends of the game, sometimes they're just not on the ice."

xxx

Nolan on comparing the Sabres to a peewee team following Monday's embarrassing 5-1 loss to Anaheim:
"Sometimes when you say words they take it literally. We didn't play very well last game. You could make a comparison it's just your like child when they say, 'I hate you, dad.' They don't really hate you. The next minute they say, 'I love you.'"

Sabres taking 'different approach' with top prospect Sam Reinhart

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

October 16, 2014

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Sabres look to build off first win

By Steve Vesey

WIVB

October 16, 2014

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - Coming off the first win of the season, the Buffalo Sabres returned to the practice ice today with plenty of issues the team still needs to iron out.

"I think sometimes it's good for confidence. I think we still have (to be) a lot better," said Matt Moulson. "I don't know if we had everyone playing their best, our line in particular, so we got to figure some things out. But you can build off that, it's a good team win."

The Sabres sent two prospects down to Rochester today, Jake McCabe and Mark Pysyk, but decisions still remain on two others. Sam Reinhart is five games away from reaching his nine-game limit, before the Sabres would have to determine whether to keep him in the NHL or send him back to juniors. 2013 first round pick Nikita Zadorov has yet to suit up in a game this year, but remains on the roster.

Buffalo hosts Florida Friday night, with Reinhart expected to see increased minutes.

Reinhart's ice time down, Kaleta practices

By Staff Report

TWC Sports

October 16, 2014

BUFFALO, N.Y. - After picking up win number one on the young season Tuesday, the Sabres host division rivals Florida and Boston at First Niagara Center this weekend.

First round pick Sam Reinhart made the team out of camp but has seen his ice time gradually decrease. He played a season-low and team-low 6:39 against Carolina. Reinhart continued to center the fourth line Thursday.

"We put him with some pretty good lines in the beginning, gave him lots of minutes," head coach Ted Nolan said. "Now it's a different approach, cutting back on the minutes, let him watch on game action more so than throwing him right in the fire. I thought last game he was almost chomping on the bit to get out there more versus playing more and the game being a little bit too fast."

"One thing with Sam, his hockey intelligence and his brain for the game is NHL caliber," Nolan added. "Now we've just got to get everything else matched up to it. Sometimes it's better to be in live action and cut back on the minutes and give it back some more. So next game we'll try to get him a little bit more."

Forward Patrick Kaleta was back on the ice practicing Thursday with a full face shield. The Angola native was hit in the face with a puck on September 28. He underwent surgery and his diet's been limited since. There's no timetable for his return.

"I went through all the tests with my eyeball and stuff, so I'm blessed and lucky that my eyesight is good, knock on wood, so far. Everything else was pretty much crushed, I guess," Kaleta said. "Three plates and 14 screws, so I broke a bunch of things in there. Fortunate enough to be ok and be able to play hockey."

Defensemen Jake McCabe and Mark Pysyk practiced with the Sabres Thursday before being assigned to the Rochester Americans.

Psysk, McCabe return to practice, assigned to Amerks

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

October 16, 2014

The Rochester Americans will receive a boost to their defensive corps.

Mark Psysk and Jake McCabe skated with the Buffalo Sabres on Thursday at First Niagara Center as they both return from injuries and after practice, both were assigned to the Amerks of the American Hockey League.

Psysk has been out since Sept. 23 when he injured his shoulder during the first shift of his first preseason game. He's been skating on his own but has only been on the ice with the team again for the past few days.

He's worked hard to get back, but has missed a significant amount of time because of the injury, which has hurt his chances of sticking with the Sabres in the short-term.

"It's tough to be here sitting, watching and having no real chance of proving yourself," he said before he got word from general manager Tim Murray that he'd be joining the Amerks.

Psysk played 44 games with the Sabres last season, recording one goal and six assists.

McCabe had been dealing with a lingering injury since the prospects tournament in Traverse City in early September. It hadn't really improved over the course of training camp so the team made the decision to get him completely healthy.

The 21-year-old rookie from the University of Wisconsin hadn't been a participant in practice since Oct. 6. Getting his conditioning back up is now a top priority.

He played in three preseason games and scored twice. He believes he left a strong impression on the coaching staff.

"I thought I had a good camp. I thought I made their decision tougher," he said after practice. "That's what they wanted us to do is come in, be in the best shape of your life and compete and make their job difficult. For the most part, I did that."

Rochester's next game is on the road against the Toronto Marlies at 3 p.m. on Saturday.

ROOKIE MOVES?

The Sabres have eight defensemen on the active roster including 19-year-old Nikita Zadorov. He hasn't dressed for a game this season.

He is eligible to play in nine games before the team must decide if they want to keep him in the NHL for the entire season and have his contract kick in or return him to his Ontario Hockey League club in London.

"We're trying to do our best with the situation and we'll keep working at him, get his conditioning a little better," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. "He's another promising young prospect that we have to make sure we do the best for him. Right now we're working him as hard as we can in practice, make him a little angry, making him want to make us play him now."

They'll have a similar decision to make with 2014 first-round pick Sam Reinhart soon. Reinhart has played in all four games so far this year. He skated on scoring lines with wings like Marcus Foligno, Chris Stewart, Brian

Gionta and Cody Hodgson, but the coaching staff had him play in a limited role Tuesday night against the Hurricanes.

Reinhart only played 6:39 in Carolina but Nolan said he'll likely see increased playing time on Friday against the Florida Panthers.

"Sometimes you play kids and you put them right in the fire and see how they react. We put him with some pretty good lines at the beginning, giving him lots of minutes. Now it's a different approach, cutting back on the minutes, let him watch game action more," Nolan said.

WAITING FOR THE GREEN LIGHT

Patrick Kaleta was also back at practice for the first time since sustaining a scary injury.

He caught a slap shot in the face the team's preseason game in Toronto on Sept. 28 and needed three plates and 14 screws inserted to repair the damage.

Kaleta wore a full-face shield and a red jersey in practice, signaling he's not ready yet for contact.

"I'm blessed and lucky that my eyesight is good, knock on wood, so far," he said. "Everything else was crushed, I guess."

He thanked his family, friends, teammates and the training and medical staff for their help and support while he recovers. He said pretty much everything he's eaten has had to be in milkshake form.

The hard-nosed wing has been working his way back from a knee injury sustained last November that ended his season. He's really itching to get back after this latest setback.

"Once I get the green light, I'm ready to go whether my face is broken or not," he said.

THURSDAY'S PRACTICE GROUP

26 Matt Moulson – 63 Tyler Ennis – 21 Drew Stafford

82 Marcus Foligno – 19 Cody Hogson – 80 Chris Stewart

17 Torrey Mitchell – 28 Zemgus Girgensons – 12 Brian Gionta

44 Nicolas Deslauriers – 23 Sam Reinhart – 8 Cody McCormick – 65 Brian Flynn

36 Patrick Kaleta (red, non-contact jersey)

4 Josh Gorges – 57 Tyler Myers

6 Mike Weber – 41 Andrej Meszaros

61 Andre Benoit – 55 Rasmus Ristolainen

51 Nikita Zadorov – 24 Tyson Strachan

29 Jake McCabe – 3 Mark Pysyk

1 Jhonas Enroth

34 Michal Neuvirth

SPECIAL TEAMS CHANGES

After sitting out Tuesday as a healthy scratch, Andrej Meszaros will be back in the lineup against Florida, according to Nolan. Meszaros also practiced with the second power-play unit Thursday morning.

The team tried a new look with the man advantage in practice. Cody Hodgson, who had been a forward on the second unit, moved up to the first unit to play the left point. Nolan hopes having him there will provide more structure and allow Hodgson to more effectively use his shot.

Power Play Units

Moulson-Ennis-Stafford

Hodgson-Myers

Stewart-Girgensons-Gionta

Benoit-Meszaros

Simonick to be inducted into Greater Buffalo Sports Hall of Fame tonight

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

October 16, 2014

When you've been around hockey as long as Robert "Rip" Simonick, you'll have more than your share of stories to tell. Always interesting in hearing about the old days, Buffalo Sabres forward Tyler Ennis has made spending time with the veteran equipment manager a part of his pregame routine.

He'll sit down, have a cup of coffee with Rip and oftentimes not say much.

Simonick will soon be able to tell the tale of night he was inducted into the Greater Buffalo Sports Hall of Fame. That honor will be bestowed upon him Thursday night at a dinner ceremony at the Buffalo Niagara Convention Center.

"I like to get in his ear and just listen sometimes," Ennis said. "He's got some funny stories. He's been around forever so I think everyone's proud of him and he definitely deserves it."

The ceremony will be streamed live on the Greater Buffalo Sports Hall of Fame's website. Simonick will be one of 12 Buffalo sports figures inducted this year.

"It's quite an honor. I hope I represent this city well and the Buffalo Sabres," he told Sabres.com when the Class of 2014 was announced. "It's a lifelong dream to work this many years, a kid from 10 blocks away from the arena. I used to walk to the rink. I've been here a long time and obviously our goal is to win a Stanley Cup."

Simonick has been with the Sabres since the very beginning and is now in his 44th season with the club.

In 1970, Rip was hired by coach and general manager Punch Imlach to join the newly formed Sabres equipment staff. He started by running errands and doing grunt work for legendary trainer and fellow Greater Buffalo Sports Hall of Fame inductee, Frank Christie.

Current Sabres coach Ted Nolan has had the pleasure of working with Simonick on two separate occasions in Buffalo now. Nolan coached the Sabres during the team's final year at the Buffalo Memorial Auditorium – affectionately known as the Aud – and for the first year at what is now the Sabres' current home, First Niagara Center.

What comes to Nolan's mind when he thinks of Rip?

"I think of the Buffalo Sabres. I think of Gilbert Perreault, Rene Robert, the French Connection. I think of the Aud. And Rip Simonick is right in that group," he said, "You think of hockey in Buffalo, you think of Rip Simonick."

"It's a great honor. Some of those people you meet in hockey, the legends of the game, sometimes they're not just on the ice. They're behind the scenes. Those are the guys who really do a lot of the work. You ask anybody in hockey, [the trainers are] the first ones at the rink, they're the last ones at the rink."

"Rip's been doing it for a long, long time and to see him get recognized in this fashion, it's a great honor for him and it's going to be a great privilege for us to be there for him."

Simonick is the longest tenured equipment manager in the NHL and has worked over 3,400 games. He has served on staff for three NHL All-Star games and two Stanley Cup Final series. He was inducted into the Buffalo Sabres Hall of Fame in 2000.

#TBT Profile: Jason Woolley

By Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

October 16, 2014

JASON WOOLLEY

How Acquired: Trade from Pittsburgh, September 24, 1997

Buffalo stats (1997-2002): 365 games; 40-125-165, 258 PIMs

Career NHL stats (1991-2006): 718 games; 68-246-314, 430 PIMs

Even during a phone conversation, it was easy to envision the smile breaking out on Jason Woolley's face. It's midway through a 20-minute interview, and Woolley was asked about the favorite memory of his NHL career. After a brief pause, he starts recounting his five seasons as a member of the Buffalo Sabres.

"It was a great five years. It was the pinnacle of my career, and I was in my prime. Everything you dream of as a hockey player was coming to life for me in Buffalo," said Woolley. "The people that I met along the way I still keep in touch with. Some of my best friends are from Buffalo. I have nothing but admiration for the fans of Buffalo and how they supported me."

Acquired from Pittsburgh for a fifth-round draft choice (that turned out to be Rob Scuderi) in September 1997, the high point of Woolley's time in Western New York was the team's improbable run to the 1999 Stanley Cup Finals. This came on the heels of a regular season that saw Woolley post career highs in goals (10), assists (33) and points (43). Since that 1998-99 season, only three other Sabres defenseman have posted seasons of 43 points or more: Brian Campbell (twice), Jaroslav Spacek and Tyler Myers.

Woolley followed up that stellar regular season with a springtime run in 1999 that saw him collect 15 points (4+11) in 21 playoff games. Woolley would etch his name in Sabres lore during the Finals with his Game 1 overtime winner in Dallas that Rick Jeanneret famously called "the shot heard round the world."

"It's something very special to me. RJ and I, we make a good team," Woolley said with a laugh. "There's nothing wrong with playing alongside RJ. He's one of the greatest play-by-play men of all-time and that is still a special goal for me in my career. I felt like Michael Jordan when I scored that goal."

"It's still amazing to me when I run into Buffalonians all over the country who remember where they were that night when I scored in Dallas."

These days, Woolley is using the wisdom of his 14-year pro career to guide the future of the NHL as a player agent. An unexpected call from a friend in 2008 led to Woolley forming TPG (The Players Group) Hockey in Birmingham, Michigan. The agency's stable of clients includes NHL'ers Drew Miller, Corey Potter and Chad LaRose, along with junior stars Brendan Perlini and Vince Dunn, both from the OHL's Niagara Ice Dogs.

(Woolley is hoping to be in Buffalo next Wednesday when the Ice Dogs face Connor McDavid and the Erie Otters at First Niagara Center.)

However, life hasn't been without a few bumps for the now 45-year-old Woolley in recent years.

Woolley was among several former NHL players (including Michael Peca and Bryan Berard) who got caught up in an investment scam that eventually saw two men charged by a federal grand jury in 2013 for bilking the players out of more than \$15 million over a 10-year period.

Being a successful agent requires more than just hockey knowledge, and Woolley says he's already using his difficult life experience to his advantage with his young clients.

"I think you're crazy not to learn from things you go through in your life. When you go through those experiences, you gain knowledge and are a lot more aware of what lies ahead," Woolley explains. "I don't want these guys to step into the same holes that I stepped in. One of the challenging parts is identifying who these people are. Typically these people become someone that you really trust and like to be around, and that's when they know they're in a position to take advantage of you."

"I'm very protective of my players. I know that there are a lot of bad people out there, and I want to try to keep them away from these people as much as possible."