



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

November 15, 2014

Maple Leafs-Sabres preview

By Staff Report

Associated Press

November 14, 2014

The Toronto Maple Leafs' normally strong power play was blanked despite numerous opportunities as their winning streak came to an end.

They should have an easier time capitalizing on chances against the Buffalo Sabres' dreadful defense, however.

Toronto can claim its longest winning streak against Buffalo in nearly 43 years Saturday night.

The Maple Leafs (9-6-2) missed out on what would have been a season-high fourth straight win Friday, losing 2-1 at home to Pittsburgh. They failed to score five goals for the first time in four games and were shut out on six power plays.

Toronto had gone 3 for 4 with the man advantage in Wednesday's 6-1 win over Boston. Its power-play unit entered Friday tied for the league's fourth-best success rate at 24.1 percent.

"As a power-play unit we have to be better," captain Dion Phaneuf said. "That was an opportunity for us to shift the momentum in the game, and we weren't able to capitalize at a key moment. That's our responsibility."

Cody Franson scored Toronto's lone goal to extend his career-best point streak to six games.

The Maple Leafs are looking to beat the Sabres for a fourth straight meeting for the first time since a five-game winning streak from Nov. 21, 1971-Feb. 19, 1972. They outshot Buffalo 37-10 in a 4-0 home victory on Oct. 28. The Sabres' shot total was the league's lowest in more than six years.

Phil Kessel and Tyler Bozak each had a goal and an assist. Kessel has scored in four straight meetings and has 10 assists in his last 11 against Buffalo.

The host Sabres (3-13-2), who own the NHL's fewest points and have scored the league's fewest goals, have lost a season-worst six straight after Thursday's 6-3 defeat at Minnesota. Jhonas Enroth surrendered four first-period goals and stopped only 33 of 38 shots as Buffalo allowed six goals for the third consecutive game and fourth time this season - matching its total from 2013-14.

Opponents are shooting 16.8 percent over the last three games after scoring on 8.4 percent of shots in the Sabres' first 15 games. Enroth and Michal Neuvirth haven't had much help in front of them with Buffalo giving up 39-plus shots in three of its last four.

The Sabres have conceded seven power-play goals on 17 chances over the last three games, including 2 in 4 penalty kills Thursday.

"It's kind of sad to watch team after team after team go through us in the defensive zone like we don't know what we're doing," coach Ted Nolan said. "We have so many guys puck-staring, watching the puck and not being aware of what's behind them."

Neuvirth, who gave up six goals on 29 shots in 6-1 loss to St. Louis on Tuesday, has dropped three of his last four starts versus Toronto while surrendering three-plus goals three times.

Drew Stafford leads Buffalo with 10 points but has only one in his last seven games against the Maple Leafs.

James Reimer is expected to start for Toronto after Jonathan Bernier stopped 38 shots in Friday's loss. Reimer is 6-2-2 in 10 career starts versus Buffalo despite a 3.34 goals-against average.

Hasek says he was born to be a goaltender

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

November 14, 2014

TORONTO – Dominik Hasek was a crybaby. That's what made him so dominating.

From his earliest days as a kid in the Czech Republic, Hasek couldn't handle losing. Failing to win tore him up, even when he wasn't directly involved.

"The professional team I was cheering for, anytime they were losing I remember my grandpa he had a handkerchief in his hands and he told me, 'You don't have to cry when we lose,'" Hasek said Friday. "I remember when I was 4, 5, 6, anytime our team lost I was crying. That's maybe why I was so competitive.

"I just enjoy winning."

The desire to win poured out of Hasek whenever he strapped on the goalie pads. Whether it was practice, the regular season, the Stanley Cup final or the Olympics, Hasek wanted to succeed. He needed to keep the puck out. He needed to win.

Hasek did. His resume features two Cups, Olympic gold, two Hart Trophies as NHL MVP and six Vezina Trophies as the league's best goaltender. The Hockey Hall of Fame recognized the legendary greatness in June, and it presented him with his gold ring Friday. His plaque is already mounted, and he'll be formally inducted Monday night.

"When you play hockey, you never think about it," Hasek said in the Great Hall. "You play hockey to win the game, to win the last game of the season or win the game for your country. That's what hockey's about. Once you retire, then you start to think about it.

"It's definitely a great honor."

Hasek, who starred in Buffalo from 1992 to 2001, can honestly say he was born to be a goalie. He never wanted to be anything else.

"I remember I was 3 years old, and I always asked my parents or my grandfather to shoot at me in the kitchen at home, in the meadow around the house," the 49-year-old said. "I never tried to score on someone. I was 3, 4 years old, and I always was in the net to stop the ball or stop the puck.

"When I was 6 it was my first practice, and I came to the hockey rink as a goalie, so I've been a goalie since practice No. 1."

Anyone who watched Hasek during a career that spanned from 1981 to 2011 knows he wasn't classically trained. He flopped, rolled, dived, wandered and dropped his stick. He'd do anything he could think of to keep the puck out.

There might have been people who wanted to change his unorthodox style, especially when he arrived in North America in 1990, but Hasek tuned them out. He had no choice.

"Fortunately, I didn't understand English at that time," he said with a smile. "I had no idea what was written about me in the papers or what the coaches say, so I couldn't listen too much to them."

Hasek always had a way of doing his own thing. That was rarely more evident than in 2001, when he forced the Sabres to trade him to Detroit. His motivation was to win the Cup – something he and Buffalo failed to do against Dallas in 1999 – and he succeeded as the Red Wings' starter in 2002 and as their backup in 2008.

"I knew in 2001 there is no chance to win it in Buffalo because the team was not anymore like it used to be," Hasek said. "I made the decision, and I asked to be traded. It was one of my best decisions.

"Buffalo, it's my second home. I spent probably the best years of my career there, but to win the Stanley Cup, at that time I had to move."

While the trade caused hard feelings in Sabreland for a long time, Hasek has no regrets. He got to win. He won because Buffalo first allowed him to play.

The Sabres acquired Hasek from Chicago in 1992, freeing him from the goal-crease shadow of Eddie Belfour and uniting him with John Muckler, the Sabres' coach and future general manager.

"In Buffalo, everything changed for me," Hasek said. "I felt right from the beginning bigger support than in Chicago. Importantly, Eddie Belfour wasn't there. When I came to Chicago, he was the starting goalie. Mike Keenan, he believed in him, so it was difficult for me in Chicago to be starting goalie. In Buffalo, it was a different situation, and I got a chance.

"We know how it ended."

Indeed. It ended with a call from the Hockey Hall of Fame – a call, by the way, that was initially rebuffed.

"I was on the bike somewhere in the country," Hasek said. "It was windy, and I got a number I didn't know. I said, 'I don't hear you. Call me later.' "

Sabres' past 100 games paint a sorry picture

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

November 14, 2014

Darcy Regier was often a pretty good revisionist about when the Buffalo Sabres' rebuilding actually started. Several moves, including the trade of Paul Gaustad to Nashville in 2012, took turns getting cited as a starting point by the team's former general manager.

The Sabres, of course, opened that season thinking Stanley Cup and were so high on themselves they barely needed a plane to fly to Europe. In the end, they failed even to make the playoffs. They started the 2013 lockout-shortened season clearly talking playoffs again but Lindy Ruff was fired after less than a month and a postseason push under Ron Rolston continued until the final week of the season.

That led to 2013-14, and one of the most reasonable assumptions was that the full-scale rebuild started in earnest last season. The Sabres retained Rolston as the full-time bench boss, even though he proved to be over his head in the NHL. But he wasn't given much help with the lineup either, as the Sabres opened the campaign with four teenagers on their roster, a first for an NHL team in 18 years.

The Sabres played 82 games last year under Rolston and Ted Nolan, going 21-51-10. They played their 18th of this season Thursday night in Minnesota and the 6-3 loss was as dreary as many of the previous 99 games. It dropped Buffalo to an NHL-worst 3-13-2 on the season.

The Sabres slog on tonight in First Niagara Center against the surging Toronto Maple Leafs, who are 6-2-1 in their last nine games. In the era of analytics, where sample sizes are key, 100 games is certainly enough of a sample and they paint an ugly picture for the Sabres.

- Buffalo has a 24-64-12 record in those 100 games. But look deeper than that and you'll find the Sabres have incredibly won just 12 times in regulation the last two seasons. Yes, 12 out of 100. They have one regulation win this season, that coming Oct. 25 at San Jose, and shootout wins over Carolina and Detroit.
- The last non-expansion team to have a worse 100-game stretch than Buffalo was the 1997-98 Tampa Bay Lightning, who were one game worse at 23-65-12.
- The Sabres are 1-6-2 at home this year. And get this: They don't have a regulation win downtown in 8½ months, since the 4-2 win over San Jose on Feb. 28 – the night they traded Ryan Miller and Steve Ott to St. Louis. That's 16 home games ago.
- In the 2014 calendar year, Buffalo has won three of its 28 home games in regulation. In addition to the San Jose game, there was a 2-1 win over New Jersey on Jan. 4 and a 3-2 win over Carolina on Feb. 25 in Miller's last game at home.
- The Sabres are on pace for a 36-point season, which would be the lowest in the NHL in the 21st century and the lowest in the league since Ottawa and San Jose registered paltry 24-point campaigns during their first and second seasons, respectively.

The standard bearer for NHL expansion-era futility remains the 1974-75 Washington Capitals, who had a record-low 21 points in their first season after posting a record of 8-67-5. They opened 2-16-2 in the 1975-76 campaign so their 100-game total was 10-83-7. No other team in history comes close to that for a similar stretch.

Through just 18 games of the season, the Sabres entered Friday already 17 points out of the Atlantic Division lead and 12 points out of a playoff spot. While players openly talked about the playoffs during training camp, few people outside the locker room believed this team had a chance. That said, those are amazing deficits to have already built up two weeks before Thanksgiving.

The Sabres have given up six goals each of the last three games, and defensive breakdowns certainly had coach Ted Nolan fuming after Thursday's game. The Wild had 20 of their 39 shots on goal and four of their goals in the first period.

"We have so many guys puck-staring and not being aware what's behind them," Nolan said. "We're at the National Hockey League level. You would think you'd be teaching at the junior level, even the American Hockey League. At this level, you would think guys would be aware of their surroundings. You have to be and you have to make the simple play.

"If the puck comes along the boards, you've got to get it out somehow. We're not very good at it right now.

"We need more than spurts. We need great goaltending every night. We need three or four lines going every night, six defensemen going every night. A game like tonight we had one line, maybe two defensemen."

The Sabres' rebuilding, clearly designed to garner Connor McDavid or Jack Eichel with their No. 1 draft pick, is also rooted in their large prospect pool panning out. To that end, things are going well.

Zemgus Girgensons is somehow only minus-1 for the season despite playing for a team that has been outscored, 65-22. Defenseman Nikita Zadorov played more than 25 minutes Thursday in a game in which his team gave up six goals and was somehow plus-3. Partner Rasmus Ristolainen was plus-2.

That's three former No. 1 picks, none over the age of 20. It's a start. On to the next hundred games.

...

Nolan said Michal Neuvirth will start in goal tonight. Marcus Foligno, a scratch Thursday, will return to the lineup but it was not announced who he will replace. The Sabres have no definitive word yet on the nature of the lower-body injury defenseman Josh Gorges suffered Tuesday in St. Louis. Gorges sat out Thursday's game and the team said he is still getting evaluated.

Jeanneret to work one period of Sabres play-by-play Saturday, full game soon

By Alan Pergament

Buffalo News

November 14, 2014

About six weeks ago, Sandra Jeanneret envisioned the night that her husband Rick returned to the Buffalo Sabres broadcast booth after his treatment for throat cancer.

"Just imagine how this family is going to feel when the puck drops and we hear Rick Jeanneret's voice again," she said.

That time is expected to come Saturday night when the Sabres meet the Toronto Maple Leafs in First Niagara Center.

Jeanneret, who was diagnosed with throat cancer over the summer and told a TV audience last week that he was cancer-free, said this morning that he plans to do one period of play-by-play of Saturday's game and has a four-game, 12-day plan to get his energy level up to work a full game by Thanksgiving Eve.

"I'm going to do a period Saturday and no more than that," said the 72-year-old Jeanneret. "I don't know how my voice will hang on. There is only one way to find out. There is no way to practice it."

If all goes well, Jeanneret's plan is to work another period at Tuesday's home game with San Jose and work two periods of games on Friday, Nov. 21 against the New York Rangers at home and the Washington Capitals on the road on Nov. 22.

"If it is good after that, let it rip," said Jeanneret.

By that, he means he plans to do a full game for the Thanksgiving Eve home game with Winnipeg on Nov. 26.

"I'll be doing cartwheels if I can do them," said Jeanneret of the game Thanksgiving Eve. "I'm all gung ho. The only thing that concerns me is my voice. There is a fatigue factor... Mentally now I'm ready to roll."

His long-term plan is to do all 47 games he is contracted to do this season and all 41 games he is contracted to do next season.

Jeanneret, who said he was emotional during last week's television appearance before a Sabres game, couldn't predict how he would feel when the puck drops Saturday.

"Ask me afterwards," he said. "I'm sure it will hit me."

It'll take more than Connor McDavid to fix these Sabres

By Damien Cox

Toronto Star

November 14, 2014

Even when things go well for the Buffalo Sabres these days, it ends up ugly.

Look at Thursday night. Early in the first period, the Buffalo squad that has been scoring at microscopic levels this season beat Minnesota's Darcy Kuemper twice on its first two shots of the game.

And trailed 3-2.

That was because the Wild had seven shots and three goals en route to a 6-3 triumph, dumping the Sabres to 3-13-2 this season and, in 80 games under Ted Nolan, a dismal 20-49-11.

That the Sabres are not a good hockey team is not news. That they are likely headed for a high draft pick and possibly their first top overall selection since Pierre Turgeon (1987) isn't news either.

But what is becoming an open question, ladies and gentlemen, is how big the smoking crater is going to be here.

Philadelphia 76ers big?

It matters because even if the Sabres manage to lay their hands on Connor McDavid next June, my goodness, how long it will take the Broken-Handed One to chain the Sabres to his rear fender and haul them up out of the gaping hole in the ice.

Five years? Longer?

It's possible, as we know, that even if the Sabres continue to be the NHL's worst and most punchless team right until the end of the regular schedule, that McDavid may not fall into their lap. The oddities of the revamped NHL draft lottery could yet foil the Sabres in their hopes of landing the sidelined Otter.

Then they could be in even bigger trouble, even if Jack Eichel turns out to be pretty damn good himself.

The Sabres, of course, are capable of pulling out a victory every month or so, and certainly Saturday's game against the Maple Leafs looks like a bit of a trap game after the Leafs and Pittsburgh Penguins clashed on Friday night.

Even now, with eight points in 18 starts, the Sabres are comfortably ahead of the record pace set by the 21-point Washington Capitals squad back in 1974-75. That said, that Caps team at least averaged 2.27 goals per game, which is more than a full goal ahead of the rate at which Buffalo is currently bulging the twine.

So it's not just about wins and losses. It's about the draining effect this kind of grinding, awful season could have on all the Sabres youngsters currently in the lineup even if the club doesn't set a futility record. It's one thing to lose, meanwhile, and quite another to be staring at a gigantic rebuild just to have a shot at finishing 13th in the conference.

Appropriately, GM Tim Murray has ordered centre Sam Reinhart, the No. 2 overall pick last June, back to his WHL club. That's good. Young Sam doesn't need to experience this.

The goalies are getting pelted nightly, but both are also unrestricted free agents and there isn't an ace netminding prospect in the Buffalo system. Ask Edmonton what it's like to advance a program without goaltending in place to at least give the kids a chance to compete.

Meanwhile, there are a few pieces in place, but not a lot, and some of those are stalled. Marcus Foligno's value as an NHLer remains unclear, and you could say the same thing about Cody Hodgson, Zemgus Girgensons and Tyler Myers. Beyond that, Mikhail Grigorenko, Mark Pysyk and Joel Armia are in Rochester learning the trade, and Nikita Zadorov is in some kind of weird limbo, with the organization fearful that if he goes to the KHL rather than the OHL, he'll be gone for good.

Rearguard Risto Ristolainen may be the club's best young player, alongside Reinhart and, probably, Girgensons. That's not yet a mountain of good young talent.

There's also some degree of uncertainty about the franchise moving forward. Owner Terry Pegula now also has the NFL's Bills, and we'll see over time whether he's better at overseeing two franchises than he has proven to be so far at owning one.

The departure of Pat LaFontaine was weird, and some rumours suggest he left because after hiring Murray he changed his mind, but Pegula wouldn't let him make another change. Nolan, meanwhile, remains a romantic and quixotic character in western New York, but he must demonstrate an ability to stick with this difficult project over the long haul while working well with others.

The John Tavares timeline is probably the most reasonable one to apply here. The Islanders made him the first pick in the 2009 draft at a time when they already owned Josh Bailey, Travis Hamonic, Matt Martin, Kyle Okposo and Frans Nielson.

Better or worse than what the Sabres have now? Hard to say.

But the Long Islanders are just now emerging as truly a solid team to be reckoned with.

So best-case scenario, we're talking 2020 before it's time to take the Sabres seriously again, and that's if they get McDavid.

Smoking crater, indeed. And that's with Murray yet to begin peeling off viable vets and sending them elsewhere for more futures.

Tim Murray knows his uncle Bryan Murray is a fighter

By Bruce Garrioch

Ottawa Sun

November 14, 2014

The news didn't come as a surprise to Tim Murray.

That doesn't mean it didn't hit home.

As the Buffalo Sabres' GM scouted Thursday's Subway Series game in Peterborough, an email arrived from the public relations department with a link to an interview his uncle Bryan Murray did with TSN's Michael Farber.

Speaking for the first time publicly, the Senators GM told Farber in the five-minute feature his Stage 4 colon cancer is incurable and the main message was he's urging people to get a regular colonoscopy because he never had one.

Tim has known since Bryan informed him of the prognosis in June, a few days before the NHL draft was held in Philadelphia, PA.

But Tim chose not to watch the video Thursday night when it arrived on his phone. He wanted to wait and he wanted to be alone.

"I couldn't watch it (Thursday night)," said Murray Friday before making a trek to Rochester, NY. "I waited until I got into my office (Friday morning), closed my door and watched.

"Even though I knew (in June) it was Stage 4, you know, but it's still hard to watch."

The 51-year-old, who left his post as the Senators assistant GM to take over the troubled Sabres, makes no bones about the fact he owes his career in hockey to his uncle Bryan.

As GM of the Detroit Red Wings, Bryan hired his nephew to be a part-time scout 21 years ago. He didn't work for a paycheck, instead, he had his expenses covered and had to prove he had what it took to do the job.

"He hired me for zero money and 'Let's see what you know?'," Murray said. "He told me, 'You're a know-it-all, let's see what you know?'"

"When he got the job in Florida (the next year), he hired me full-time and he gave me a two-year deal worth \$35,000 and \$40,000. So I worked for him for three-years for \$75,000 and he wanted me to earn my way."

Tim isn't surprised by Bryan's candor about his situation in the interview with Farber. That's what has made the 71-year-old successful in the game as both a GM and coach.

"That's what he has done all his life is help people," Tim said. "He's helped young people from Shawville, Que. in different ways and not just in hockey.

"He was a schoolteacher. He taught people and he empowered people. He empowered me but way more people than just me. I've always been surprised in the job that he's had how much time he has had for people. He's always taken the time. For him to put out a message, is what he's about and it certainly doesn't surprise me."

Tim admires the fact his uncle has chosen to speak out because he might be able to help somebody who has been thinking about going for the screening but can't be bothered or is fearful.

Tim told TSN 1200 his colonoscopy is scheduled for Jan. 21 and he got the call Friday. Bryan hopes other people follow suit by being up front about his own situation

"He's a man. That's the way he is," said Tim. "He's going to stand up in front of it. He's not going to try to hide anything. That's the way he has always been, honest.

"He's certainly not embarrassed by it or anything like that. He's going to deal with it head-on and that's what he is doing."

Tim said his family realizes they aren't the only ones involved in this fight and that's why Bryan went public by telling his story.

"This has affected many, many, many families," said Tim. "The reason he is speaking out isn't because his cancer is more important than anybody's. It's because people are paying attention when they're talking about him.

"There are thousands and thousands of people who are affected by this and their family is as devastated as our family is but he's got a name and a cachet that if they can put this out there then people are going to pay attention. He's so recognizable and it only takes a couple of people to pay attention and then they pass it along."

Tim knows Bryan is tough as nails and if anybody can put up a good fight with this horrible disease he will.

"That's what he is: He's tough and he's a fighter," said Murray.

Maple Leafs look to bounce back vs. struggling Sabres

By Staff Report

NHL.com

November 14, 2014

MAPLE LEAFS (9-6-2) at SABRES (3-13-2)

TV: CBC, MSG-B

Season series: Toronto Maple Leafs goalie Jonathan Bernier had to make 10 saves in a 4-0 win against the Buffalo Sabres on Oct. 28. Sabres goalie Michal Neuvirth faced 37 shots, with Maple Leafs forwards Tyler Bozak, Phil Kessel and James van Riemsdyk combining for three goals and two assists.

Maple Leafs team scope: Toronto was outshot 40-31 and went 0-for-6 on the power play in a 2-1 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins on Friday. The Maple Leafs were 7-for-16 in the previous five games and scored at least three goals in seven of eight. Goalie James Reimer is expected to start; he is 4-2-0 with a 2.65 goals-against average and .925 save percentage. Bernier, who made 38 saves Friday, has allowed two goals or fewer in seven of 12 starts this season but is 5-4-2.

Sabres team scope: Buffalo scored three goals in regulation for the second time this season but lost to the Minnesota Wild 6-3 on Thursday. The Sabres have allowed six goals in each of their past three games, have lost five in a row, eight of nine, and 12 of 14. Neuvirth will start this game; he and Jhonas Enroth have alternated starts the past three games. Off the ice, Rick Jeanneret will call play-by-play of the first period, his first appearance since being treated for throat cancer in September. He said he is cancer-free.

Hasek had only one goal: to be the man in the net

By Mike Brophy

NHL.com

November 14, 2014

TORONTO -- There was never any other choice for Dominik Hasek. If he was going to play hockey, he was going to be the goalie.

"I was a goalie from practice No. 1," Hasek said here Friday at the start of Hockey Hall of Fame weekend. "I remember I was 3 years old and I always asked my parents and grandfather to shoot at me in the kitchen at home, in the meadow around the house. I never tried to score on anyone. I always was in the net to stop the ball or stop the puck. When I was 6 and at my first practice, I came to the hockey rink as the goalie."

Turns out it was a very astute decision. Hasek received his Hockey Hall of Fame ring with this year's other inductees: Mike Modano, Rob Blake, Peter Forsberg, referee Bill McCreary and coach Pat Burns (accepted by his widow, Line Gignac Burns). The group will be inducted Monday.

Right from the get-go, Hasek hated giving up a goal. Buffalo Sabres teammate Mike Peca once said jokingly that Hasek stopped 106 of 115 shots he faced in warm-up prior to a game.

"I remember I cried many times when I lost or when I let goals in during practice when I was a kid," Hasek said. "I remember crying when my favorite professional team I was cheering for would lose a game. My grandfather had a handkerchief and he would wipe my tears and tell me I didn't have to cry when I was a kid."

After a brilliant career in Europe, where he was three times chosen Player of the Year and five times Goaltender of the Year, Hasek headed for North America. He had been drafted in the 10th round, pick No. 199, by the Chicago Blackhawks in 1983.

"I always dreamed about one day being a starting goalie in the NHL and it took me a few years," Hasek said. "I was sent down to the minors and I played behind Eddie Belfour, who was the Vezina Trophy winner in Chicago. Honestly at the time I never dreamed of being a Vezina Trophy winner or being inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame. It is like a dream, seriously."

Hasek's career kicked into gear when he was traded to the Sabres in August 1992 and got the chance to be the starter for the first time in the NHL.

The high point of his nine years in Buffalo was arguably also the low point: losing Game 6 of the 1999 Stanley Cup Final, 2-1 in triple overtime, against the Dallas Stars. Fans in Buffalo to this day insist Stars forward Brett Hull had his skate in the crease and the goal he scored should have been disallowed. But it counted, and Dallas won the Cup.

"It was tough ... difficult for everyone in our locker room," Hasek said. "Especially with the Brett Hull goal, which was sort of on the edge maybe. It was an illegal goal."

Hasek was traded to the Detroit Red Wings in July 2001 and helped them win the Stanley Cup in 2002 and 2008.

Throughout his career, Hasek had to answer questions about his unique, unorthodox style. He would fling himself from side to side in the net, roll around on his back with his legs kicking in the air, and drop his stick to pick up the puck with his blocker.

"I think the NHL should have made a rule that made it illegal for him to do that," Forsberg said with a smile.

"What can I say about my style?" Hasek said. "When I was a kid I would watch the best goalies, what I could see on TV, and at that time it was European goalies like Jiri Halicek and Vladislav Tretiak. I watched them and I tried to do the same things in practice. There were certain things that were working for me and some things that didn't work for me at all. So that is how I developed my style. I was more flexible than most goalies. I never had a goalie coach as a kid so I developed my style on my own."

Hasek said he knew that's how he wanted to play.

"I had some goalie coaches who maybe asked why I did things a certain way, but back in the day I was strong-willed and they never tried to change me," he said. "I think it worked because I was more flexible than the other guys. My butterfly, I think, was the best in my time. I could reach from post to post with my legs and the whole body was more flexible so I could be on my knees because I was able to reach farther than the other goalies."

Hasek's acrobatic style certainly confused the opposition.

"I think his greatest attribute was that he was so flexible he could have a leg anywhere and he read the play so well," Forsberg said. "I remember a few times you'd maybe beat a guy coming in and he would be right there. If he saw you had your head down he would read the play so he was always close to you and you could never get an easy goal on him."

Hasek, who turns 50 in January, smiles when he thinks back on robbing some of the best players in the world.

"I watched yesterday on TV some of my great saves and I enjoyed it," Hasek said. "I enjoyed so much playing goal. Unfortunately I could not help my teammates score goals, but when the game was 2-1 for us I knew I could be the biggest difference. For me it was all about winning the game."

Hasek won the Vezina Trophy as the NHL's best goalie six times and won the Hart Trophy as the League's most valuable player in 1997 and 1998.

The biggest victory for Hasek came in 1998 when the Czech Republic won the gold medal at the Nagano Olympics.

"Nagano was definitely No. 1," Hasek said. "I have to say definitely No. 1 with winning my first Stanley Cup in 2002. In 1998 we came to Nagano as an underdog, but we had a special feeling in the locker room with a coach like Ivan Hlinka and a player like Jaromir Jagr and some other, at that time, underrated players. This is something I will never forget.

"We won the gold medal and then flew on a charter to meet our president [Vaclav] Havel, who sent for us in Prague. We spent one night in Prague and I will never forget that. It is something I will appreciate for the rest of my life."

The Czechs defeated the United States 4-1 in the quarterfinals, Canada 2-1 in a shootout in the semifinals, and Russia 1-0 in the gold-medal game.

The loss stung Canada. Blake, who won gold for Canada at the 2002 Salt Lake City Olympics, credited Hasek.

"He was one of the greatest," Blake said. "You knew you were never going to get an easy one on him. The best game I ever saw or he played against me was in the Olympics in Nagano. He was the best player on the ice and he stopped five of Canada's best shooters (Theo Fleury, Ray Bourque, Joe Nieuwendyk, Eric Lindros, Brendan Shanahan)."

If the Czechs were underdogs at the start of the Olympic tournament, as Hasek suggested, it wasn't long before the other teams started looking over their shoulders.

"After we beat USA in the quarterfinals we started to believe that maybe we can do something more," Hasek said.

It was a big deal not just for the team.

"The people in the Czech Republic still remember exactly where they were and what they were doing when we beat the Canadians in the semifinal," Hasek said. "It was an unforgettable moment."

Hasek retired from the NHL after the 2007-08 season but found himself growing restless. He returned to play for hometown Pardubice in the Czech League in 2009-10 and for Moscow Spartak in the Kontinental Hockey League in 2010-11.

"For me it was easy to retire, but after a few months without hockey I decided to come back just for the love of the game," Hasek said. "But for every player, there comes a time when you have to retire forever, and that day came for me too."

When the call came telling Hasek he had been elected to the Hall of Fame, he was out for a bike ride when he answered the phone.

"The wind was blowing, so I said, 'I can't hear you; call me back,'" Hasek said.

There was never any doubt he would be a goaltender, and there was no other sport for him.

"Hockey is the best sport in the world," Hasek said. "The city I am from, hockey is No. 1, so I am glad I chose hockey."

Sabres GM Murray has 'second guessed everything' since uncle's cancer diagnosis

By Ryan Dadoun

NBC Sports

November 14, 2014

Tim Murray had been the Ottawa Senators assistant general manager for roughly seven years when he left his uncle and boss, Bryan Murray, in January to join the Buffalo Sabres as their general manager. It is the job he wanted and worked his entire career to obtain, but since Bryan was diagnosed with cancer in June, Tim has struggled with his decision to leave.

"I've quite frankly have second guessed everything that has gone on since..and [Bryan] knows that too," Tim Murray told TSN. "What's happened has happened and I'm here, but under different circumstances – certainly if I knew that earlier, I wouldn't have been very anxious to be out the door. I would have been quite content to know that I would have been his assistant for as long as he wanted."

Bryan Murray recently revealed that he is in a battle that he will not win. His goal, as he put it, is to "keep it going as long as we can, be as healthy as we can for that time, and enjoy what we have as we do it."

Tim and Bryan speak regularly and while Tim starts the conversations by saying that they won't talk about hockey, Bryan often eventually steers the discussion in that direction.

"The last 5 minutes always comes back to hockey and a couple of tips for me with the situation that I'm in," Tim said. "I can get emotional or frustrated and he can always help bring me back."

Ted Nolan still searching right Sabres line combinations, frustrated with Cody Hodgson and Chris Stewart

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

November 14, 2014

BUFFALO – Drew Stafford figured what the heck, he had nothing to lose by offering his services at center. The Sabres winger had played the position in high school.

So Stafford recently told coach Ted Nolan he would move if the reeling Sabres wanted to experiment.

"I wanted to let him know I'm comfortable with whatever he throws at myself or whoever I end up with," Stafford said Friday inside the First Niagara Center. "I want him to know I want to be part of something positive that tries to help us get better and turn this thing around somewhat, because everyone in here is obviously sick of this.

"It's miserable, and we're trying everything in our power to try to turn this around."

Stafford practiced at center earlier this week, then started Thursday's 6-3 loss in Minnesota there.

The nine-year veteran lasted just a couple of shifts.

"I think it was the right intent, but (he) found it a little bit more difficult than just assuming you'd like to do it," Nolan said after the Sabres prepared for tonight's game against the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Stafford, the Sabres' leading scorer, shifted back to right wing. Nolan, meanwhile, went back to the drawing board.

The futility has forced Nolan and his staff to constantly switch lines, duos and even change some positions. So far, most attempts have yielded little or nothing.

The Sabres, losers of four straight contests, are an NHL-worst 3-13-2. Counting two scores awarded for two shootout wins, they've scored 24 goals and allowed 66, meaning they have a stunning minus-42 goal differential. No one else is below minus-17!

"You keep searching, you keep looking and hopefully you find that good combination," Nolan said.

Nolan believes he found one combination, the trio of Matt Moulson, center Zemgus Girgensons and Tyler Ennis, whose five goals lead the Sabres.

"Looks like we got a great mix there," Nolan said.

Of course, to create that line, Nolan put Ennis, his No. 1 center since the winter, back on the wing, where he started his NHL career.

"No coach in their right mind would be keeping the same lines with three wins," Sabres center Torrey Mitchell said.

Sabres captain Brian Gionta, who's still goalless, added: "He's trying to find something that fits and works. At times, you get a line going and it works good, but then he tries to spread it out to try to get a few more going. So it's trying to find that depth."

Nolan said he wants to identify his top nine forwards. In addition to the No. 1 line, he also likes the trio of Mitchell, Gionta and Brian Flynn.

The other two lines are works in progress.

Nolan mixed up more lines Friday, putting Stafford with center Cody McCormick and Nick Deslauriers. Marcus Foligno, who will return from a shoulder injury tonight, skated on the left wing beside center Cody Hodgson and Chris Stewart. Patrick Kaleta also skated on that line and subbed for Ennis, who's a little banged up.

Nolan wouldn't say who would be scratched for Foligno, but his patience is clearly wearing thin with Hodgson and Stewart.

Both players have one goal and two points. Hodgson skated a season-low seven minutes, 53 seconds Thursday; Stewart played a season-low eight minutes, 31 seconds.

"The response is not what I expected," said Nolan, who didn't specifically name Hodgson and Stewart. "I expected a little bit more frustration, a little bit more anger. It's like we're just OK with it, and we can't be OK with it. You got to want it.

"I guess that's the biggest thing, we talked to our captains today, we had a good video session. One thing about pictures and video, they don't lie."

While the Sabres played terrible defensively Thursday, they scored three times for only the second time all season. Remember, six players on the roster have at least two 20-goal seasons on their resume.

"We have it," Gionta said about the scoring. "It's not a matter of bearing down more, it's ... how we play the game that doesn't allow us to create enough chances, and that's why scoring is down. We spend a lot of time in our D-zone. We don't come around our own end clean so we're coming through the neutral zone with speed, back off their D. We chase the puck a lot throughout the game.

"So when you don't have that time to set plays up or get sustained pressure, so that's why goals are down."

Sabres players excited to have Rick Jeanneret back: 'A pretty special moment for the whole organization'

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
November 14, 2014

BUFFALO – To winger Patrick Kaleta, who grew up in nearby Angola listening to Rick Jeanneret call games, the greatest perk of playing for the Sabres isn't money or prestige.

"One of the best, if not the best thing about being a Sabre is hearing your name called by Rick Jeanneret," Kaleta said Friday inside the First Niagara Center. "I still get chills listening to some of stuff on YouTube."

So whenever Kaleta needs to "get pumped up," he listens to the legendary play-by-play man, who will return tonight, call some famous goals.

"I'm just happy and privileged to have my name called by him," said Kaleta, who used to turn down the television to listen to Jeanneret on the radio.

In an otherwise glum season, Friday was a special day. The Sabres announced Jeanneret, who said last week he's cancer-free, would call the first period of tonight's game against the Toronto Maple Leafs.

Jeanneret has been sidelined all season battling throat cancer.

"The time seems right to slowly begin transitioning back to work," Jeanneret said in a statement. "My doctors have told me I'm cancer-free and I'm feeling well enough to get back in the booth, even if it's only on a limited basis for the time being. The kindness and well-wishes from everyone, especially Sabres fans and the Western New York community, has been overwhelming and I'm truly grateful for the tremendous support during this process."

Kaleta called Jeanneret a "true role model in what he's gone through and what he's battled."

Sabres defenseman Tyler Myers added: "It's pretty special, not only for R.J., but to see what he's gone through, he fought out of it and was a fighter throughout the whole experience. It's a pretty special moment for the whole organization."

That first goal will be special, too.

"R.J.'s arguably the best in the league," Myers said. "To be the guy to get the first goal with him would be pretty cool."

Kaleta and Myers both kept in contact with Jeanneret over the last several months.

xxx

Sabres winger Marcus Foligno (shoulder) will return tonight. He missed four of the last five games.

"I got to be playing my (physical) style of play," Foligno said. "Didn't do it last game, and just needed some time to group it together and come back stronger."

Sabres coach Ted Nolan wouldn't reveal which forward will sit. Nolan said goalie Michal Neuvirth will start. He had no update on defenseman Josh Gorges (lower body). Gorges was being evaluated Friday.

xxx

Nolan seemed shocked the Sabres came out so flat against Edmonton last Friday after Jeanneret and Hall of Fame Buffalo Bills quarterback Jim Kelly, who recently announced he's cancer-free, spoke to the team.

"There's no bigger inspiration than when Jim Kelly walks in your room with Rick Jeanneret," he said. "You can't get two bigger sports figures, especially with the Buffalo area. I thought for sure we'd come out flying, just for that sake. Different strokes for different folks. That would inspire me."

The Sabres lost 3-2 to the Oilers.

Hasek talks Hall of Fame; No goal

By Howard Berger

WGR 550

November 14, 2014

Toronto, ON (WGR 550) -- As a testament to the passage of time, it was 15 years, four months and 25 days since "No Goal" or "Toe in the Crease" -- whichever you prefer. And, Dominik Hasek admitted he hasn't yet recovered from the disappointment.

"That was tough for everyone in our locker room and it still bothers me when I think about it," Hasek said on Friday afternoon when asked about the infamous, triple-overtime goal by Brett Hull of Dallas that eliminated the Sabres in Game 6 of the 1999 Stanley Cup final. The toe of Hull's skate was in the crease, which should have nullified the goal based on strict rules that season. Instead, it counted and it remains the closest Buffalo has come to winning the Cup; the 1975 team losing to Philadelphia in five games.

"That goal by Brett was definitely on the edge," Hasek said rather charitably when surrounded by a horde of media at the Hockey Hall of Fame. "And, it was really the only chance our Sabres team had to win the Stanley Cup. By 2001, the club had changed and I had to ask for a trade. It turned out to be the best decision of my career because I went to Detroit and was able to win the Cup [in 2002]. It was exciting to play on that Hockey Hall of Fame team -- this time with Brett Hull."

Other Hall members from the '02 Red Wings include Hull, Steve Yzerman, Chris Chelios, Igor Larionov, Luc Robitaille, Brendan Shanahan and coach Scotty Bowman. Nicklas Lidstrom will join them next year along with, perhaps, Sergei Fedorov.

Hasek will be inducted into the Hall of Fame Monday night along with former players Mike Modano, Rob Blake and Peter Forsberg; referee Bill McCreary and the late NHL coach Pat Burns, who died of cancer in November 2010.

Though his greatest NHL moment occurred in Detroit, Hasek's prime years as the best goalie on Earth took place in Buffalo. Six times (1994-95-97-98-99 and 2001) he was awarded the Vezina Trophy, thus becoming the first European-born player to win the award. He earned the Hart Trophy as the NHL's most valuable player in 1996-97 and 1997-98; the first goalie to do so since Jacques Plante in 1962. Playing for his native Czech Republic, Hasek won a gold medal at the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan -- the first Games in which NHL players participated.

The soon-to-be 50-year-old (Jan. 29) will forever have terrific memories from his time in a Sabres uniform. "Buffalo is my second home; my nine years there were my greatest as a pro and an international player," Hasek said. "But, to win the Stanley Cup at that time, I had to move to another team."

Modano, now 44, played against Hasek in the '99 Stanley Cup final and was asked if he brought up the rather sore point with his fellow inductee.

"Naw, I didn't say much about that," he smiled. "Lindy Ruff is around [my home in Dallas] too and I don't bring up the subject around him either."

Ruff, now coaching the Dallas Stars, was behind the Buffalo bench on that fateful night in June 1999. It was Ruff who chased NHL commissioner Gary Bettman out of the arena trying to ascertain how Hull's goal could have counted. "I think every time Lindy sees me around the [Stars] offices, he gets a little twinge in his gut," said Modano. "Brett Hull is going to be here this weekend. I can let him talk to Dom about it."

Hasek broke up the media gathering when asked, by Gord Miller of TSN, how he was told of his Hall of Fame election. "I was riding on a bike at home when my cellphone rang. I couldn't hear who was on the other end and I said, 'Sorry, you'll have to call me back.' Thankfully, they did."

Will Larsson be in the Sabres' long term plans?

By Matthew Coller

WGR 550

November 14, 2014

We all like to be right. So when there is a prospect that is tough to figure out, it can be easy to pick a side and stick with it. But sometimes, it's simply too hard to tell. Sometimes we have to wait and see.

That's the case with forward Johan Larsson, who continued his terrific play in Rochester on Friday night with a goal and an assist in the Amerks' 6-1 win over the Toronto Marlies. Larsson's two points upped his season total to 11 in 11 games and 55 in 69 games as an Amerk since being acquired from the Minnesota Wild.

For the 22-year-old forward, the offensive success has not yet come at the NHL level. In 33 games in The Show, he has just four assists.

"I try to improve every day," Larsson said Friday night. "You got up there and try to get on a roll, but don't play power play so it's tough, but I'm going to play here, do good here and see what happens."

"Everyone wants to be up there, that's your main goal. When you're down here, you have to play good. You can't think about it that much. Take your opportunity, be good down here and have patience."

So the question surrounding Larry – his Amerks teammates call him Larry – is whether he can be an impact player for the Sabres someday.

How should we go about projecting Larry? We have to look at all the factors: Age, draft status, tools/skill set, makeup, circumstances and AHL and NHL statistics.

At 22-years-old, the Swedish forward is getting to the age where there isn't much more room to grow. That does not mean that what you've seen in the NHL is all he can be, rather that he won't make many more improvements in major areas such as skating, intelligence and strength. So we should not project him to make strides in these areas going forward.

Larsson is a second round draft pick, meaning that scouts saw him as more than a grinder type or AHL lifer, but a player with NHL potential. The scouting reports around the draft projected him as a third line center who was difficult to play against and who could add enough offense to stay in the top nine.

The scouting report matters. If a player is undrafted and scores in the AHL, it is possible that they can score at the next level, but less likely than for a second round pick.

Hockey's Future wrote: "Larsson is a hard-working, two-way winger who can play either wing. He is a strong team player and plays in all situations. He can chip in offensively and play shifts on the penalty kill, though he has no high-end skill to speak of."

The report touches on his tools. Grading them out individually, he has average hands that include an accurate wrist shot, decent passing ability, below average offensive aggressiveness and ability to get to the front of the net, average speed but NHL-caliber skating, above average along the walls and above average intelligence.

"He is a guy who produces a lot in this league," coach Chadd Cassidy said. "It hasn't translated up top. Has it been a fair assessment up there? I don't know. It's all opportunity, who you're playing with, what situation you're in. He continues to make strides to get better, but it's hard to tell what he is going to be at the National League level. Until you have the right people around him, it's going to be hard to know that."

That combination of tools results in what you would call a low risk prospect. The skating ability and smarts usually result in at least a capable NHL fill-in. The question mark is whether he will be a fill-in – say like Brian Flynn or Zac Dalpe – or if his so-so offensive skills will be good enough to post the 20-30+ points required for a defensive forward to see third line minutes.

This is where we have to look at circumstances and statistics for help.

Brilliant statistical analyst Gabriel Desjardins estimated that the average AHL call-up posted 0.20 even strength goals per game in the AHL, then 0.11 per game at the NHL level the next season. By this metric, Larsson's even strength scoring is slightly below average for call-ups at 0.15 for goal scoring. If he could repeat his AHL EV scoring in the NHL, that would equate to around 12 5-on-5 goals per season – a solid mark for a third liner. Per the translation, you might estimate closer to seven.

In terms of total points, the translation per every one point, according to Desjardins, call-ups score 0.44. That would put Larry at about 24 points per 69 games or close to 30 per 82 – right in our third-liner range.

Some of those call-ups will receive power play and top six time. Larsson does not project as a power play threat like, say, Connor McDavid or Jack Eichel.

His NHL time is relevant to his scoring projection, but not *that* relevant.

He has played under 400 total minutes. Here is a look at the forwards he has been paired with most last season:

Zemgus Girgensons: 113 minutes

Matt D'Agostini: 67 minutes

Steve Ott: 52 minutes
Nicolas Deslauriers: 39 minutes
Marcus Foligno: 38 minutes
And this season:
Cody Hodgson: 18 minutes
Cody McCormick: 18 minutes
Brian Flynn: 16 minutes
Chris Stewart: 12 minutes

A mixed bag, but very few players with scoring ability – considering Girgensons was only 19 when they were paired together and just finding his NHL legs.

If Larsson is going to produce points in the NHL, he will have to do it alongside more defensive-minded players. However, D'Agostini couldn't score at all. Neither can Deslauriers, McCormick or Flynn and since Ted Nolan took over, neither can Foligno. That leaves pre-offensive step forward Girgensons and Ott, who wasn't exactly Teemu Selanne. And Hodgson has two points this year.

Scoring alone does not answer the question of whether Larsson can be an NHL player. Was he effective in other areas of the game?

The stats would suggest the answer is yes.

While playing alongside Girgensons, the Larry posted a whopping 52.7% Corsi Percentage (Percentage of total shot attempts). This is an incredible mark for any player under any circumstance on the league's worst Corsi team.

Even more interesting is that Larsson was not given the advantages young players might normally receive such as what are called "sheltered minutes." Instead, he started in the offensive zone only 43.8% of the time **the lowest of any Sabre forward with more than 20 games played** except Matt Ellis and Cody McCormick.

Similar players with 40% or so offensive zone start percentages around the NHL include players like Brandon Prust, Brandon Sutter, Marcel Goc, Dan Carcillo, Vern Fiddler, Chris Kelly and so on. Few scorers are on the ice for that high of a percentage of Dzone faceoffs.

As you can see in this Player Usage Chart, invented by Rob Vollman, the Sabres' forward who faced tough minutes were usually crushed in possession. Not Larsson.

So what can Larry be for the Sabres? Maybe he won't even see big power play minutes, likely reserved for the No. 1 picks from the past and of the future, but the small sample NHL numbers and quality AHL stats, combined with his draft status, skill set and hard-nosed makeup suggest that he can play in the NHL every night.

Whether he does it, well, I'm sure we'd all like to be right about that. But only time will tell.

Amerks end losing streak

So, the Amerks aren't all busts.

A terrific all-around effort on Friday night resulted in a 6-1 blowout over one of the league's worst teams in Toronto. Luke Adam potted two goals, both coming with Brayden Irwin in front of the net.

Adam and Matt Ellis - who also scored twice - were thrilled to have Irwin back on the team. For some reason, Irwin started the year in the ECHL. Seeing as he was a big part of the Amerks' run to make the postseason last year, scoring 25 points in 45 games, it didn't make much sense to have Akim Aliu on the roster over him. Aliu had some goal scoring ability, but wasn't nearly the all-around player as Irwin.

Adam is an interesting case. Many think of him now as purely an AHL guy, but there's this crazy thing he does that NHL teams usually like: Score goals. Between last year and this year, he has 35 in 73 games for the Amerks.

The difference between him and a lot of AHL guys is that his goals come in "dirty areas." Nearly every goal has been from around the blue paint, which is where the NHL goals are scored (as you hear EVERY coach tell you all the time, but it's true.)

In the NHL, he has 15 goals in 87 games over his career. Recognizing he would not be an all-around player at the NHL level, couldn't somebody in the league use 15 goals? Last year, 153 players in the NHL scored more than 15 - the rest didn't. Also acknowledging that many of those goals came while playing with Jason Pominville and Thomas Vanek, it still seems there should be a role somewhere for a player who can put some pucks in the net, rather than many of the "grinder" players who score between 0-5 per season.

Jeanneret returns to the booth on Saturday

By Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

November 14, 2014

One week after a surprise appearance during an emotional pre-game ceremony on Hockey Fights Cancer night, Hall of Fame broadcaster Rick Jeanneret will rejoin the Sabres broadcast team to call the first period of Buffalo's game against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Saturday night.

The game, which begins at 7 p.m. on MSG, will be the Foster Hewitt Award winner's first game since being treated for throat cancer in early September.

"The time seems right to slowly begin transitioning back to work," Jeanneret said. "My doctors have told me I'm cancer-free and I'm feeling well enough to get back in the booth, even if it's only on a limited basis for the time being. The kindness and well-wishes from everyone, especially Sabres fans and the Western New York community, has been overwhelming and I'm truly grateful for the tremendous support during this process."

Since the announcement on July 2 that Jeanneret had been diagnosed with throat cancer, there was no timetable put on his return to the booth. Dan Dunleavy, who was already scheduled to take on an increased workload this season, has called Buffalo's first 18 games in Jeanneret's absence.

Buoyed by the news he is cancer free, Jeanneret decided that he was ready to return on Saturday.

"I'm feeling pretty good, although a little weak from weight loss, which is par for the course and the recovery regimen," Jeanneret explained. "I had planned all along to get back in the booth, but I couldn't set a timetable given that I didn't know how the recovery would go. I had no preset return date, but it was certainly affected by the news that I had been found cancer free."

Jeanneret doesn't know exactly what to expect when the puck drops on Saturday, but he believes that starting off slow is the right move.

"I'm approaching Saturday's game with a great deal of trepidation, and just hope I'll get stronger and better with each ensuing outing. Success would certainly help to wipe out some of the recovery memories, as did the incredible reaction of the fans before the Edmonton game.

"One period seems right to begin with, and I'm hoping the stamina will be there to get me through it. "

Buffalo Jr. Sabres notebook

By Joe Ray

Sabres.com

November 14, 2014

Even as the midway point of the Ontario Junior Hockey League season approaches, the Buffalo Jr. Sabres have had to continually adapt to changing conditions.

After a rough start to the season, the Jr. Sabres strung together four consecutive wins from October 14-22 and appeared to be turning a corner. Since the end of that streak, however, the team has failed to collect a point in eight straight outings, surrendering 45 goals during the slump and falling to last place in the OJHL West division at 6-19-0-0.

With 13 of the 19 players on the Jr. Sabres' roster in their first season with the team, head coach John Tucker recognizes that there will be lengthy learning experiences with this group.

"It's just growing pains with our group," Tucker said. "We have a lot of frustrated kids who want to do well and are working really hard in practice. Frustration sets in when you don't win, and that's a good thing. If they weren't upset and frustrated and mad at themselves, then they would accept losing. We have a really good core of leaders on the team that we're counting on to help pull us out of this."

"At the beginning of the year we were struggling in many areas, now we just have to work and focus on playing a full game," forward **Zach Evancho** added. "The game's not 40 minutes, it's not 20, it's 60. If we can play a full 60 minutes, we can compete with anybody in the league, and I think that's about to happen for us."

The Jr. Sabres have also had to adapt after their captain, Nick Smith, decided to leave in the team in order to begin focusing on his collegiate education.

After compiling 25 points (10+15) in 36 games with the Jr. Sabres last season, Smith played 15 games this year before pursuing a different set of future endeavors.

"He was two years out of high school and part of it was just time to get to work, get to school, and look at some other options," Tucker said of Smith. "We were hurting, he was our captain, but sometimes life takes over."

Forward **Ryan Kuhn**, another second year Jr. Sabre, took up the captaincy in the wake of Smith's departure.

Kuhn says that the new letter on his jersey has not changed his role drastically.

"I'm just trying to help a lot of the young guys, stay on them," he said. "They are all coming along well as they're starting to learn and help the team out. I think we're going to string some wins together soon, we're just stuck in a bit of a rut now."

Evancho's return to the Buffalo Jr. Sabres organization has been a boon to the team this season. After playing for the U18 Jr. Sabres in 2011-12, Evancho spent the past two seasons with the USHL's Youngstown Phantoms. The 19-year-old winger returned to Buffalo six games into the OJHL season, and he is now tied with Kuhn and **Tim Kielich** for the team scoring lead with 16 points (9+7), aided by a five-game point streak.

"Coming from Youngstown, it's a bit more of a faster league so you have to move the puck quicker. You have to know what you're going to do before you do it," Evancho said. "Here [in the OJHL] you have a little more time to make plays, but at the same time it's more physical. I've had to change some stuff, but most of it stays the same."

Listed at 5'8" and 155 pounds, Evancho is one of the smallest players on the team, but that has not hindered him one bit.

"He came back from Youngstown with a great attitude," Tucker said. "As one of our older guys, he's been a great leader for us. He's probably one of our biggest hitters too. Heart goes a long way; it doesn't always have to be size. He's definitely a great player."

While the team may be struggling on the ice, the Jr. Sabres are well on their way to reaping the benefits of being one of the home teams at the newly-completed HARBORCENTER complex.

"For the whole Buffalo Jr. Sabres program, it's going to do a lot of great things for kids in Western New York," Tucker said. "Everything is just first class, and everyone is really enjoying it. We're just happy and thrilled."

The Jr. Sabres dropped their first two contests on HARBORCENTER ice, but the players and coaches have taken notice of the tangible change in the atmosphere around the organization.

"It's been way different, actually," Evancho said. "We're starting to get more fans every game, people want to check us out and they want to come check the new rink out. There's more of a junior atmosphere now."

The Jr. Sabres have six games remaining in November, and hockey fans will have a pair of chances to be part of that junior hockey atmosphere at HARBORCENTER.

Upcoming Games

- Friday, November 14 @ Pickering (7:30 p.m.)
- **Tuesday, November 18 vs. St. Michael's (7:30 p.m., HARBORCENTER)**
- Friday, November 21 @ Milton (7:30 p.m.)
- **Monday, November 24 vs. Stouffville (7:30 p.m., HARBORCENTER)**
- Friday, November 28 @ Burlington (7:30 p.m.)
- Sunday, November 30 @ Newmarket (7:30 p.m.)