



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*December 27, 2014*

## **Tatar, Red Wings end 6-game skid, beat Sabres**

By Staff Report

Associated Press

December 23, 2014

DETROIT (AP) — Tomas Tatar took advantage of extra space on the ice to create some scoring chances — and help Detroit end a six-game skid.

Tatar had a pair of power-play goals in the third period Tuesday night and the Red Wings beat the Buffalo Sabres 6-3 Tuesday night.

Tatar's 13th goal of the season gave the Red Wings the lead for good with 8:20 to play and Johan Franzen scored a few minutes later to pad the advantage for the hosts, who hadn't won since Dec. 7. Tatar's second goal came in the final minutes.

Stephen Weiss, Danny DeKeyser and Henrik Zetterberg also scored for Detroit, which got 10 saves from Petr Mrazek.

"We found a way to come back and score some goals," said Zetterberg, who also had an assist. "Christmas will be a lot nicer now."

Nicolas Deslauriers, Chris Stewart and Andre Benoit had goals for the banged-up Sabres, who were missing eight regulars due to injuries or illness. Michal Neuvirth returned from an illness and had 33 saves.

Buffalo took a 3-2 lead to the second intermission but all three third-period penalties ended with Detroit goals. The first came after Brian Flynn flicked the puck over the glass.

"Playing a good team, you have to play smart with a two-goal lead," coach Ted Nolan said. "We took a stupid penalty and the rest is history."

Buffalo got the game's first goal 2:36 in when Drew Stafford's shot struck Deslauriers' upper body and ricocheted past Mrazek.

Officials reviewed the play before calling it a goal.

Detroit's Weiss, who returned Tuesday after missing four games with a shoulder injury, evened it with a power-play goal midway through the first period.

Stewart's tally later in the first sent the Sabres to the break with a 2-1 lead.

Buffalo took a 3-1 lead halfway through the second when Benoit scored his first goal of the season on a short-handed breakaway that began with a blocked shot near the Sabres' blue line.

DeKeyser cut into the lead with a slap shot off a turnover late in the period and Zetterberg tied it five minutes into the third with a slap shot of his own.

The rout was on a few minutes later.

"They were unbelievable," Neuvirth said. "Our penalty kill wasn't good enough."

The offensive output — Detroit's best this season — was especially satisfying after the Red Wings managed one or no goals in five of the six games during the skid.

Coach Mike Babcock said he knew the scoring would come.

"These streaks happen," he said. "You like to think they're never going to happen and you try to do everything you can but sometimes the puck just doesn't go in the net.

"These chances we had tonight; we had the same chances the last game except they didn't go in the net," he said.

NOTES: Red Wings defenseman Niklas Kronwall left the game with an upper body injury and did not return. Babcock was not certain if the injury was serious, but Kronwall left the arena in street clothes after the game and did not appear shaken. Weiss was helped off the ice in the third after taking a hard hit from Nikita Zadorov but said he expected to be ready to play when Detroit plays Saturday at Ottawa. . Detroit placed goalie Jimmy Howard (groin) on short-term injured reserve Tuesday. . The Sabres recalled forward Joel Armia from Rochester of the AHL and placed forward Marcus Foligno (hand) on injured reserve. Armia, who started Tuesday, is the fifth player Buffalo has recalled from its AHL affiliate since Saturday.

## **Sabres' Girgensons surprised by All-Star vote**

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

December 23, 2014

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Zemgus Girgensons feels a little sheepish discussing how fans back home in Latvia have clicked and quadruple-clicked his name so often that the Sabres forward is running away with the NHL All-Star Game vote.

The second-year player appreciates the overwhelming support he's received from the Baltic nation. And yet the 20-year-old Girgensons doesn't consider himself worthy of being included among the league's elite.

"It's a little bit embarrassing and funny at the same time," Girgensons said, before the Sabres hit the road for a two-game swing that concludes Tuesday at Detroit. "It came out of nowhere. I know people know me back home, but I didn't think it was going to go that far. That's like crazy far."

As of Tuesday, Girgensons has a league-leading 1,291,186 votes, with about 80 percent coming from Latvia.

The only limit on voting is fans can use the same device no more than 10 times a day.

Chicago's Patrick Kane (815,990 votes) is second among forwards, followed by teammate Jonathan Toews (803,034).

Blackhawks players hold down the three other remaining spots eligible to be selected by vote. Chicago's Duncan Keith (790,922) and Brent Seabrook (641,736) lead defensemen, and Corey Crawford (714,471) leads goalies.

With voting set to close Jan. 1, Girgensons is on the verge of clinching a spot to play in the All-Star Game at Columbus on Jan. 25.

"If I have to, it's awesome" said Girgensons, the only Latvian currently playing in the NHL. "It'll be satisfaction to the fans, really."

Selected in the first-round of the 2012 draft, Girgensons has established himself as a skilled two-way forward, and part of the rebuilding team's young core.

Girgensons leads Buffalo (13-18-3) with nine goals and is second with 18 points.

That puts him well off the league-leading pace. Dallas center Tyler Seguin is first with 25 goals, while Philadelphia's Jakub Voracek tops the points list with 44.

Sabres coach Ted Nolan said Girgensons has nothing to be ashamed of.

"I wouldn't be embarrassed at all," Nolan said. "The whole nation's cheering for him, which is great to see. So he should feel a lot of pride."

Nolan knows plenty about Girgensons and Latvia. He spent the previous four years coaching Latvia's national team, which included Girgensons.

"He's come a tremendous long way in a very short period of time," Nolan said.

In an email, Latvian Ice Hockey Federation media manager Maris Gorbunovs wrote the support Latvians have shown Girgensons has been spontaneous, and a reflection of their passion for hockey and a native son.

"Canada and USA has many NHL players but Latvia at the moment has only one," Gorbunovs wrote. "It is not an initiative of some separate group or segment. It is an achievement of all Latvian fans."

Gorbunovs estimated at least 11,000 Latvians traveled to Minsk, Belarus, to attend last year's World Championship tournament. Former Latvian NHLers include goalie Arturs Irbe, now a Sabres assistant, and defenseman Sandis Ozolinsh.

Growing up in Riga, Girgensons was a fan of the Kontinental Hockey League team based in the Latvian capital.

Girgensons was 15 when he moved to North America to play for the former Vermont-based Green Mountain Glades of the Eastern Junior Hockey League. He then spent two seasons with Dubuque of the U.S. Hockey League, before committing to play at Vermont.

Girgensons turned down a college career for the chance to play pro after being drafted by Buffalo.

"I never would have said at age 20 that I'd be in my second year in the NHL," Girgensons said.

Soon enough, he might be an all-star.

Girgensons laughed when reminded that Latvia, a country with a population of about 2 million people, accounts for about 1 million of his vote total.

"Yeah," Girgensons said, smiling. "Only half like me."

## **Islanders-Sabres preview**

By John Kosik

Associated Press

December 26, 2014

Jaroslav Halak was rewarded for his outstanding play with a night off before the Christmas break and the New York Islanders' win streak was promptly halted at four.

Halak will be back in net Saturday night when the Islanders visit the Buffalo Sabres, who have returned to their early-season losing ways following a monthlong surge.

After starting every game during the win streak and allowing six goals on 92 shots, Halak was rested Tuesday in favor of backup Chad Johnson, who made 18 saves while losing his third straight start, 3-1 to Montreal.

Johnson won four of his first five starts with a 2.96 goals-against average, but he's dropped four of five since behind a 4.16 GAA - making it abundantly clear that New York (23-11-0) needs Halak to remain healthy for the remainder of the season.

"It's frustrating," said Johnson. "You play to win hockey games. We were right there. It just didn't happen. You've just got to regroup and keep working."

Halak is 18-6-0 with three shutouts, a 2.24 GAA and .919 save percentage, and the Islanders have been unable to counter offensively when he isn't at his best. New York is 4-5 when he's allowed at least three goals and 14-1 when he's given up two or less.

Kyle Okposo scored and the Islanders outshot the Canadiens 14-3 in the first period, but they allowed three goals on 18 shots in the second and third. New York put the puck on net 15 times in the final period, but goalie Carey Price got it done for Montreal.

"I thought we ran out of gas," Okposo told the team's website. "We looked like a tired team tonight. We didn't have that same jump in the offensive zone we usually do."

Despite the loss, the Islanders will come out of the break still tied with Chicago and Anaheim for the most victories in the NHL, though they trail first-place Pittsburgh by three points in the Metropolitan Division.

New York would certainly like to make some noise coming out of the holiday hiatus the same way it did last season with seven wins in the first nine games after Dec. 25, but the Islanders play eight of their next nine on the road. They've lost four of seven away games and their power play has gone 2 for 27 over the previous nine.

"We can't forget what we've done here in the past, and what's made us good," New York defenseman Travis Hamonic said.

Buffalo (13-19-3) appeared to be recovering from 15 losses in its first 18 games during a 10-3-0 stretch from Nov. 15-Dec. 15, but the Sabres dropped their final four games heading into the break - three of them on the road.

After allowing 29 total goals during those solid four weeks, Buffalo has given up 20 just in the last four games, including a 6-3 loss at Detroit on Tuesday that matched a season worst for goals allowed.

The Sabres took a 3-2 lead into the third but gave up four goals in a single period for the third time. All three of their penalties in the third ended with Detroit goals.

"Playing a good team, you have to play smart with a two-goal lead," coach Ted Nolan said. "We took a stupid penalty and the rest is history."

The upside is that most of the success from Nov. 15-Dec. 15 came in Buffalo, where the Sabres have won eight of their last ten.

This marks the first meeting this season between these clubs.

## **Sabres battle before giving way to Red Wings**

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

December 23, 2014

DETROIT – It's not all that fair to extend Christmas coal to the Buffalo Sabres for what happened Tuesday night in Joe Louis Arena.

Under normal circumstances, blowing a two-goal lead during a road game in which you score a short-handed goal is pretty unforgivable. But short-handed is exactly what you have to call the Sabres in this one.

They led, 3-1, late in the second period but a lineup missing eight regulars and utilizing five call-ups from Rochester simply couldn't hold up through 60 minutes.

The Detroit Red Wings crept within a goal late in the second period and overpowered bedraggled Buffalo in a four-goal, third-period blitz to beat the Sabres, 6-3.

With their trademark precision passing attack carving up the Buffalo penalty killers, the Red Wings scored four power-play goals in a game for the first time since 2010. Three of them came in the final 8:20 to snap a tie and drop the Sabres to 0-3-1 in their last four games.

Detroit, meanwhile, ended an 0-2-4 slump that saw a wildly talented roster somehow score only six goals in six games. The Wings equaled that total Tuesday alone.

"They just took it to us. Their power play was unbelievable," said Sabres goalie Michal Neuvirth. "I had no idea what was going on out there. Three or four goals, I didn't even see the shooter."

Tomas Tatar put Detroit ahead for good, 4-3, with 8:20 left and Brian Flynn in the penalty box for delay of game. Johan Franzen made it 5-3 with 5:54 to go and Johan Larsson gone for slashing. Tatar added the coup de grace with 2:12 to play during Andrej Meszaros' holding penalty.

As per the collective bargaining agreement, the Sabres now have the next three days free from games, practices or travel. They won't convene again until Saturday morning, and then host the New York Islanders on Saturday night in First Niagara Center.

The Sabres need a break. Big names like Tyler Myers, Brian Gionta and Matt Moulson were among those who missed this game and their absence showed. The score could have been much worse as the Sabres were outshot, 39-16, and Detroit had an incredible 76-22 advantage in shot attempts.

Still, the Sabres got goals from Nicolas Deslauriers and Chris Stewart to take a 2-1 lead after the first period and stunned the crowd of 20,027 when defenseman Andre Benoit's short-handed breakaway tally, his first goal as a Sabre, gave Buffalo a 3-1 lead with 11 minutes left in the second.

Things started to fall apart when Deslauriers went off for roughing at 14:48 of the second, when he foolishly made a hard hit in the corner on Jakub Kindl on a play that had already been whistled for icing.

The Red Wings didn't score on the ensuing power play but got momentum and used it to pull within 3-2 on Danny DeKeyser's goal at 17:54. That was a very stoppable shot that Neuvirth let creep between his legs.

"I take blame for all that," Deslauriers said. "I wasn't sharp enough to know there was icing and they took momentum off that. I take the blame for everything that happened tonight."

"Stupid is a good word for it," grumbled coach Ted Nolan. "You're playing a good team like Detroit, you have a lead and you want to play a smart, intelligent game and then we take a bad penalty. We woke them up a little bit and the rest is history."

Nolan wasn't in a giving mood to extend olive branches to his young players either. The Rochester five – Mark Pysyk, Larsson, Mikhail Grigorenko, Tim Schaller and Joel Armia – combined for just two shots on goal in the game.

Armia, Buffalo's No. 1 draft pick in 2011, played 14:49 in his much-anticipated NHL debut. He didn't have a shot on goal while playing left wing on the top line with Zemgus Girgensons and Tyler Ennis and often seemed confused about defensive assignments.

"You get opportunities," Nolan said. "The American League guys came up from Rochester and you get a chance. You don't hope to do OK. You've got to give something more, especially when you're depleted the way we are. They didn't play like they wanted to stay here."

Neuvirth was disappointed by the DeKeyser goal, but there wasn't much he could do on any of the others. Henrik Zetterberg tied the score at 4:19 of the third on a terrific back pass from fellow Detroit legend Pavel Datsyuk, and then the Wings really went to work.

Buffalo entered the game 24th in the NHL on the penalty kill, and 29th on the road. Detroit's power play was ranked No. 7 and will climb higher.

"We're missing some of our key penalty killers," Nolan said, "And we have guys who just came up from the American Hockey League going against Zetterberg and Datsyuk. They're going to find those seams when you don't have your stick in the proper position."

"The key is to stay out of the box," Benoit said. "Once we took some penalties, we had trouble coming up with the kills. We just have to find a way to close that game out."

## **Sabres notebook: Ruling on hit to Gionta rankles Buffalo**

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

December 23, 2014

DETROIT – The Buffalo Sabres are certainly unhappy but have grudgingly accepted the fact they have lost their captain on a vicious check that the NHL deemed not worthy of a suspension.

Brian Gionta did not play Tuesday night against the Detroit Red Wings after getting KO'd Sunday in Boston by Bruins defenseman Matt Bartkowski. Gionta was hit in the shoulder and head and was cartwheeled to the ice on the play late in the first period.

The league announced Monday on the Sabres' day off that there was no suspension because contact to Gionta's head was incidental and not the principal point of contact.

"I didn't see all the angles," coach Ted Nolan admitted Tuesday after Buffalo's pregame skate. "From the angle we saw on our camera, it certainly looked like the head was the main point of contact but that was only from one angle. We couldn't really tell. The league has all kinds and I don't think anything is going to slip by them so we'll have to accept what they give up."

One thing that concerned the Sabres was the league's statement that Gionta put himself in a vulnerable position trying to field Marcus Foligno's pass and thus took much of the onus away from Bartkowski.

"In that one, he was completely vulnerable and defenseless," said defenseman Josh Gorges. "There's no way he could have done anything different to protect himself. If you're coming across to get a pass, that's not putting yourself in a vulnerable position. You're going to get a pass. But they make the decisions. You just have to live with it and there's nothing we can do."

Added Nolan: "Sometimes, unfortunately, some of your players put themselves in vulnerable positions. Does that give you the green light to hit them in that position? Sometimes the sportsmanship should come out but, once in a while, that doesn't seem to be the fact anymore."

Nolan said Gionta is not suffering from a concussion but has an undisclosed upper-body injury that needs further examination when the team returns to Buffalo. Gionta was seen in the Sabres' dressing room area following Tuesday's pregame skate but the team said he was not available to comment.

"It's never a good thing to see," Gorges said. "You never want to see anybody get hurt, and hopefully he's not out too long. I'm not really sure how that's handled. It was a five-minute penalty, major and a game. I thought it was supposed to be an automatic hearing and review. But they make their decisions and we live with it."

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In addition to Gionta, the Sabres played the game without seven other players: Foligno (hand), Tyler Myers, Tyson Strachan, Cody McCormick and Torrey Mitchell (all undisclosed lower body), Mike Weber (knee) and Matt Moulson (flu).

Foligno is going to be out long-term after injuring the hand in the ensuing fight with Bartkowski after the hit. Nolan said Weber could have played Tuesday and will almost certainly be ready for Saturday's game against the New York Islanders, and McCormick is back skating with the team.

Nolan said Tuesday on his weekly radio show that Myers would be out week to week but amended that after the pregame skate, saying this weekend might be realistic for the big defenseman's return.

Patrick Kaleta returned after a bout with the flu that left him ill on the bench Saturday night against Colorado.

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Zemgus Girgensons' lead in balloting for the NHL All-Star Game slipped some this week in totals released by the league, but he still is more than 400,000 votes ahead of Chicago's Patrick Kane in voting for the game Jan. 25 in Columbus.

Girgensons has 1,291,186 votes while Kane is at 815,990 and Chicago teammates Jonathan Toews (803,034) and Duncan Keith (790,922) are close behind. The next two players are Chicago defenseman Brent Seabrook and Corey Crawford.

More than 25 million votes have been cast thus far – and 30 percent of them have been for players from either Buffalo or Chicago. Voting concludes Jan. 1, with the top six vote-getters by position – three forwards, two defensemen and one goaltender – getting slots in the game. Among other Sabres, Jhonas Enroth is now seventh among goaltenders (190,006), Myers is 12th among defenseman (203,607), and Tyler Ennis is the next forward behind Girgensons (15th at 172,005).

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With Gionta and Moulson out, Tyler Ennis and Drew Stafford joined Gorges in serving as alternate captains. No one wore the 'C.' ... The next meeting between the Sabres and Red Wings will be Jan. 13 in First Niagara Center, the night the Sabres will retire Dominik Hasek's No. 39 in a pregame ceremony. ... Wheatfield native Tom McCollum, a first-round pick in 2008, served as backup goaltender for the Red Wings. McCollum, who played one NHL game in 2013, is 5-8-3 this year for Grand Rapids of the AHL, compiling a 2.57 goals-against average and .903 save percentage.

## **Plenty at stake for NHL teams after break**

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

December 26, 2014

The last time the NHL and its players' association hammered out a collective bargaining agreement, they extended the Christmas break. Formerly a two-day hiatus spanning Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, the sides now get Dec. 26 off, too.

Rather than gorge themselves on holiday leftovers, the following clubs should spend Boxing Day searching for ways to boost their status once the NHL's doors reopen:

- **Buffalo:** There are two sets of fans to please, as you probably know. One group wants the young Sabres to learn how to win now. The other wants them to learn next year - after the team selects Connor McDavid or Jack Eichel at the top of the draft.

For the win-now contingent, a scorer would be ideal. Once again, the Sabres are rock bottom in goals at 1.83 per game. Brian Flynn and Torrey Mitchell are quality role players, but they're skating on the second line. The team could use a second-line scorer, especially with Cody Hodgson's disappearance from the score sheet (two goals, four assists in 34 games).

For the lose-now delegation, the Sabres need to stop squeaking out victories. Buffalo is an impressive 11-4-3 in one-goal games, a .611 winning percentage that ranks seventh in the NHL. The Sabres were 30th last season at .325 (13-17-10).

- **New York Islanders:** Much to the dismay of the Sabres, who own New York's first-round draft pick, the Isles are one of the league's top turnaround stories. They'll enter First Niagara Center on Saturday as the No. 5 team in the NHL with 46 points (23-11-0).

What the Isles don't have are packed houses to cheer them on. They're playing to 88.2 percent capacity, which ranks 24th in the league.

The Isles are in their final season in Nassau Coliseum, the decaying home that hosted four straight Stanley Cup champions in the early 1980s. A surge of nostalgia on Long Island could help the team transform from eye-opening upstarts to legitimate contenders.

- **Anaheim:** A glimpse at the standings might lead folks to believe the Ducks have it all. They pace the league in points with a 23-8-5 record. They're hard to beat at home (11-3-3) and tops on the road (12-5-2).

But they've been hammered on defense, with illness or injury claiming Francois Beauchemin, Clayton Stoner and Ben Lovejoy. The result is a goal differential of just plus-6. Anaheim is sixth in goals with 104 and 11th in goals allowed with 98.

The Ducks picked up Eric Brewer from Tampa, but they could certainly use another stay-at-home defenseman to bring down the goals against.

- **Toronto:** If white-furred Carlton is anything like the Maple Leafs, the team mascot is a bipolar bear.

The Leafs can destroy anyone and lose to everyone. They lead the NHL with 13 victories by three or more goals. They've also lost eight times by three goals or more, which is the fourth-most defeats in that category. Their ninth-ranked power play has allowed a league-worst five short-handed goals. Their 10th-ranked penalty kill has scored a league-best six shorties.

If they reduce the lows and retain the highs, the Leafs could hold onto their playoff spot.

- Los Angeles: The Kings still reign in L.A. The defending Stanley Cup champions are 13-4-2 at home, making Staples Center one of the hardest buildings to win in for a road team.

The problems for the Kings come nearly everywhere else. They are 4-7-5 on the road, a record that bests only Edmonton, Buffalo and Carolina. That's not the kind of company the Kings want to keep if they hope to repeat.

The Kings will get the home team's best game whenever they arrive somewhere. They need to rise up and meet it.

- Edmonton: So many problems, so little time. The Oilers are without peer for dysfunction.

In 2009, then-General Manager Steve Tambellini fired Craig MacTavish as coach. In 2013, MacTavish replaced Tambellini as GM. This month, MacTavish fired coach Dallas Eakins and put himself back behind the bench (ostensibly as a "mentor" for Todd Nelson, who was promoted from the American Hockey League to be interim coach).

The Oilers need new faces or this run without the playoffs – soon to be nine years in a row – could go on forever.

- Detroit: The Red Wings are in position to make the playoffs for the 24th straight season. They've got balanced scoring. Goaltender Jimmy Howard backstops a squad that is ninth in fewest goals allowed.

They would be poised to pull away in the Atlantic Division if they could win a shootout. The Wings are a paltry 1-7 in the breakaway challenge and have the most overtime and shootout losses with nine. With even modest improvement after regulation, they would be ahead of Montreal and Tampa Bay instead of one point behind.

## **Islanders continue fine play**

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

December 26, 2014

Back in May, when New York Islanders General Manager Garth Snow decided to keep his first-round pick and give his 2015 selection to the Sabres, folks in Buffalo figured that was just fine. Although New York had the No. 5 overall pick, many assumed the Islanders would remain bottom feeders and give Buffalo a high lottery chance for the most anticipated draft in years.

Then the games started. New York won its first four. It increased to six of the first eight, then ballooned to 16 of the opening 22.

The Islanders haven't slowed down. They visit the Sabres and First Niagara Center on Saturday with a 23-11 record that has them second overall in the Eastern Conference.

What in the name of Mike Bossy and Denis Potvin is going on?

The Islanders have learned how to win with impressive young forwards, improved goaltending and an influx of accomplished defensemen. Former first-round picks Brock Nelson and Ryan Strome have joined holdovers John Tavares and Kyle Okposo atop the scoring list, while Jaroslav Halak has solidified the crease with trade-acquisitions Nick Leddy and Johnny Boychuk skating in front of him.

"This is a good hockey team," Montreal coach Michel Therrien said this week. "They ended up picking up three important pieces of the puzzle with two solid defensemen and a goalie. They play with confidence, and they've got a lot of skill."

The Islanders have seen improvement across the board in the major categories:

- Their goals per game have risen from 2.63 to 2.91, which ranks seventh overall.
- Their goals allowed have dropped from 3.18 to 2.76. Last year's mark was third from the bottom.
- Their shots per game have jumped from 30.9 to 32.7, while the shots allowed have been cut from 30.0 to 27.8.

The biggest difference is New York is winning the close ones. The Islanders are 15-2-0 in one-goal games, a .882 winning percentage that is tops in the NHL. They were 25th last season at .442 (19-13-11).

Though this year's percentage is not sustainable - the top numbers from the last five full seasons ranged from .659 to .735 - winning breeds confidence. In hockey, confidence is of utmost importance.

"We're doing some good things, and we believe in ourselves," Tavares said earlier this season. "You can see the poise and composure we have now."

Tavares, whose 2013-14 season was cut short by knee surgery, is near his usual point-per-game pace. He has 13 goals and 29 points in 34 games. Okposo, who had a team-best 27 goals and 69 points last season, is tied with Tavares for the team points lead and has 21 assists.

Nelson and Strome's maturation has made a big difference.

Nelson, a 2010 first-round pick who turned 23 in October, has shown the scoring touched he honed in college and the American Hockey League. After putting up 14 goals and 26 points in 72 games as a rookie, Nelson already has 14 goals and 27 points in 34 games.

The ascension of Strome, selected with the No. 5 overall pick in 2011, has come even quicker. The 21-year-old scored 97 goals during his final three seasons of junior hockey and put up 13 goals and 49 points in 37 AHL games last season. He had seven goals and 18 points in 37 outings after being called up, and he has improved the pace with six goals and 21 points in 34 games.

While the goals are obviously nice, the decrease in tallies in New York's zone is even better. Halak is deserving of the credit.

The goalie was a member of the Sabres for a few days last season before being traded to Washington with a third-round pick for Michal Neuvirth and defenseman Rostislav Klesla, who never reported to Buffalo. The Isles signed Halak to a four-year, \$18 million deal after watching Evgeni Nabokov, Kevin Poulin and Andres Nilsson reek in the crease.

The Isles' team save percentage last season was a paltry .894. Halak is at .919, allowing him to start 18-6 with a 2.24 goals-against average.

Leddy and Boychuk have changed the Isles on and off the ice. New York picked up the Stanley Cup winners from cap-strapped Chicago and Boston, respectively, less than a week before the season opener.

The 23-year-old Leddy has 15 points and is plus-8 after playing every game for the Blackhawks the previous three seasons. Boychuk has 14 points and is plus-6 after five seasons playing in Boston's top four.

While New York's rise is a disappointment to Sabres fans, it's easy to see why the Islanders already have four winning streaks of four games or more after only one such run last season.

"I'm not surprised by their success," said Montreal forward and former Islander P-A Parenteau. "They've been rebuilding over the last couple of years now. ... They're a good team."

## **Off-field action had the most impact this year in local sports**

By Budd Bailey

Buffalo News

December 26, 2014

The year 2014 was one of the most lively and historic in Western New York sports history – as long as the games aren't considered. ¶ Championships, or even memorable wins, were few during the past year. Yet there was enough drama to fill the sports pages with major stories for many of the 365 days. That includes everything from business transactions to arrivals and departures of important figures, from construction projects to serious illnesses. ¶ Some of the contenders' tales popped up in other sections of the newspaper. Trying to rate their impact on local sports, then, is extremely subjective and difficult. Here's one person's guess, then, at the top stories of 2014:

### **1. Terry Pegula takes over the Bills**

For many years, football fans wondered what would happen to their beloved Buffalo Bills when Ralph C. Wilson Jr. was no longer on the scene. The fans had reason to be insecure, since an NFL franchise figured to be worth more in another city than in Buffalo, putting any local bidder at a disadvantage.

Pegula answered the question emphatically with a \$1.4 billion bid for the Bills and a promise that the team would not be going anywhere. The offer quickly won NFL approval. Only time will tell how Pegula does as an NFL owner, but certainly he bought a long honeymoon period with fans with his investment.

### **2. Ralph Wilson dies**

The passing of the only owner in Bills history marked the end of an era. Wilson took a chance in 1959 when he bought a franchise in the new American Football League for Buffalo. Wilson maintained ownership of the team for almost 55 years.

While his teams had a losing record during his tenure (369-431-8), there's no doubt that Wilson always acted in the best interests of the sport and of the NFL. What's more, he always resisted the temptation to move the Bills elsewhere, even though he could have made a financial windfall in the process. For starting the franchise and keeping it here, Wilson became the most important figure in the region's sports history.

### **3. Pat LaFontaine departs**

It was a huge surprise when the former Sabres center joined his old team's front office as president of hockey operations in November 2013. His departure a few months later was even more stunning.

LaFontaine had put in place his own management team in General Manager Tim Murray and coach Ted Nolan. Then on March 1, the Sabres announced that LaFontaine was leaving the organization to return to a position with the National Hockey League. While rumors have spread about what happened to cause the breakup, no one has come forward yet with a complete explanation. LaFontaine was not replaced.

### **4. The Sabres rebuild continues**

Former General Manager Darcy Regier had traded such players as Jason Pominville and Thomas Vanek before they could leave as free agents. He received a large haul of draft choices as well as some players in return.

Regier may have lost his job in 2013, but Murray followed a similar script upon taking over Jan. 9. The toughest pill to swallow came on Feb. 28, when Ryan Miller and Steve Ott were traded to the St. Louis Blues for three players and two draft choices. Miller was the face of the Sabres franchise for almost a decade, and his departure was met with sadness. Other players also were moved as the roster restructuring continued, and the team

finished last overall. An important piece of the future may have arrived in June when Sam Reinhart was picked with the second overall draft choice.

## **5. A Buffalo tint to the draft**

Western New York had a strong interest in two of the first five picks in the NFL Draft. The Bills traded up from the ninth overall pick to the No. 4 spot, while giving up a first- and fourth-round pick in 2015. They chose wide receiver Sammy Watkins of Clemson. It was a large price to pay by a team with a number of needs, but the Bills did have Watkins ranked as the best player in the entire draft. The trade's merits will be debated for years. The rookie has had some ups and downs on the field, but he has been the most dynamic offensive player on the roster.

One pick after the selection of Watkins, the Oakland Raiders took linebacker Khalil Mack from the University at Buffalo. No Bulls player had ever gone in the first round before, let alone in the top five. Mack stepped right into the starting lineup in Oakland. While the Raiders have had a terrible season, no one is blaming Mack.

## **6. Life and death**

Sometimes real life intrudes on our fun and games. Such was the case when two local legends – former Bills quarterback Jim Kelly and Sabres announcer Rick Jeanneret – battled cancer throughout the year.

Western New York's sports fans braced themselves for the worst during the course of the year, but they waited and hoped for the announcement of good news – which came for both men in the fall. By the end of 2014, Kelly was making public appearances and Jeanneret was broadcasting games again as they continued their recoveries.

## **7. The Bills become more relevant**

After nine straight losing seasons, Buffalo's football fans suffered from low expectations entering 2014. But the team surprised many by never dipping below .500 throughout the season and remaining on the fringes of the playoff race.

What's more, the Bills notched one of their most memorable wins in recent memory, as they knocked off the streaking Green Bay Packers at home in December. For the first time in quite a while, hope for the future was not an irrational thought – although a Dec. 21 loss that ended the team's playoff hopes tempered that enthusiasm for the time being.

## **8. Domination by Canisius**

It's always difficult to try to pick the best sports team across eras. But Canisius High School certainly made a good case to be ranked as one of the all-time great local high school football teams with an amazing year.

The Crusaders went 3-0 against Ohio teams and were ranked nationally by several polls, including USA Today's. Canisius' toughest game might have been with Jamestown, which went on to win a state title in the public school ranks. The Crusaders, meanwhile, won their own state crown in the Catholic playoffs on Dec. 7 with a 23-10 win over Stepinac.

## **9. UB changes coaches**

The Bulls football team played in a bowl game in 2013 and finished the season 8-5. The squad lost some of its stars to graduation before the 2014 season, but the Bulls still had a 3-4 record on Oct. 13.

It was a large surprise, then, when coach Jeff Quinn was relieved of his duties – partly because the move came in midseason. Lance Leipold was hired from Wisconsin-Whitewater after the season to replace him. Leipold had a

gaudy 106-6 record with the Warhawks of Division III when he was hired. We'll see how he does at a much higher level of competition in 2015.

## 10. Andre's Hall call

The Bills' glory years of the early 1990s were already well-represented at the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio. Kelly, Bruce Smith, Thurman Thomas, Marv Levy, James Lofton and Wilson were already in place. Andre Reed had been a big part of that group, but had just missed election several times.

That finally changed in 2014. Reed probably will be the last player associated with that group of Bills to be so honored. Mix that with the uncertainty associated with the pending sale of the team at the time and Kelly's fight with cancer, and the result was an induction ceremony on Aug. 2 that was filled with emotion for all concerned – including Bills fans.

The honorable mention list is a long one:

- HarborCenter opened to good reviews, giving Canisius College hockey a new home and providing the area with a catalyst for economic development.
- Darryl Talley revealed his personal problems in a story that made him the most well-known of Bills players facing significant problems in their lives well after retirement from football.
- Randolph won its third state football championship in a row, while Jamestown joined it as state champion. Speaking of such honors, Cardinal O'Hara took the Federation girls basketball title, Williamsville South and Hamburg took softball crowns, St. Mary's, Eden, Williamsville South and Portville won in girls volleyball while International Prep at Grover Cleveland won in boys soccer. The Nichols girls hockey team was ranked as one of the nation's best programs.
- Speaking of high schools, June saw the first annual Prep Talk awards from The Buffalo News. Major award-winners were: Team of the Year – Clarence girls swimming; Female Athlete of the Year – Clarence swimmer Dina Rommel; Male Athlete of the Year – Bishop Timon-St. Jude hockey and lacrosse player Connor Fields; Coach of the Year – Cardinal O'Hara girls basketball coach Dan McDermott; inaugural Hall of Fame inductee – Dick Gallagher..
- Buffalo basketball fans watched the future national champion when Connecticut played its first two games of the NCAA Tournament in First Niagara Center. They also saw Dayton upset Ohio State and Syracuse.
- The Bisons missed the playoffs, but Marcus Stroman had a memorable season. The pitcher dominated opponents in the season's first month. He went up to Toronto on April 29 and was 11-6 there.
- The UB women's soccer team came out of nowhere to take the MAC championship and play in the NCAA Tournament.
- Buffalo Marathon and Turkey Trot director Tom Donnelly died unexpectedly at the age of 61.

## **Red Wings rally by Sabres to end losing streak**

By Paul Harris

NHL.com

December 23, 2014

**DETROIT** -- The Detroit Red Wings scored as many goals Tuesday as they had in their previous six games.

Tomas Tatar had two to help Detroit to a 6-3, come-from-behind win against the Buffalo Sabres at Joe Louis Arena, ending a six-game losing streak.

"We've been playing fine but finding a way to lose every night each night. You can't find ways to lose and stay in a good spot in the standings," Red Wings coach Mike Babcock said. "These streaks happen. You like to think they're never going to happen and you try to do everything you can, but sometimes the puck just doesn't go in the net. These chances we had tonight, we had the same chances the last game except they didn't go in the net."

Gustav Nyquist had a goal and two assists, Danny DeKeyser and Henrik Zetterberg each had a goal and an assist, and Stephen Weiss and Johan Franzen scored for Detroit (18-8-9), which trailed 3-1 in the second period.

Jakub Kindl had two assists, and Petr Mrazek made 13 saves.

"It's been a while. We've been playing good enough hockey to win some games but we hadn't found a way to do it," Zetterberg said. "We found a way to come back and score some goals. Christmas will be a lot nicer now."

The Red Wings, who were 0-2-4 in the past six, lost defenseman Niklas Kronwall and Weiss to injury during the game.

Kronwall left with 13:16 remaining in the second period with an upper-body injury. It isn't known how long he will be out.

Weiss left 7:57 into the third period after being hit in the jaw by Buffalo defenseman Nikita Zadorov. Babcock said the forward passed the NHL concussion protocol and should be ready Saturday when Detroit plays the Ottawa Senators.

Nicolas Deslauriers, Chris Stewart and Andre Benoit scored for Buffalo (13-19-3), which was missing eight regulars because of injury. Brian Flynn had two assists, and Michal Neuvirth made 33 saves.

Five players in the lineup were recalled from Rochester of the American Hockey League since Saturday.

"They just took it to us in the third period. Their power play was unbelievable. I had no idea what was going on out there. Three, four goals I didn't even see the shooter," Neuvirth said. "They were unbelievable. ... Our penalty kill wasn't good enough. They wanted it more than us."

Detroit's four power-play goals were its most since Dec. 27, 2010.

Tatar's power-play goal with 8:20 left in the third period broke a 3-3 tie. He beat Neuvirth with a one-timer from the right faceoff dot.

"To be honest, I tried to overshoot the puck the whole game. I'm really happy the one went in and then the other one," Tatar said. "That's the thing, when the puck won't find the net, you have to overshoot it and keep shooting and hopefully some pucks find the way. That's what happened."

Zetterberg tied it 4:19 into the third period with a one-time slap shot from the high slot. He converted a pass from Pavel Datsyuk as the pair completed a give-and-go play off the left-wing boards.

"I think we just stuck with it," Zetterberg said. "I think the first period we had 15 shots, but maybe we weren't there for second chances. In the second period we were a little bit better, a little stronger, a little heavier on the puck than them.

"In the third, we kept going the same way. The power play was huge. But we felt we had momentum from the second period, and the chances they had, Petr was good in net and made some saves."

Benoit gave the Sabres a 3-1 lead with a shorthanded goal 9:00 into the second period. It was a 2-on-none after Kindl's shot was blocked in Buffalo's zone.

DeKeyser made it 3-2 with 2:06 left in the second. He beat Neuvirth between the pads from the top of the left circle after a turnover by the Sabres in their zone.

## **Islanders resume schedule in Buffalo against Sabres**

By John Kreiser

NHL.com

December 26, 2014

**ISLANDERS (23-11-0) at SABRES (13-19-3)**

**TV: MSG+, MSG-B, BELL TV**

**Season series:** The New York Islanders won two of three games against the Buffalo Sabres last season, including a season-ending 4-3 shootout victory on April 13 at First Niagara Center in which Brock Nelson had the game-tying goal late in the third period and the deciding goal in the tiebreaker.

**Islanders team scope:** The Islanders resume play after the Christmas break in second place in the Metropolitan Division despite a 3-1 home loss to the Montreal Canadiens on Tuesday. Backup goaltender Chad Johnson made 18 saves in his first start in two weeks; starter Jaroslav Halak was given what coach Jack Capuano called "another maintenance day" and didn't even dress; New York called up Kevin Poulin on an emergency basis to back up Johnson. Poulin was returned to the Bridgeport Sound Tigers of the American Hockey League in time to play Friday, indicating that Halak may be able to dress, if not play, in Buffalo. Nelson's tying goal on the final day of the 2013-14 season was his 14th; he's matched that total in 34 games this season, and his 27 points are one more than he had in '13-14.

**Sabres team scope:** Buffalo had a chance to end its pre-Christmas schedule on a high note, but the Sabres couldn't hold a 3-1 second-period lead and lost 6-3 at the Detroit Red Wings on Tuesday, extending their losing streak to four games after a stretch in which they won 10 of 13. The Sabres were missing eight regulars in that game because of injury or illness and recalled five players from Rochester of the American Hockey League to fill the holes in the lineup. Four of those players were sent back to Rochester on Wednesday but could be recalled if needed. The Sabres are still last in the NHL with 65 non-shootout goals in 35 games (1.87 per game).

## **Former Sabres goalie Clint Malarchuk bares soul in new book**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
December 23, 2014

BUFFALO – In his gritty new memoir, “A Matter of Inches: How I Survived in the Crease and Beyond,” former Sabres goalie Clint Malarchuk describes the brief time in his turbulent life he felt like a king and a savior in Buffalo.

It was March 1989, and the Sabres had just acquired Malarchuk for their playoff run. In his first appearance, he shut out the New York Rangers in Madison Square Garden. He quickly won two more games.

As a 27-year-old in the prime of his career, Malarchuk believed he was “on the verge of something huge.”

“That stretch was the best two weeks of my life,” Malarchuk writes.

Then Malarchuk’s world came crashing down. A skate blade sliced his jugular vein during a March 22, 1989 game against the St. Louis Blues. In a harrowing scene, Malarchuk nearly bled to death on the ice inside Memorial Auditorium.

The scary incident will forever be Malarchuk’s claim to fame, something he embraces. Other goalies, Malarchuk said, had similar careers but have been forgotten about.

Remarkably, Malarchuk played again 10 days later.

“I’m proud of the fact I came back as quick as I did,” Malarchuk said Dec. 11 prior to a book signing inside the First Niagara Center. “Even though it probably wasn’t the healthiest thing for me mentally and down the road, I’m still proud of that. Not a lot of people can say they would’ve rebounded that way.

“I was told to retire. I was told to take the rest of the season off. The last thing I was told was to come back and play that quick. To me, it’s a badge of character and the warrior mentality. That’s how I look at the accident.”

But that accident eventually destroyed Malarchuk’s life. He had no idea he had developed post-traumatic stress disorder while he was also battling obsessive compulsive disorder, alcoholism and anxiety.

The toxic mix led to brushes with death, including a 2008 suicide attempt – Malarchuk shot himself in the mouth and still has a bullet lodged in his skull – he details in the book’s prologue.

A six-month stay in rehab helped Malarchuk fix his life. Still, there have been hiccups. Writing the book was excruciating for him. Reliving his past – “all that emotion and baggage,” he said – made him drink again. He went back to rehab earlier this year for a “tune-up.” The Calgary Flames let him go as goalie coach following last season.

“Every time I thought I couldn’t finish it I’d take a break, go back and do more,” said Malarchuk, who wrote the book with Canadian journalist Dan Robson. “When the book was finally done, I mean, I was emotionally spent. I was just exhausted.”

So far, the book has generated tremendous feedback, Malarchuk said. He was worried about baring his soul in print. Now, he’s glad he wrote it.

“It’s really helping people,” he said. “The feedback has been just so gratifying, so gratifying.”

What do people tell Malarchuk? They say they have a friend or loved one who suffers from mental illness and thank him for giving them a better understanding. He said about 80 percent of the feedback has come from fellow sufferers.

"They relate to everything I've been through and talked about in the book," he said. "They relate so closely to it (they can) talk about it, because I've talked about it.

"Having played in the NHL, we've got the Superman thing going with the public, and that is to say that we're human and to portray that, hey, we struggle, too, helps the regular guy go, 'Oh, OK, not only is this normal, this isn't that uncommon that it also affects even athletes, successful people.'"

For Malarchuk, raising awareness and fostering a better understanding of mental illness became his calling after he "woke up in intensive care with a bullet in my head."

"Surviving that, I asked, 'Why? Why me?'" he said. "I've faced death three times. I started to think about, 'What's my purpose, you know?' I always thought it was to be an NHL goalie and to be an NHL coach, and now I look at it and those were just avenues to my purpose, and my purpose is to help people."

Malarchuk plans to begin speaking engagements and has an agency booking appearances for him. If those talks go as well as his four recent promotional stops around Buffalo, he could have a new career. Books sold out around town. Fans greeted him warmly.

His wife, Joanie, had never visited Buffalo before and wanted to know what the city was like.

"I said, 'The people are awesome,'" Malarchuk said. "I mean, you walk by and people smile, they say hi, chit chat. It's a good town. They'll rally around a team. It's a blue-collar sports town. It's hard not to like it when you're playing for the Sabres."

After his signing, Malarchuk watched the Sabres play Calgary beside former Buffalo player and coach Rick Dudley, his close friend.

"I mentioned to him how friendly Buffalo is, and he goes, 'Yeah, they never forget if you're a player here,'" Malarchuk said.

## **Sabres face stiff test in surging Isles**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
December 26, 2014

BUFFALO – Since creeping to within four points of the final playoff spot Dec. 15, the Sabres have lost four straight games, earning just a single point for Sunday's 4-3 overtime loss in Boston.

Are the Sabres swooning again? Opponents have scored a whopping 20 goals during their skid.

Or is this just a normal part of a young club's growth? A team battered by injuries and illness had the lead in two straight road games earlier this week before imploding late.

The Sabres have a stiff challenge tonight inside the First Niagara Center to avoid losing their fifth straight contest for the second time this season. The New York Islanders, one of the NHL's stumblebum franchises for years, have suddenly become a heavyweight.

The Isles have a league-high 23 wins and rank second in the Metropolitan Division behind Pittsburgh with 46 points.

Maybe these *are* your father's Isles. They haven't been this good since their dynasty days of the 1980s.

Here's more on tonight's tilt, the teams' first meeting this season:

**Best start ever:** The Isles, led by superstar John Tavares, set a franchise record by winning 22 of their first 33 games. They already have 13 home wins, as many as last season. They were recently 13 games over .500 for the first time since the end of 2001-02.

The Sabres received the Isles' 2015 first-round pick as part of the Thomas Vanek trade last year. After their dreadful finish last season, many Sabres fans thought that draft choice could be a lottery selection. Now, it's more likely the pick will be somewhere in the 20s.

**Former Sabres goalie buoying Isles:** Yes, Jaroslav Halak was Sabres property for five days last winter. The 29-year-old Slovak dressed for one game after they acquired him from St. Louis on Feb. 28. The Sabres then dealt Halak to Washington hours before the March 5 trade deadline.

Halak has become a top netminder this season, posting some of the league's best numbers: 18-6 with a 2.24 goals-against average and .919 save percentage. He won a franchise-record 11 straight games earlier this season.

The Isles traded for Halak's rights before free agency started. They also signed forwards Mikhail Grabovski and Nikolay Kulemin in free agency and traded for defensemen Johnny Boychuk and Nick Leddy during training camp.

**Sabres should have healthier lineup tonight:** The Sabres had 10 players sidelined Sunday and eight for Tuesday's 6-3 loss in Detroit, a game in which they had a 3-1 second-period lead.

Defenseman Mike Weber will likely return from a six-game absence tonight following knee surgery. Forward Cody McCormick (lower body, six games) could also return. Coach Ted Nolan was hopeful earlier this week defenseman Tyler Myers (lower body, two games) would be ready.

Even if winger Matt Moulson (sick, three games) is feeling better, it's possible he would need some practice time before he plays.

The Sabres sent four youngsters back to the AHL on Wednesday: forwards Joel Armia, Mikhail Grigorenko and Tim Schaller and defenseman Mark Pysyk.

**Eric Boulton still in NHL:** Boulton, a 38-year-old former Sabres tough guy, has played four games with the Isles this season. The winger recently returned from an injury. Boulton last played for the Sabres in 2003-04.

The Isles recently waived Canisius College product Cory Conacher, who played 19 games with the Sabres last season. The winger had only one goal and three points in 15 NHL appearances this season. He's now with AHL Bridgeport.

## **Red Wings double up Buffalo 6-3**

By Staff Report

WGR 550

December 23, 2014

Detroit, MI -- The Detroit Red Wings used four third period goals to erase a deficit and defeat the Buffalo Sabres 6-3 on Tuesday night at Joe Louis Arena.

Nicolas Deslauriers was credited with the first goal of the night, scoring less than three minutes into the game. The forward had the puck deflect off of his body and then into the net, which prompted the referee to signal no goal. However, the NHL's "war room" in Toronto reviewed the play and deemed it a good goal. Drew Stafford was the one that threw the puck to the net, and was credited with the lone assist.

Detroit answered back midway through the period thanks to a power play chance. A shot from the point was deflected once, maybe twice, on its way into the net for the equalizer. Stephen Weiss was credited with his fifth goal of the season. Nearly four minutes later the blue and gold used a nice transition into the offensive zone to re-take the lead, 2-1. Cody Hodgson fluttered a pass onto the stick of Chris Stewart as the forward frove the net. He was able to beat Petr Mrazek as the net minder sprawled across his crease.

The Sabres increased the lead to two goals thanks to a shorthanded goal in the second. Andre Benoit finished off the breakaway chance after a pass from Brian Flynn, and the Sabres upped the lead to 3-1. Danny DeKeyeser scored with just over two minutes to go in the middle stanza to bring the home team back within a goal. The goal is DeKeyeser's second of the season.

Henrik Zetterberg scored for Detroit early in the third to even the game at 3-3. The Red Wings' captain unleashed a hard wrist shot from the slot after holding the puck, and beat Michal Neuvirth in the top corner. There was traffic in front of the goaltender as the shot was released. Pinpoint passing halfway through the period helped Detroit take their first lead of the night, 4-3. Tomas Tatar eventually gets the goal after tic-tac-toe action that included DeKeyeser and Gustav Nyquist. Johan Franzen scored on the power play to up the Detroit lead to 5-3 late in the game.

### ***Scoring Summary***

#### **Goal Summary**

##### **First Period**

**BUF:** 2:36 - Nicolas Deslauriers (3) (Drew Stafford, Brian Flynn). 13:35 - Chris Stewart (4) (Cody Hodgson, Mikhail Grigorenko)

**DET:** 10:50 - Stephen Weiss (5) PPG (Jakub Kindl, Gustav Nyqvist)

##### **Second Period**

**BUF:** 9:00 - Andre Benoit (1) SHG (Brian Flynn)

**DET:** 17:54 - Danny DeKeyeser (2) (Tomas Jurco, Luke Glendening)

##### **Third Period**

**BUF:** none

**DET:** 4:19 - Henrik Zetterberg (7) (Pavel Datsyuk, Justin Abdelkader). 11:40 - Tomas Tatar (13) (Danny DeKeyeser, Gustav Nyquist). 14:06 - Johan Franzen (7) PPG (Henrik Zetterberg, Jakub Kindl). 17:48 - Tomas Tatar (14) PPG (Ben Smith, Gustav Nyquist)

#### **Penalty Summary**

### **First Period**

**BUF:** 9:23 - Zemgus Girgensons (2 min., hooking)

**DET:** none

### **Second Period**

**BUF:** 7:55 - Nikita Zadorov (2 min., holding). 14:48 - Nicolas Deslauriers (2 min., roughing)

**DET:** 4:46 - Pavel Datsyuk (2 min., tripping)

### **Third Period**

**BUF:** 9:53 - Brian Flynn (2 min., delay of game). 12:46 - Johan Larsson (2 min., slashing). 17:13 - Andrej Meszaros (2 min.,

**DET:** none

### **Shots on Goal**

BUF - 10 (6, 4), DET - 26 (15,11)

## **Hamilton: Sabres play their final game before break**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 23, 2014

Detroit, MI (WGR 550) -- It wasn't pretty, but the Sabres left after one period up 2-1.

Michal Neuvirth had to make 14 saves including some good ones on Henrik Zetterberg and Pavel Datsyuk.

Petr Mrazek only made four saves and it should've only been three as Brian Flynn set up Drew Stafford in front for a lay-up. The winger backhanded it right back through the crease and into the goaltender.

That opportunity and the two goals were because players went hard to the net. On the first goal, Stafford's pass to Nic Deslauriers got elevated and went in off of the winger's chest. The goal was reviewed and stood.

Cody Hodgson had a step on Brendan Smith, but couldn't get a good shot. I'm assuming Chris Stewart yelled as he was flying down the slot. Hodgson gave him a perfect pass for his 4th.

Stephen Weiss scored on the power play giving Detroit just seven goals in seven games, but five have been on the PP.

Buffalo changes anytime a line passes the bench. I would estimate they're trying to change every 20 seconds or so. That's keeping a sick team fresh.

Joel Armia is playing his first NHL game. He just missed sending Tyler Ennis in on a clean breakaway as he had good vision on the play. He also is having pretty good luck controlling the puck on the wall.

Armia's not used to play left wing and he drove Ennis crazy in that period because he kept floating over to the right in the defensive zone. Ennis would try to switch and go to the left and Armia would realize it and go there too. They're probably lucky it didn't cost them.

The Sabres opened the second period giving the puck away at every turn. There were mindless dumps that would not get out or lost battles. It finally cost them a penalty, but a funny thing happened. Andre Benoit blocked a shot from the point and went in 2-on-0 shorthanded with Brian Flynn and scored his first goal as a Sabres. That was Buffalo's 8th shot and they scored on three of them.

Armia gave the puck away, but got back in time to get it back when Tomas Tatar was stopped. Ennis found him down the slot, but Mrazek made the save in the quick shot.

Late in the second, Stewart couldn't get a puck out along the wall and Danny DeKeyser took a long wrist shot that somehow eluded Neuvirth.

Nikita Zadorov was on the ice for that goal and is minus eight in his last five games.

In the third period, Armia learned a big first game lesson. He was leading a 3-on-2 and thought he had the time he has in the AHL and got his stick lifted by the back checking Luke Glendening who stole the puck.

You could pretty much see Detroit tying the game because they'd been dominating play. Datsyuk found Zetterberg deep in the slot and he beat Neuvirth because Josh Gorges couldn't move Justin Abdelkader who was in Neuvirth's lap.

In the first 50 minutes of this game Buffalo had 10 shots and none in the third period.

This team is just spent physically and mentally and mental mistakes cost them throughout the game. They led 3-1, but it was pretty obvious they wouldn't be able to hold it when Tatar ripped a screened one-timer on the

power play. Gorges is a great shot blocker and he went down to get that one, but he couldn't and he screened Neuvirth.

Johan Franzen made it 5-3 on his first goal in 15 games. It was Detroit's third power play goal of the game and seventh seven games. Tatar's second of the night again came on the power play and closed the game out 6-3.

Both Andre Benoit and Nic Deslauriers agreed that the holiday break is coming at a good time for this team. With illness and injury, the time off will help the team get healthy. Deslauriers added, "every off day feels good...the off day we had yesterday was good. We just collapsed in the third."

## **Armia to make NHL debut against Red Wings**

By Chris Ryndak

Sanres.com

December 23, 2014

**DETROIT** – Battling sickness and injuries, the Buffalo Sabres have had to make quite a few call-ups from the American Hockey League over the past few days. They made one more Tuesday morning, bringing Joel Armia up to play in his first NHL game.

It'll happen at Joe Louis Arena as the Sabres are set to take on the Detroit Red Wings on Tuesday at 7:30 p.m. The Tops Gamenight pregame show begins at 7 p.m. on MSG-B and Bell. The game can also be heard live on WGR 550.

Armia, the 16th overall pick in the 2011 NHL Draft, has 16 points (7+9) in 21 games this season with the Rochester Americans. He recently returned from an injury that kept him out for a few weeks. He's now on a Sabres team that features four other call-ups from the Amerks playing big roles.

Mikhail Grigorenko, Johan Larsson, Tim Scaller and Mark Pysyk are the other players who have been brought up in the past week. Eight regular Sabres are currently out of the lineup with six of them on injured reserve.

Armia, a 6-foot-3, 192-pound Finnish wing, will play on Buffalo's top line with center Zemgus Girgensons and right wing Tyler Ennis.

"I think I'm going to be a little bit nervous for the first shift, probably, but I hope it goes away," Armia said after the team's morning skate. "I was really happy to get the call up and it's nice to be here."

While Armia, 21, may understandably be nervous, Nolan spoke with him about how those nerves can't get in the way of him playing to the best of his ability.

"Opportunity only presents itself a few times. You can't waste your first opportunity on being nervous," Nolan said. "Obviously you are, but you really have to concentrate on what you do best. If he does that, he'll be fine. You don't want to sit back two days from now [and think], 'Shoot, I should've done this or could've done that. I was too nervous.'

"No, there's time for nerves. You've got to put them in the proper order and play with some composure."

Michal Neuvirth, who was unable to start Sunday night because of the flu, will man the pipes for Buffalo against Detroit. He was the winning goaltender the last time the teams met, a 3-2 shootout victory in Buffalo. The Sabres haven't won in Detroit since Oct. 13, 2006.

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### **LAST FESTIVUS**

One year ago to the day, Buffalo played shorthanded against the then-Phoenix Coyotes because of a flu bug that rattled the team. The Sabres dressed only 16 skaters that night and went down to 15 when Drew Stafford was given a game misconduct for elbowing midway through.

Pysyk was credited with the overtime-winner when the puck dropped into goaltender Mike Smith's pants and he backed up into the net, putting the puck over the goal line.

The Sabres have found themselves in similar short-handed situations the past few nights. Matt Moulson was unable to play Saturday because of the flu, prompting Larsson's late recall. Larsson missed pregame warmups, but ended up scoring his first NHL goal in the third period.

Then, Patrick Kaleta had to leave the game because of similar flu-like symptoms. Neither Moulson nor Kaleta traveled to Boston for Sunday's game and Tyler Myers sustained a lower-body injury, so the team called up Schaller and Pysyk.

In that Bruins game, Schaller scored the first goal of his career.

Larsson and Schaller became the first Sabres to score their first NHL goals in back-to-back games since Nikita Zadorov and Rasmus Ristolainen did so last season. Larsson and Schaller became the first Sabres to accomplish that feat on consecutive nights since Michael Ryan scored his first career goal on March 2, 2007 and then Nathan Paetsch got the first of his career on March 3, 2007.

The Bruins battled back to win in overtime, but the Sabres' effort in a game where they were shorthanded for most of the night impressed alternate captain Josh Gorges.

"We gave ourselves a chance to win. It's unfortunate we came up on the wrong end, but we learn from those mistakes; we learn from those experiences," Gorges said. "We've got to carry it through to another big effort here tonight."

Gorges praised the play of Pysyk, who was playing his third game in three nights because the Amerks had games on Friday and Saturday. Pysyk finished the game with 19:58 of ice time and an even rating.

"Obviously for me it's an opportunity to get into the lineup here with some injuries and illness here," Pysyk said. "It's a little bit different lineup than it was two weeks ago, but for the guys that are here, it'll be a good, hard-fought game."

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## TOP PICKS

With Armia in the NHL, the Sabres have 12 first-round picks on their roster. Myers won't play, so 11 first-round picks will dress for the Sabres on Tuesday.

Eight of them were drafted by the Sabres (Drew Stafford in 2004, Myers and Tyler Ennis in 2008, Pysyk in 2010, Grigorenko and Girgensons in 2012 and Ristolainen and Zadorov in 2008). Andrej Meszaros (2004), Chris Stewart (2006) and Cody Hodgson (2008) are the other first-rounders on the team.

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## MEDICAL REPORT

Kaleta re-joined the team for the morning skate in Detroit and feels well enough to play.

"You never know what you can do. You just try to take care of yourself," Kaleta said. "You don't want the sickness to spread around the team so that's why I didn't travel to Boston. I'm just thankful to be here."

While Cody McCormick (lower body) and Mike Weber (knee) made the trip, they're still not ready to play.

Brian Gionta, who sustained an upper-body injury after taking a big hit from Matt Bartkowski on Sunday, will not play either. Nolan said that Gionta's injury is not a concussion and that he'll be further evaluated once the team returns to Buffalo.

Marcus Foligno is out with a hand injury, which happened in a fight with Bartkowski immediately after the hit on Gionta.

Moulson also remains sidelined with the flu.

Nolan hopes both Myers and Weber will be ready for Saturday's game against the New York Islanders. The Sabres canceled practice on Monday so that players could rest up.

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### **PROJECTED LINEUP**

33 Joel Armia – 28 Zemgus Girgensons – 63 Tyler Ennis  
44 Nicolas Deslauriers – 65 Brian Flynn – 21 Drew Stafford  
19 Cody Hodgson – 25 Mikhail Grigorenko – 80 Chris Stewart  
22 Johan Larsson – 59 Tim Schaller – 36 Patrick Kaleta

4 Josh Gorges – 55 Rasmus Ristolainen  
51 Nikita Zadorov – 3 Mark Pysyk  
61 Andre Benoit – 41 Andrej Meszaros

34 Michal Neuvirth  
1 Jhonas Enroth

Injured: 12 Brian Gionta (upper body), 26 Matt Moulson (illness), 57 Tyler Myers (lower body)

Injured Reserve: 6 Mike Weber (knee), 8 Cody McCormick (lower body), 17 Torrey Mitchell (lower body), 24 Tyson Strachan (lower body), 31 Matt Hackett (knee), 82 Marcus Foligno (hand)

### **POWER PLAY**

#### *First Unit*

Flynn-Girgensons-Ennis  
Stafford-Ristolainen

#### *Second Unit*

Armia/Hodgson-Grigorenko-Stewart  
Zadorov-Meszaros

## **Sabres surrender 4 power-play goals in loss to Detroit**

By Chris Ryndak

Sanres.com

December 23, 2014

**DETROIT** – Four third-period goals – and three on the power play – helped power the Detroit Red Wings past the Buffalo Sabres on Tuesday at Joe Louis Arena.

The Red Wings ended up going 4-for-6 with the man advantage in their 6-3 win over the Sabres. Buffalo held a 3-2 lead heading into the third before Detroit broke open the floodgates. Buffalo was outshot 39-16 in the game.

The Sabres are 0-3-1 in their past four games after winning 10 of 13. For Sabres coach Ted Nolan, it's the type of penalties the Sabres took – minors for hooking, holding, roughing, delay of game for shooting the puck over the glass, slashing and another for holding – that is most troublesome.

"All the penalties were not very good penalties. And when you take bad penalties on a good team, they'll make you pay," he said.

Michal Neuvirth made 33 saves in net for Buffalo. He had missed his last start Sunday night due to the flu, but was able to keep the Sabres in the game early. He tipped his cap to the Red Wings' well-oiled power play.

"They just took it to us. Their power play was unbelievable," he said. "I had no idea what was going on out there. Three or four goals, I didn't even see the shooter. They were unbelievable and I think the only goal I'd like to have back was the second one, the five-hole."

Nicolas Deslauriers took one of the penalties, a roughing minor after the whistle in the offensive zone, that he thought helped turn the tide in Detroit's favor.

"I think I take blame for that. My penalty – I wasn't sharp enough to know there was an offside and they took momentum on that. So I'll take the blame for everything that happened tonight," he said. "They came out hard and we took a bunch of penalties. It killed us there."

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### **AN EARLY LEAD**

The Sabres opened the scoring on a goal credited to Deslauriers 2:36 into the game. Drew Stafford drove to the right wing corner and threw a pass to the front of the net. The puck deflected up off the stick of Red Wings defenseman Jakub Kindl and out in front of the net.

Crashing the crease, Deslauriers had the puck hit him in the pants and it redirected in past Petr Mrazek.

Brian Flynn recorded the secondary assist even though he wasn't on the ice. Flynn blocked a shot by Kindl that allowed the puck to move up ice but headed to the bench for treatment. Tim Schaller stepped onto the ice just before the goal was scored.

Detroit tied the game when Stephen Weiss deflected Kindl's slap shot from the point through a screen and in the net through Michal Neuvirth's five-hole with 9:10 remaining in the first.

Then, with 6:25 to play in the first period, Chris Stewart gave Buffalo a 2-1 lead on an end-to-end rush. Cody Hodgson came free with the puck down the left wing and worked around Detroit defenseman Brendan Smith. Stewart, streaking down the middle of the ice unguarded, was able to tap home Hodgson's pass for his fourth goal of the season.

Andre Benoit notched his first goal as a Sabre when he scored shorthanded 9:00 into the second period to put Buffalo ahead 3-1. He blocked a slap shot by Kindl and raced down the ice with Flynn, who tapped it up to him and sprung him loose. Benoit skated in and roofed a shot over Mrazek.

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### **DETROIT'S RESURGANCE**

Detroit inched closer when Danny DeKeyser beat Neuvirth five-hole with 2:06 remaining in the second to make it 3-2.

And from there, the Red Wings rolled. Henrik Zetterberg closed that gap with a slap shot 4:19 into the third period.

Tomas Tatar scored the go-ahead goal with 8:20 left in regulation on the power play and set up the first of three power-play goals for Detroit to end the game. Johan Franzen made it 5-3 with 5:58 to play and Tatar added his second of the night with 2:12 remaining. Detroit controlled the play for a majority of that time in the Buffalo zone.

"We were missing some of our key penalty killers. We have guys who just came up from the American Hockey League going against Zetterberg and [Pavel] Datsyuk and players like that," Nolan said. "They're going to find those seams when you don't have your stick in proper positions and they took advantage of it."

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### **THE FIRST FOR JOEL**

Joel Armia made his NHL debut, playing 14:47 on the top line with Zemgus Girgensons and Tyler Ennis.

The Sabres were without eight regulars for the game due to injury and illness. Armia was one of five players called up from the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League to help fill the holes in the lineup.

"The young guys played well for sure, but we have some top end players that weren't there tonight," Benoit said. "That's always tough to fill in for those guys but at the same time, we need to find a way to step up and do a little bit more."

The Sabres will have Wednesday, Thursday and Friday off for the holidays. The mandated break comes at a good time for players close to returning who need a few more days to recover. Buffalo will be back in action Saturday night when they host the New York Islanders at First Niagara Center.

## **Rivalry Renewed**

By Kevin Snow

Sanres.com

December 23, 2014

Western New York-native Emily Pfalzer has represented the United States in several international hockey tournaments, putting her front and center for the heated rivalry games between the U.S. and Canada.

So how does Pfalzer describe the intensity of those games?

"It's a bloodbath out there."

The United States and Canada will write another chapter in their storied international hockey rivalry on Monday, January 5 when they'll meet in their opening game of the 2015 IIHF Women's U18 World Championship at HARBORCENTER.

The eighth-annual tournament features the top under-18 women's hockey talent in the world, with Russia, Sweden, Finland, Czech Republic, Japan and Switzerland joining the United States and Canada on the schedule. Preliminary round games run from Jan. 5-8, followed by the single-elimination playoff games from Jan. 9-11. The bronze and gold medal games are set for January 12.

The United States and Canada have finished one-two in the previous seven tournaments, with Canada taking home the gold medal on four occasions – including the last three years.

Now a senior at Boston College, Pfalzer played for Team USA in the 2010 and 2011 U18 tournaments. After losing the gold medal game in OT in 2010, Pfalzer returned to capture gold in 2011 when the US defeated Canada in Sweden.

"Every game against Canada, whether it's for a gold medal or in round-robin play, it doesn't matter what the situation is," says Pfalzer, a Nichols School grad who will be attending the Women's National Team Camp next week in Minnesota. "It's always the game you look forward to playing in the most."

This year will mark the first time in tournament history the two teams will face each other in the preliminary round. The previous seven matchups all came in the gold medal game, with Canada holding a 4-3 advantage.

Three of the games have been decided by one goal, including back-to-back overtime decisions in 2010 (Canada 5-4) and 2009 (USA 3-2). Canada's 5-1 win in last year's tournament was the most lopsided of the seven results.

"The US-Canada rivalry is unmatched, and not just in women's hockey," says Reagan Carey, USA Hockey's Director of Women's Hockey. "No matter what level we're playing, or what's at stake, any game between US and Canada is a great game to watch, and a very exciting one for the players to take part in."

The excitement and passion in these rivalry games also leads to a more physical contest, one that many casual observers of the women's game don't expect to see.

Pfalzer's description of the games being a "bloodbath" may be a bit extreme, but they certainly take on an edge for both sides.

"It definitely turns out to be quite a physical game. Each team has so much pride in playing for their country, and they are elite athletes at the top of their game," explains Carey. "Anytime you get to represent your country, no matter who you are playing, is a tremendous accomplishment. But to know that you get to go out there and battle your country's long-time rival is an honor.

"There isn't one player in that game that needs to be told how big that game is. It's just a matter of trying to contain their excitement in those opening minutes."

This is just the third time the U18 Women's Championship will be played in North America. The United States won gold at the inaugural event in Calgary in 2008, and Canada got their revenge in overtime at the 2010 tournament in Chicago.

Pfalzer says she is admittedly jealous of the players who will get to play in front of a hometown crowd at HARBORCENTER, and knows the tremendous amount of pride that will be flowing through each skater when they hit the ice on January 5.

"Everytime I put the USA jersey on, whether it's in practice or a game, it's still an amazing feeling," Pfalzer explains. "It's just something you work even harder for in girls' hockey because there's no NHL for us.

"It's always a dream to represent your country. I know that every girl in that room will be as honored and privileged as I am to put on a USA jersey and face Canada."