



Buffalo Sabres

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Kings-Sabres preview

By Noey Kupchan

Associated Press

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While most teams might like their chances of rebounding from a disappointing result by facing a last-place club, the Los Angeles Kings haven't seen much go their way in Buffalo.

Los Angeles opens a five-game trek Tuesday night seeking its second win in 14 road matchups against the Sabres, winners in four of five at home.

The Kings (14-8-5) had posted back-to-back shutouts over Boston and Arizona before Saturday's 2-1 loss to a Philadelphia team which had dropped six straight. Justin Williams scored in the third period for the Kings, who went 0 for 5 on the power play and fell behind just 4:35 into the game.

"We definitely can't be satisfied with the way we came out again," center Anze Kopitar told the team's official website. "We just didn't get it going right off the start and we were playing catch-up hockey for the most part, and that's hard."

Things might not get any easier in Buffalo, where the Kings have gone 1-10-1 with one tie over their last 13 visits. Los Angeles has been outscored 29-8 during a five-game losing streak there, dating back to 2003, after falling 3-2 in a shootout last season.

However, Jonathan Quick was injured in overtime of that game - his only career start in Buffalo - and he blanked the Sabres in the teams' only other two meetings since the start of last season. He made 29 saves in a 2-0 victory Oct. 23 to improve to 4-0-0 lifetime versus the Sabres with a 1.48 goals-against average - his second-lowest mark against any team.

Quick, though, is 1-3-3 on the road this season with a 3.35 GAA. Martin Jones has been in net for the Kings' last two road games - 4-0 wins in Minnesota and Arizona.

Buffalo (9-16-2) hasn't allowed more than two goals in five straight at home, winning four of them after opening 1-6-2 there.

The Sabres are surely looking forward to getting back home after being outscored 8-2 during a winless two-game trip. However, coach Ted Nolan was pleased with his team's effort in Saturday's 3-2 loss at Florida following Thursday's 5-0 defeat to Tampa Bay.

"That's the way we've got to play," Nolan said. "Unfortunately we came up on the short end of a 3-2 but those are the type of games we have to play - hard-fought."

Drew Stafford scored in his first game back after missing three with a lower-body injury, and Brian Gionta netted just his third goal of the season.

Cody Hodgson assisted on Stafford's goal to snap a 17-game pointless stretch. Hodgson has been limited to three points after setting a career high with 44 last season.

"That's why he's here. That's what we expect out of him, to make those plays," Stafford said. "I think he just needs to apply himself a little but more. ... Hopefully he carries it over."

Michal Neuvirth made 34 saves in his first appearance since suffering a lower-body injury Nov. 18. He has a 3.26 GAA in his past five starts.

Jhonas Enroth has a 1.34 GAA in starting Buffalo's last four home games, but he allowed all five goals Thursday in Tampa.

Jeff Carter is second on the Kings with 18 points despite having none over the past five games, though he had a goal and an assist against Buffalo in October. Kopitar has four goals and six assists in eight games against the Sabres, though only one of those points came in Buffalo.

Sabres focus on power play

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

December 8, 2014

They were trailing by one goal with about four minutes remaining in regulation when the Buffalo Sabres drew a power play.

It was the perfect opportunity to draw even with the Panthers and salvage the Florida road trip.

Instead, the Sabres whiffed on the man-advantage and flew back to Buffalo with a 3-2 loss and two-game losing streak.

So it's not a surprise the team spent half an hour practicing the power play at First Niagara Center Monday morning, preparing for Tuesday's game against the Stanley Cup champion Los Angeles Kings.

"We had a late power play against Florida that could have been a deciding factor," said forward Drew Stafford. "Unfortunately it went the other way against us. It's something that we're always going to be working on. We're still last place. It's something we're trying to improve on every day. Take advantage of those opportunities when you get them in a game because that can be huge for us."

The Sabres continue to own the worst power play in the NHL, clicking at 6.6 percent.

They have scored just five power play goals, while opponents have countered with three shorthanded tallies.

Stafford has two of those goals. Tyler Ennis has two and Matt Moulson one. Those three practiced together on a power play unit. Ennis and Moulson worked with center Zemgus Girgensons while Stafford played the right point with defenseman Tyler Myers at the left.

"I've done it on and off over my career. It's one of those things where we're trying new things, we're trying new options. See if that can click," Stafford said. "I'm going to try to make some plays up top there. See if we can get a little more shots on net. See if I can, whether it's just a wrister getting it on net doesn't hurt. You look at some of the top power plays in the league, it's usually one or two passes and a shot."

Coach Ted Nolan said Stafford likes to shoot, has a heavy shot and can get pucks through to the net on the power play.

While there's a danger playing a forward on the blueline (remember those three shorthanded goals against?) Nolan is confident Stafford will be steady.

The other unit featured Marcus Foligno back playing in front of the net along with Cody Hodgson, Brian Gionta, Rasmus Ristolainen and Nikita Zadorov.

"Marcus, he played really strong two of the last three games," Nolan said. "In Florida I thought he banged the bodies well. That's the type of player he is. He plays a powerful game and he did that last week. He's still a young guy, we've got to build up his minutes and getting him in front of the net on the power play could do that."

While the Sabres have tweaked the power play units, they haven't changed much of the philosophy with the continued emphasis on keeping plays simple.

"We've just got to do simple things," Nolan said. "Sometimes we try to saucer pass from side to side versus just going up the wall to the point and getting some traffic in front of the net. Simplicity is the best way to do it. Just

trying to get those things going. Get everybody in sync. We had it going for a little while, then all of a sudden it falls back off again. We should practice it almost every day.”

The Sabres will face a Kings’ penalty-killing unit that ranks eighth in the NHL (84.4 percent) but is just 19th on the road (78 percent, nine power play goals against).

Conversely, the Kings aren’t setting the offensive world on fire. The Kings have the 20th-ranked power play (16.7 percent with 15 goals) and are just 26th on the road (11.8 percent, four goals).

Sabres notebook: Kings are the litmus test for improving

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

December 8, 2014

When you're the defending Stanley Cup champions, every opponent brings its "A" game.

That's what life has been like this season for the Los Angeles Kings. The club provides a test and a measuring stick for other teams and the Buffalo Sabres are no different.

"They're always one of the top teams in the league and they're a contender again," said forward Drew Stafford looking ahead to the Sabres game against the Kings Tuesday at First Niagara Center. "You kinda want to see where you're at against other teams. We've obviously had some challenges this year but we've also beaten some pretty good teams as well. For us to have a solid, strong effort against a team like L.A., that's something we're striving for."

The Sabres struggles are no mystery, but the team has played better and shown signs of growth and maturity.

Take the recent Florida road trip where the Sabres were blanked, 5-0, at Tampa Bay then came back with a better effort and a chance to steal a point in a 3-2 loss at the Florida Panthers.

"Earlier in the year it would have taken a few games to kinda feel good about ourselves again," Stafford said. "Obviously we're not happy with losing the two points to the Panthers, but at the same time our effort and our execution was an improvement compared to the Tampa game. That's all we're looking for."

The Sabres dropped a 2-0 decision to the Kings in Los Angeles on Oct. 23, but the players will tell you they've developed into a different team.

Forward Cody Hodgson said "a lot of things," are different. "We've established our work ethic. If we work as hard as we can, we have a chance to win and we've been able to win. ... If we play our game, anything can happen."

And the Sabres game must include focused play in their own zone and clean, effective breakouts.

"I'd say just our execution in our own zone," Stafford said of the improvements in the Sabres since October. "We're a little less running around. Our breakouts have been a lot better with making that first pass.

"That leads to a lot more zone time in the other team's zone instead of chasing around for 45 seconds then you have to change and they have the puck again and before you know it, you're outshot by 20. That's really not in our game any more. Against L.A., they come hard. They're a physical team. If we can beat them with that good first pass, work on our breakouts and our execution, I think we can do pretty good."

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The Kings kick off a five-game road trip in Buffalo.

They are 6-3-1 in their last 10 games and are coming off a 2-1 home loss to Philadelphia on Saturday.

That was a tough loss for the Kings to take.

The Flyers hadn't won a road game since Oct. 22 and were on a 0-4-2 road skid before jumping out early and hanging on to win.

Scoring has been down for the Kings, a trend for them in the regular season. Their power play went 0-for-5 on Saturday and is 2 for 19 over the last six games.

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Rasmus Ristolainen came off the ice at the end of practice Monday with some blood coming from his face. The defenseman was doing a skating drill and got his stick caught, which came back and hit him in the face. "It's just one of those freaky things," Nolan said. "His stick got caught in a rut and kinda came up in his facial area. He should be OK."

Andrej Meszaros practiced in a red non-contact jersey. Nolan said there is no timetable for his return.

Tyson Strachan and Mike Weber were not at practice, but Nolan said it was "very possible" both would be in Tuesday's lineup. "Tyson skated a little bit today. He's feeling a little bit better," Nolan said. "Webby, we just have to do a little check to make sure he's OK."

While Nolan said they would make the decision on a starting goaltender later, he did say it was "more likely Jhonas" Enroth.

Pegulas open up about vision for One Buffalo

By Bill King

Sports Business Journal

December 8, 2014

Near the end of a two-hour walking tour through the innards of the Buffalo Bills' game-day operation, the team's new co-owner made her way through an end zone tunnel and onto the field, where the Bills and Kansas City Chiefs were warming up as kickoff approached.

She was in daylight for less time than it takes a punt to land when a voice boomed from behind her.

"Hey, Kim!" a man decked out in red, white and blue regalia hollered, leaning over a rail at the front of the stands.

Kim Pegula knew how this would play out. She has seen it every day, every place she has gone in Buffalo since she and husband Terry closed on their \$1.4 billion purchase of the team in October.

Western New York first made acquaintance with the Pegulas in 2011, when they purchased the beleaguered Buffalo Sabres NHL franchise from former caretaker Tom Golisano, who bought the team out of bankruptcy in 2003. Buffalonians were grateful to have owners who spoke of spending more for talent and investing in downtown revitalization. Sabres management saw as much from surveys of the team's fan base. But that was nothing compared to the outpouring that came when the Pegulas stepped in to buy the Bills from the estate of founding owner Ralph Wilson.

Sabres fans sent a Hallmark card and a fruit basket. For the Bills, there was a skywriter and a ticker-tape parade.

So when Kim heard that fan screaming her name as she came through the end zone, she responded as she often does, pivoting to wave. And then he did what fans in Buffalo do these days.

"Thank you for saving us," he yelled.

Saves are commonplace in sports. Goalkeepers make them in soccer. Relief pitchers record them in baseball. In hockey, saves are so integral to the drama that they're described in detail. Glove saves, stick saves, kick saves.

Saving a team? In a city that lost half its population in the second half of the 20th century? In a region in which a generation of parents raised their kids on the idea that to succeed you had to leave?

Nobody keeps stats on that. Maybe they should.

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Cliff Benson reached for a sheet of scratch paper, leaned forward and began sketching the resurgent south side of Buffalo's downtown.

Over here is the waterfront. There, First Niagara Center, where the Sabres play. Here is the HarborCenter, the \$172 million complex that the Pegulas opened across from the arena last month, with two hockey rinks, the vast and impressive (716) Food and Sport bar, a Tim Hortons doughnut shop and, soon, a Marriott. There, about a mile and a quarter up the rail line, is a medical campus that has spurred much of the downtown rebirth. Along the way is the Class AAA baseball park, Coca-Cola Field, home of the Buffalo Bisons.

And here, snug between the arena and the ballpark ...

Here is where Benson stopped drawing, tapping his pen to a blank spot and looking up.

"If the stadium is right here," said the confidant whom Terry Pegula dispatched to Buffalo to help execute his vision, not so much for the team as for the city, "then you can tie all of that together under the theory that as those assets are developed, other people will come invest."

"For Terry, this was about more than owning a hockey team, though he loves owning the hockey team. Now, it's about more than owning two teams. This is about Buffalo, and the region, and economic growth."

Even if you hadn't heard of Terry Pegula before he bought the Sabres and then the Bills, you likely are familiar with the boom that funded those purchases. Pegula, 63, made his money through fracking, the controversial process by which modern-day wildcatters unlocked previously unreachable stores of natural gas.

When Pegula sold some of his company's valuable drilling rights to Royal Dutch Shell for \$4.7 billion in May 2010, he began speaking with Benson, a Pittsburgh attorney and CPA, about what he might do next. Benson suggested he read the book "Halftime," which tackles precisely that question, offering suggestions of how to parlay success into fulfillment.

Pegula came back with a suggestion for a second act that his friend wasn't expecting. He wanted to buy the Sabres. Benson tried to talk him out of it, suggesting that if he wanted to buy a hockey team, he look for one in a more palatable market. He worried that in only a few years, Pegula would regret the purchase; that he'd find out that sports ownership wasn't all it was cracked up to be; that missing the playoffs for years in a row felt far worse than drilling in the wrong spot.

"You've got more money than you can ever spend," Benson told him. "What we don't want to do is wake up one morning and look at this with regrets."

But Pegula wouldn't hear of it. He'd become a rabid hockey fan while living in Buffalo back in the 1980s, holding season tickets for 18 years. Kim Pegula was raised about 90 minutes east of Buffalo, in a small town where her parents still reside. Pegula wanted a National Hockey League team, and it had to be the Sabres, who had delivered plenty of wins over the years but had struggled for more than a decade.

"That's where I want to go," Pegula said. "I want to help Buffalo."

Telling the story in his arena office, as the Sabres were getting whacked by the Penguins down on the ice, Benson shook his head and chuckled.

"All right, I'll go with you," Benson told Pegula. "But we're going up there to make a difference. We're not going up there to stand in the owner's box and look important. That's not the gig."

They hired Ted Black, the head of FSN Pittsburgh, to navigate the purchase of the team. In February 2011, Pegula closed on the Sabres in a \$189 million deal that included \$15 million in assumed debt, bringing on Black as team president, the slot he still holds today.

The first time they met, Black asked Pegula one question. He wanted to know whether he could stand the idea of someone coming to the arena with a "Pegula Sucks" sign, or registering the domain name TerryPegulaSucks.com.

"Well, the second one is easy," Pegula said. "I don't own a computer."

It hasn't gotten that bad in Pegula's nearly four years as owner of the Sabres. But he has taken some shots. Last season, the Sabres came within a point of matching the worst record in the franchise's 44-year history. Pegula was slammed for sticking with former general manager Darcy Regier for too long before dismissing him last November, then ripped again when things went sideways with Regier's replacement, Pat LaFontaine, who left in March.

This year, the Sabres are awful again, mired in the cellar of the eight-team Atlantic Division at the beginning of December. But they also are young, with a well-regarded crop of prospects in the pipeline and six picks in the first two rounds of the 2015 draft.

"You could see from the outset that he understood it wasn't all going to be a bed of roses," Black said. "He's a very patient man. To Buffalo, he's an overnight success story. I tell people it's an overnight success that was 30 years in the making. I'm not suggesting we have 30 years to win a championship here. But he'll take a longer view."

While Terry downplays the toll the Sabres losses have taken on him — "It's not about me," he said. "You want to win for the players and the fans." — those who are close to him said the Sabres' woes, and the accompanying criticism in the papers, have caused him to take a step back from public view.

"It's probably been harder on Terry than myself because I haven't been out on the firing line as much as Terry has," Kim Pegula said. "When he first came on the scene, you're excited, you're happy, you want to get engaged. And then the media starts and it gets personal. So then you say — 'You know what? I'm just happy being where I am. I can do without that.'"

Where he is, during Sabres games, is in a small owner's box that he typically shares with Black and general manager Tim Murray while Kim entertains guests in the larger owner's suite on the opposite side of the arena. At Bills games, Terry watches with team President Russ Brandon while Kim, their three children, her parents and the rest of the family are with friends in the owner's suite on the 50-yard line.

Whether by design or as a function of their individual preferences, that in-game dichotomy is an accurate reflection of their respective roles as co-owners.

And they are, by all indications, co-owners not only in name, but in function.

Terry Pegula may have chosen Buffalo because he saw the potential to make something larger out of sports ownership, but he chose sports ownership because he loves sports. His interest is primarily on the personnel side of things — the rosters, free agency, scouting, the draft — and on league matters.

Kim Pegula likes hockey and football, but mostly she is interested in what goes on beyond the playing surface — game presentation, marketing, ticket sales and customer service; the traditional, business-side dealings of a front office.

And so the Pegulas, as a couple, have divided oversight of their sports properties quite neatly.

Settling into the suite in the minutes before a recent Sabres game, Kim watched as an array of graphics and video were projected on the ice below.

"I'm not going to be the hockey person, but when you're talking about sports and entertainment, this is the stuff I like," Kim said. "Terry gets competitive about what's on the ice. For me, it's what you see from up here. I can have an impact there. I came in and our game presentation wasn't much. We had two lights. I said, 'What do the other teams have?' Most teams have 20 or 30. We had two, and one didn't work all the time. Now, we have 45 to 48 lights on the ice."

"Terry is all about the hockey. I come for the experience."

She has paid close attention to that experience, and other aspects that might affect Sabres fans, since they bought the team, regularly walking the concourses to chat with them, even passing out programs at the main entrance before some games.

Before each game, Black meets with one or two dozen season-ticket holders in an area set up to look like a locker room, with stalls customized with the names of the fans in that night's group.

Not long into one of those meetings before a recent game, Kim entered the room, taking a seat in a locker to the right of Black. When a fan brought up a sore point, the franchise's practice of using the MSG feed featuring the opposing broadcast crew when the Sabres are on the road against the Rangers, Islanders or Devils, Kim chimed in.

"Terry was at home watching on TV and he said the same thing," she said. "'Why do I have to listen to these guys?' I told him I'd find out."

It was the sort of moment that goes a long way toward explaining why many in Western New York revered the Pegulas, even before they doubled down.

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Even without the Bills, the Pegulas had a sprawling sports and entertainment business. They got the Buffalo Bandits National Lacrosse League team as part of the Sabres deal. A couple of months later, they added the Sabres' American Hockey League affiliate, the Rochester Americans.

They had Five Star Athletes Management, a sports agency representing NFL players. And Impact Sports Performance, an 8,000-square-foot athletic training facility in Boca Raton, Fla. They also had a country music recording studio and label in Nashville, run by Kim's brother, Gordon Kerr.

And then, on April 13, 2013, they broke ground on the HarborCenter, a \$172 million complex born of far humbler stock.

When Terry and Benson were spitballing the idea, the plan was to build two hockey rinks on top of a parking garage. They wanted to improve the property adjacent to the arena to show their commitment to improving downtown. After visiting the Washington Capitals' Kettler Iceplex, they decided something similar could work in Buffalo.

As Benson looked into the engineering, it was clear that the project didn't make financial sense. He told Pegula that moving forward would be akin to presenting the city with "a \$15 million gift."

Pegula said that was fine.

Then Kim got involved. During a meeting in Kansas City with sports architecture firm Populous, Benson saw her interest piqued as they discussed ways that the project might be broadened. It would increase cost but also throw off revenue.

"Parking garages don't make money," Kim said, explaining the shift in thinking. "This one has a rink on top of it, so because of the cost to build it that way, that puts even more pressure on the finances. So what makes money? Hotels make money. Let's do a hotel. Restaurants make money. How do we get a restaurant to come here? Well, I always wanted to own a restaurant so let's do it ourselves. And let's put a Tim Hortons in here, too."

Initially, Terry balked at the idea. But Kim persisted.

What they landed on is a one-of-a-kind project that figures to make Buffalo a magnet for top-level amateur hockey. The larger, main rink, which seats 1,800, serves as home to Division I Canisius College and the Sabres' junior program. A second rink allows for simultaneous games during tournaments, as well as additional space for practices and training.

There are nine locker rooms along with a state-of-the-art training facility staffed by the Pegulas' Impact Sports Performance staff. Their hockey academy, headed by former Sabres coach and NHL player Kevyn Adams, also works out of the facility, making use of the training center as well as a 50-seat classroom and 40-seat tiered theater with telestrator.

The flow of events, and the hockey families that they will attract, made the hotel a logical play. Those, coupled with games and shows at First Niagara, also should fuel the (716) restaurant and the Tim Hortons.

While Kim was engaged on the entire project, it was the (716) that she put her heart into, enlisting the Sabres' longtime director of creative services, Frank Cravotta, to head up the design. The 13,000-square-foot, two-level restaurant features a 38-foot TV screen, eight booths with their own TVs, hockey sticks for door handles and illuminated, glass-top bars that look like sheets of ice.

"Honestly, the only resemblance between what Terry and I were talking about and what Kim eventually produced is that there's two rinks and a parking garage," Benson said. "She took it and ran with it and she did a phenomenal job."

It was while planning the HarborCenter that it occurred to Kim that they needed a company to tie the management of all their properties together.

Pegula Sports & Entertainment was born in July out of her recognition that, in working with management from so many properties, she was having the same conversations time and again. She didn't want to merge the staffs, but she did want to streamline her dealings with them.

She plucked a trio of department heads from the Sabres — Chuck LaMattina from finance, Brent Rossi from marketing and Cravotta from creative services — then added Mark Preisler, who spent 11 years as a producer at ESPN and almost four years as executive producer at the NHL Network, making each an executive vice president of the new company, which now employs 20. Kim is president and CEO.

"I saw there were these key people I was relying on who could help across all these entities and bring it together and streamline the confusion I was starting to have with all these things going on," Kim said. "The beauty of PSE is that there are links, but we're not combining things together. So nothing has to be forced. PSE is that conduit that can ask, 'What does work?' and then implement it."

The most obvious crossovers are in finance. That also was the easiest area to integrate, since the Bills' accounting all was handled outside the organization when Wilson owned the team. LaMattina had to create a finance department from scratch. To smooth that transition, he hired the controller who handled the Bills' finances in Detroit, where Wilson was based. He is relocating to Buffalo. He also hired three new staff members to handle accounting and payroll.

The idea is for each of the properties to maintain its own books, but do so using similar systems, so that PSE can view them in a consolidated fashion. They're also putting all the properties on the same payroll and accounting systems, hoping to find efficiencies there.

Consolidating the creatives from the Pegulas' sports and entertainment properties around Cravotta, who brings a rare background designing exhibits that was particularly valuable in the renovation of the Sabres' locker room and the planning of (716), gives PSE an in-house agency with a dozen employees, a mix of graphic designers, animators and editors.

"The stuff we do is pretty amazing when you think that we can design a ticket, we can design a magnet, and we can design a \$200 million, state-of-the-art hockey facility," Cravotta said. "That was all done through this group."

Although they've only begun discussing further integration of the Bills, it clearly will influence the structure of PSE.

"We're really fortunate that because we live in a small community, we all already know each other," Brandon said. "It's going to take thoughtful consideration in the coming months as we think about how we build our business. It's not all going to be easy. But it's exciting. So park your ego at the door and let's be part of one of the more special opportunities you will ever find in sports. If you can't get fired up about that, then you might be in the wrong spot."

In marketing, the early emphasis of the combined entity will be on tracking consumer behavior more than packaging offerings or sharing lists. With so many properties in the region, PSE plans to create a central media buyer to serve them all.

"We know from our research that people here look at these as their teams, as community teams," Rossi said. "It's not like that in every other market. And I think it's because there have been times that you didn't know if your team was going to be here the next year. It's the Bills now, but the Sabres went through the same thing. So you don't just want your teams to win, you want them to survive. You're in this together."

"When you can tap into that feeling of community, and really make it about Buffalo, people respond."

The best example of the Pegulas tapping into that came soon after they bought the Bills, when they were prepping for their first home game as owners. Initially, Terry and Kim said they didn't want to do anything, other than perhaps honor Wilson's contributions. But Rossi convinced Kim that they needed to acknowledge the only ownership transfer in 53 years in front of the fans.

Working with Rossi and Cravotta, Kim came up with the idea for "One Buffalo," a campaign that would tie together the fan bases of the two teams, rallying behind the resurgence of the region. There was a video that aired in-stadium before the game, narrated by Chris Berman. "One Buffalo" T-shirts were distributed to fans at the gates. And there was a social media hub aggregating content from all the teams.

"One Buffalo is a great example of how we see what we're doing here," Kim said. "It's not about football. It's not about hockey. It's about our city and the community. Really, it was a response to what Terry and I felt when we went through the whole bid process. There were people out raising money [to keep the team in town]. People writing songs. This was such a catalyst for the community."

"I don't know if you could do what we're trying to do here anywhere else."

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The on-field portion of Kim's tour before last month's Bills-Chiefs game was more handshakes and hellos than fact-finding. She met an Army general who was there for the team's annual salute to the armed forces. Thanked a couple of sponsors. She made a presentation honoring employees who got a paid day off for exemplary performance.

Then she made her way to the visiting sideline, where she was introduced to a family that had its own long connection to the Buffalo franchise.

The AFL was the brainchild of Chiefs owner Lamar Hunt, who died in 2006. Ralph Wilson was one of the league's original owners. As such, the Chiefs and Bills, and Hunt and Wilson, were inexorably linked in football history.

Lamar Hunt's wife, Norma, son Dan and daughter-in-law Toni Munoz-Hunt were standing near the visiting bench when a Bills executive brought Kim over for her first introduction.

Norma Hunt told her that games against the Bills always held a special place for them, because of the history the teams' patriarchs shared. She said she was thrilled to see the Bills land with someone who planned to keep the team in Buffalo, and even more so to see it in the hands of a family that intended to make it a generational

legacy. Dan Hunt pointed out another similarity: That both of them own teams in more than one sport. He offered to share the way the Hunts handled their succession plan if Kim and Terry were interested.

Succession is something the Pegulas discussed even before they bought the franchise. Four of Terry's five children — two from a previous marriage and three with Kim — were on the field when they were introduced as owners before their first home game. How involved that generation will be in the management of the sports properties remains to be seen.

"I don't doubt that at some point in time they'll want to be involved in some area of the business," Kim said. "But we have no idea how, or how much. Whatever it is, it's a huge plus. With Mr. Wilson, it was Mr. Wilson and then no one knew what was going to happen. Now, people here know we've got all these kids, and they're young. So we're going to be around a while. There will be a plan and they will fit into the plan."

Terry has made it clear what the plan is in the meantime. Kim is an involved and engaged co-owner, to a degree that is unique for a spouse in the NFL and rare for one in the NHL.

"When I'm in the box, [Kim] is going to be the primary contact with the league," Terry said. "You can't step into a job without knowing anything. So if my wife is going to hopefully be the succession owner, then wouldn't it be nice if she's up on everything going on?"

On her tour to learn about the Bills' game-day operation, Kim peppered those she encountered with questions, probing in a way that indicated she was sincerely curious, not just feigning interest. As if she needed to endear herself any more to the already thankful staffers and volunteers, she brought smiles to their faces when she noted that they could use more space.

During a meeting with the guest services workers who man the entry gates, one woman kept glancing Kim's way, dabbing the corner of one eye with a tissue, as if bothered by an allergy. After the new owner made a few remarks and was on her way out the door, the woman rose and raised her hand.

"I just wanted to say thank you to Mrs. Pegula," she said, her voice cracking. "And to Mr., too."

Kings begin five-game road trip against Sabres

By Evan Sporer

NHL.com

December 8, 2014

KINGS (14-8-5) at SABRES (9-16-2)

TV: NBCSN, FS-W

Season series: Jonathan Quick made 29 saves and Jeff Carter and Anze Kopitar scored power play goals for the Los Angeles Kings in a 2-0 win against the Buffalo Sabres on Oct. 23. A total of 46 penalty minutes were assessed, including four fighting majors and 10-minute misconduct to Sabres forward Drew Stafford.

Kings team scope: Despite outshooting the Philadelphia Flyers 38-16 on Saturday in Los Angeles, the Kings were defeated 2-1. Los Angeles is 3-2-1 in games which it takes at least 38 shots on goal. Tuesday will be the first game of a five-game road trip, which matches their longest of the season. "We're getting hit with everyone's best, and we've kind of brought that on ourselves when you win and then you get hit with peoples' best every night," defenseman Jake Muzzin told the Kings website Monday. "They want to knock off the champs, and that's what we're getting. I think we're getting better at preparing for that."

Sabres team scope: Buffalo defensemen Mike Weber and Tyson Strachan did not skate at practice Monday, but coach Ted Nolan told the Sabres website each may be in the lineup. Weber played on Saturday in a 3-2 loss against the Florida Panthers, and Nolan said he had a check-up on Monday. Nolan also said Strachan was on the ice before the team practiced. The Sabres are 6-3-0 over their past nine games, including wins against the Montreal Canadiens, the Tampa Bay Lightning, and the San Jose Sharks. "We've been using a lot of these games as tests recently to see where we're at," forward Cody Hodgson said after practice. "This is just another good test for us."

Sabres' Cody Hodgson slowly emerging from season-long funk

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 8, 2014

BUFFALO – Just under 11 minutes into Saturday's 3-2 loss in Florida, Cody Hodgson grabbed a loose puck in the corner and beat a Panthers defender along the wall. The Sabres center then cut to the middle and fended off two more Panthers before deftly feeding Drew Stafford, who one-timed the perfect pass in the net from the left circle.

"For him to have that vision to make a play like that, just goes to show you what kind of skill he has," Stafford said Monday. "Those are the type of plays we expect out of him."

Hodgson's slick play, one of the Sabres' prettiest assists all season, was the struggling 24-year-old's first point since scoring his only goal Oct. 25, an 18-game stretch. It was his first assist since Oct. 14, a 23-game stretch.

Incredibly, 27 games into the season, Hodgson has one goal, three points and a minus-11 rating. For some perspective, stay-at-home defensemen Tyson Strachan and Mike Weber each have four points.

So much for a breakout season. Hodgson had 20 goals and a team-high 44 points in 72 games last season and 15 goals and 34 points in 48 contests in 2012-13.

Hodgson's scoring at a stunning three-goal, nine-point pace entering tonight's tilt against the Los Angeles Kings inside the First Niagara Center. His shooting percentage is 2.9 percent.

No one wearing blue and gold has been a bigger disappointment than Hodgson, who's in the second season of a six-year, \$25.5 million contract.

"We all know he can do it," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. "It's just a matter of doing it. It's one thing with talking about it, but getting in those areas where goal scorers have to go to, there's a certain price you have to pay.

"He's getting there. He's getting a lot closer, and in return he's starting to play a little bit better."

There are some positive signs.

Nolan rewarded Hodgson last Tuesday – a hunch he called it – by using him in the shootout, and he scored the winner in the Sabres' 2-1 triumph against Tampa Bay. Hodgson, perhaps one of the NHL's worst defensive forwards in recent seasons, has an even or plus rating in 11 of the last 14 games.

"I think it started even before (the shootout), just realizing that you go out every shift and try hard, and if you can't contribute offensively, you can contribute other ways," Hodgson said.

At times, Hodgson's career-worst stretch has given Nolan fits. Nolan was visibly agitated in late October talking about the underachiever's demotion to the fourth line. For now, Hodgson, who has played both center and wing this season, has avoided being a healthy scratch.

What has been Nolan's message to Hodgson?

"Ted just wants me to get back to playing the way he knows I can play, and that's creating opportunities, being hard on the forecheck, being physical and playing an all-around game," Hodgson said.

Of course, Hodgson still has time to salvage the season. Stafford understands his plight. A year ago at this time, the winger had two goals. He didn't score his third until Dec. 19, his 35th game. He finished with 16 scores.

"I think it's sticking with it," Stafford said. "It's one of those things where the harder you try, the more you think, the worse off you're going to get. You need to do your best to make sure you keep your head clear, stay away from the negativity – ignore the noise, ignore the external stuff and just focus on what got you to this level.

"For him, it's obviously his skill. But he's the most effective when he's engaged and he's initiating. I think that play (Saturday) is a perfect example. He wins the race to the puck, he takes the puck out of the corner, he makes a skill move and makes a great pass."

Nolan knows it could take some time for Hodgson to get going.

"You look at a lot of goal scorers in the past, I was speaking to Danny Gare the other day," Nolan said last week about his former teammate in Detroit. "He didn't score for the first 12, 14 games, he said. He said he ended up scoring 50. Goal scorers, when it comes it comes, and Cody's got some special hands. When it comes, it'll come."

Sabres notes: Rasmus Ristolainen escapes freak injury

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 8, 2014

BUFFALO – As players trickled off the ice Monday following practice, Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen suddenly bolted down the hallway holding his nose and went to the trainer's room.

What happened?

Ristolainen apparently got caught in a rut on the ice, and his stick hit him in the face as he fell backward. The youngster will be OK, Sabres coach Ted Nolan said.

It's a good thing, because the Sabres are running low on defensemen. They practiced Monday with only five healthy ones. Tyson Strachan and Mike Weber both missed the session inside the First Niagara Center. Both, however, are strong possibilities for tonight's tilt against the defending Stanley Cup champion Los Angeles Kings, Nolan said.

Strachan missed Saturday's 3-2 loss in Florida. He skated on his own Monday morning. Weber needed to be examined, Nolan said.

Meanwhile, defenseman Andrej Meszaros (possible concussion) practiced in a non-contact role. He has no timetable for a return. Meszaros said he got elbowed in the jaw Nov. 28.

Nolan said goalie Jhonas Enroth will likely start tonight, his seventh nod in the last eight games.

The Sabres spent much of Monday's session working on their NHL-worst power play, which has only converted 6.6 percent of its opportunities. No one else is below 11 percent. They have five power-play goals in 76 attempts.

"Sometimes we try the saucer pass side-to-side instead versus just going up the wall to the point, try to get some traffic in front of the net," Nolan said. "Simplicity is the best way to do it. We're trying to get those things going."

Nolan changed things up, putting winger Drew Stafford on a point and big winger Marcus Foligno up front.

"I've done it on and off over my career," Stafford said about playing a point. "We're trying new things. We're trying new options and see if that can click."

Notes: The Kings have three former Sabres defensemen – Jamie McBain, Brayden McNabb and Robyn Regehr – on their roster. ... Nolan's son, Jordan, has been a staple on the Kings' fourth line since 2012. ... Stafford on playing the Kings, who have won two of the last three Cups: "You kind of want to see where you're at against other teams. We've had some challenges this year, but we've also beaten some pretty good teams as well." The Sabres lost 2-0 on Oct. 23 in Los Angeles.

Special emphasis put on special teams at Monday's practice

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

December 8, 2014

A few new wrinkles to the Buffalo Sabres' power-play units will hopefully spring the man advantage back to life.

The team used the second half of their practice Monday morning at First Niagara Center to focus on special teams. Drew Stafford moved to the point on the first power-play unit and Marcus Foligno found himself parked in front of the net on the second unit.

Buffalo's power play is currently last in the League at 6.6 percent (5-for-76). They're 1 for their past 19 opportunities although they have a record of 5-3-0 over that span.

"We just have to do simple things. Sometimes we try to saucer pass from side to side versus just going up the wall to the point, get some traffic in front of the net," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said.

"Simplicity is the best way to do it. Just try to get those things going, get everybody in sync. We had it going for a little while and then all of a sudden it falls back, off again."

Buffalo had a chance late in Saturday's 3-2 loss to tie the game on the power play but was unable to generate much offense.

POWER PLAY UNITS

First Unit

Matt Moulson - Zemgus Girgensons - Tyler Ennis

Drew Stafford - Tyler Myers

Second Unit

Marcus Foligno - Cody Hodgson - Brian Gionta

Rasmus Ristolainen - Nikita Zadorov

UP TOP AND IN FRONT

Stafford played a little bit on the point last season and is looking forward to helping out in a different way once again. He'd missed the past three games due to a lower-body injury but scored Saturday night in his return against Florida.

"We're trying new things. We're trying new options and see if that can click," he said. "I'm going to try to make some plays up top there, get a little more shots on net, whether it's just a wrister. Getting it on net doesn't hurt. You look at some of the top power plays in the League, it's usually one or two passes and then a shot."

Foligno played 12:43 against Florida and Nolan has, for the most part, liked his game over the past few contests.

"He played really strong two of the last three games and in Tampa, we didn't play very well. But in Florida, I thought he banged the bodies well. That's the type of player he is," Nolan said.

"He has to play a powerful game and he certainly did that last week. He's still a young guy. We've got to build up his minutes and getting him in front of that net on the power play could add."

FREAK INCIDENT

Toward the end of practice, defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen left the ice with an apparent injury. Nolan didn't think it's too serious.

"It's one of those freaky things," Nolan said. "His stick got caught in a rut and kind of came up in his facial area. He should be OK."

LOOKING TO RETURN

Tyson Strachan, who missed the last game due to an injury, skated for a few minutes at the beginning of practice before leaving the ice. Mike Weber did not skate as he was being checked out by the team's medical staff.

Nolan said it's very possible both could play Tuesday night.

THE NEXT TEST

The Sabres will host the Los Angeles Kings on Tuesday and Buffalo knows it will be a tough contest. The Kings are 6-3-1 in their past 10 games and are coming off a 2-1 loss at home to the Flyers on Saturday.

"We're using a lot of these games lately as tests, see where we're at," Sabres center Cody Hodgson said. "I thought we played really well against Montreal and some of the top teams in the League so this is just another good test for us."

WORLD JUNIOR ROSTER UPDATE

Courtesy of SabresProspects.com's Kris Baker:

MODO winger Victor Olofsson and Brynas IF goaltender Jonas Johansson have been named to Sweden's preliminary roster for the 2015 IIHF World Junior Championship, which takes place Dec. 26 to Jan. 5 in Toronto and Montreal.

The Swedes join Nikita Zadorov (RUS), J.T. Compher, Hudson Fasching (USA), Vaclav Karabacek (CZE), Sam Reinhart and Nick Baptiste (CAN) as other Sabres prospects to earn a World Junior camp invite.

The 19-year-old Olofsson has put together a solid first half in the SHL, placing second on MODO with nine goals while leading all U20 players in the league with 17 points. He scored one goal in four games for Sweden at the United States National Junior Evaluation Camp in August.

Johansson, who was on Sweden's roster at the 2014 World Junior tourney, looked to be atop the goaltending pecking order heading into the season. He was the leading man for Sweden at the NJEC, but a bacterial infection hindered his start to the season. He has played in just seven games all year between Brynas' SHL club and J20 entry.

TUX AND PUCKS RETURNS

The Sabres have announced the return of 'Tux and Pucks' for the team's home game against the Tampa Bay Lightning on Dec. 31.

Click here for more information on ticket packages and tuxedo rental options.

MONDAY'S PRACTICE

26 Matt Moulson – 28 Zemgus Girgensons – 63 Tyler Ennis

65 Brian Flynn – 17 Torrey Mitchell – 12 Brian Gionta

82 Marcus Foligno – 19 Cody Hodgson – 21 Drew Stafford

44 Nicolas Deslauriers – 8 Cody McCormick – 80 Chris Stewart – 36 Patrick Kaleta

Defensemen: 4 Josh Gorges, 24 Tyson Strachan (left early), 41 Andrej Meszaros (non-contact jersey), 51 Nikita Zadorov, 55 Rasmus Ristolainen, 57 Tyler Myers, 61 Andre Benoit

1 Jhonas Enroth

34 Michal Neuvirth

Did Not Skate: 6 Mike Weber

Sabres prospects report

By Kris Baker

Sabres.com

December 8, 2014

Sean Malone (2013, sixth round) made an immediate impact in his return to the Harvard lineup over the weekend, picking up two goals and two assists as the No. 8 Crimson extended their winning streak to six games with a pair of ECAC Hockey victories.

After missing Harvard's first 10 games due to an undisclosed injury, Malone debuted on Friday with a goal and two helpers to lead a 4-3 triumph over Princeton. After earning an assist on a second period tally, Malone scored to put the Crimson up 3-2 at 1:35 of the third period and then made a nice play to set up the game-winner five minutes later. The three-point night tied his career high set on January 14, 2014 in a 7-4 victory over Boston University.

The following night, Malone buried the game-winning goal at 19:59 of the middle frame as Harvard skated into the holiday break with a 5-2 victory over No. 15 Quinnipiac. With the Crimson working the power play, the sophomore centerman gathered an incoming point shot and finished with a backhand for his second power play tally in as many games to give his team a 3-1 lead at the second intermission.

Harvard (9-2-1) has been one of college hockey's surprise clubs in the first half of the season, and they look to be all the more potent with Malone back down the middle.

OHL

Brendan Lemieux (2014, second round) recorded five goals last week to guide the Barrie Colts to three consecutive victories. After getting to the doorstep for a tally in Thursday's win over Mississauga, Lemieux posted back-to-back two-goal efforts over the weekend as the Colts claimed victories over Peterborough and Ottawa. The fiery winger has connected for 19 goals in 24 games this season, including five in his last three to vault into seventh on the OHL scoring leaderboard.

Nicholas Baptiste (2013, third round) scored his first two goals in an Otters uniform Wednesday to earn the game's first star as Erie defeated Owen Sound 4-3. Baptiste, who was blanked in weekend losses to Belleville and Oshawa, has two goals and an assist in six games since joining the Otters, and a total of 14 points (8+6) in 18 OHL contests this season.

Jean Dupuy recorded the first two-goal game of his OHL career Sunday as Sault Ste. Marie dropped a 7-6 shootout decision to Sarnia. The overage winger has supplied the first-place Greyhounds with more than just leadership this season, posting eight goals and a career-high 23 points in his first 24 games.

Justin Bailey (2013, second round) was unable to get a point as Kitchener dropped both ends of a home-and-home series with Owen Sound. Bailey has one goal and a minus-10 rating in his last seven games for the slumping Rangers, but he remains the team's leading scorer with 30 points (15+15) in 26 games.

A night after his team was clubbed 6-0 by league-leading Oshawa, Peterborough's **Eric Cornel** (2014, second round) contributed a pair of assists in the Petes' 5-3 loss to Guelph on Friday. Cornel served a one-game suspension on Saturday to finish the week with 25 points (8+17) through 26 games.

WHL

Sam Reinhart (2014, first round) amassed two goals and two assists last week to extend his point streak to 14 games since his return from Buffalo. The ICE captain cashed the game-winning goal on the power play in Friday's 2-1 win over Spokane. Reinhart wasted no time producing in Saturday's rematch with the Chiefs, picking up a goal and an assist on his first two shifts as the ICE held on for a 3-2 victory. Reinhart closed the three-game weekend on Sunday with a shorthanded helper in a 5-4 loss at Tri City, leaving him with eight goals and 27 points in his first month of WHL duty while guiding the surging ICE to an 11-3 record.

Swift Current defenseman **Brycen Martin** (2014, third round) scored his first goal of the year Saturday as the Broncos were bested 6-4 by Brandon. Martin's marker ups his season total to 13 points in 31 games.

OMJHL

Vaclav Karabacek (2014, second round) earned a pair of third-period assists Friday as Gatineau was doubled 6-3 by Chicoutimi. The skilled winger added another helper on Saturday as the Olympiques came up short in a 3-2 loss to Baie-Comeau. Karabacek, who on Wednesday saw his four-game goal streak snapped in a loss to Quebec, has points in nine of his last dozen games to boost his total to 23 (10+13) on the year.

NCAA

Cal Petersen (2013, fifth round) made 14 saves Saturday to earn his second shutout of the season as Notre Dame earned the Hockey East sweep with a 4-0 victory at Massachusetts. The freshman netminder improved to 4-5-1 with a 2.66 GAA and .910 save%.

On Friday, **Connor Hurley** (2013, second round) scored his third goal of the year and assisted on the game-winner as Notre Dame roared back with five third-period markers to stun Massachusetts 7-5. Hurley put Notre Dame up 1-0 at 10:26 of the opening frame when he raced down the left side and finished a Jake Evans feed. The sophomore was unable to get on the scoresheet in Saturday's blanking of the Minutemen, leaving him with three goals and eight points through 17 contests.

J.T. Compher (2013, second round) won a faceoff for a secondary assist Friday as Michigan trounced rival Ohio State 8-3. The helper gives Compher 11 points (3+8) through 14 games, slightly off the point-per-game pace he posted a season ago at the same juncture.

Hudson Fasching extended his point drought to six games Saturday as No. 3 Minnesota closed the 2014 portion of their schedule with a 3-3 tie at Michigan State. Fasching, who finished with a plus-one rating in Friday's 5-0 shutout of the Spartans, has seven points (5+2) in 14 games.

Minnesota's **Christian Isackson** (2010, seventh round) contributed three shots on goal in the two games with Michigan State. The fourth-year forward has appeared in all 14 games for the Gophers, collecting one assist and 11 shots on goal. Minnesota is off until Friday, January 2 when they open the 24th Annual Mariucci Classic versus Merrimack.

Anthony Florentino (2013, fifth round) logged a plus-three rating Tuesday as Providence earned a 5-1 victory at Northeastern. On Saturday, the sophomore defender contributed three shots on goal as the Friars were edged 2-1 by the Huskies.

Providence rearguard **Mark Adams** (2009, fifth round) netted a plus-two rating in the set with Northeastern. The Friars next host Colgate for a non-conference tilt on Tuesday.

Max Willman (2014, fifth round) posted three shots on goal Friday as Brown was hammered 7-1 by Union. Willman was scratched on Saturday as Brown earned their third win of the year with a 4-2 doubling of RPI. The freshman winger has registered two points (1+1) in 10 appearances for the Bears, who are off until Friday, January 2 when they square off with Boston College at the Dartmouth Ledyard Bank Tournament.

Senior co-captain **Brad Navin** (2011, seventh round) recorded one assist over the weekend as Wisconsin was swept by Penn State by scores of 5-2 and 4-2. The Badgers close out the 2014 calendar on Friday when they host an exhibition with Team USA Under-18.

USHL

Christopher Brown (2014, sixth round) scored his ninth goal of the year Saturday as Green Bay was defeated 5-2 by Madison. Brown, who was kept off the scoresheet in Friday's loss to Bloomington, has points in 11 of his last 13 games, including goals in four of his last five.

SHL

Victor Olofsson (2014, seventh round) scored his ninth goal of the year Saturday as MODO was defeated by Orebro HK 5-2. With MODO down 4-1 in the third period, Adrian Kempe (LAK) spun a puck at the net that was quickly scooped up by Olofsson and lifted high over Julius Hudacek's shoulder. Olofsson's nine goals place second in team-scoring, while his 16 points are second-most among all U20 players in the SHL.

Gustav Possler (2013, fifth round) recorded his first two-goal game of the year Thursday as MODO dropped a 3-2 shootout decision to Farjestads BK. He redirected an Olofsson point shot for his first, and converted a seeing-eye wrist shot through traffic for his second. The scoring line winger followed up with a team-high four shots on goal in 18:43 of action in MODO's 5-2 loss to Orebro HK on Saturday. Possler is right behind Olofsson on the MODO scoring list with eight goals and 14 points through 26 games.

Linus Ullmark (2012, sixth round) earned his 19th start for MODO on Saturday, allowing four goals on 30 shots in the loss to Orebro HK. Ullmark is 7-11 on the year with a 3.46 GAA and .900 save% with two games left to play before the holiday break.

Goaltender **Jonas Johansson** (2014, third round) did not see any last week. The 19-year-old has gotten into just two SHL contests thus far this season.