



Buffalo Sabres

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Flyers-Sabres preview

By Staff Report

Associated Press

January 16, 2015

The Buffalo Sabres are on the verge of matching their longest losing streak in team history and have failed to earn even one point on their current slide.

The Sabres will try to end that drought while avoiding a record-tying 10th consecutive defeat Saturday night against a Philadelphia Flyers team looking to break out of a scoring funk.

Buffalo (14-28-3) has lost 10 in a row twice since the beginning of the 2007-08 season. The Sabres went 0-5-5 from Jan. 26, 2007-Jan. 16, 2008, and 0-9-1 during a streak that stretched from last season into this one.

They were drubbed 7-0 by Minnesota on Thursday - their sixth loss by at least three goals during this swoon - prompting coach Ted Nolan to put his team through a hard 40-minute skate Friday that barely involved pucks.

"We have meetings. We talk about certain things then we don't do them. It's enough talking. It's enough yelling and screaming at each other," said Nolan, whose team has been outscored 39-9 the last nine games. "We've got an angry team. We've got a disappointed team, and we've just got to find a way to fight through it."

The Sabres have also dropped four in a row at home for their longest skid there since an 0-4-1 start to this season.

Arriving at an opportune time, Philadelphia (17-21-7) looks to avoid a franchise-worst third consecutive shutout and end a 144:59 scoreless streak that's currently the eighth-longest in team history.

The Flyers lost 4-0 to Vancouver on Thursday and are averaging 1.91 goals in a 3-7-1 stretch after putting up 2.85 per game in their first 34 contests. They've also been outscored 20-9 in a string of six road losses (0-5-1) despite boasting two of the league's point leaders in Jakub Voracek (52) and captain Claude Giroux (48).

"We want to be successful. We just have to go out there and do it," center Sean Couturier said. "We can't start yelling and hoping to make plays. ... We have to go out there and do it."

The Flyers have won eight of 10 over the Sabres heading into the first matchup this season, and a 5-2 victory April 6 was their third in a row in the series. They also snapped a two-game skid in Buffalo with a 4-3 win Jan. 14, 2014.

Vincent Lecavalier had the deciding score in that visit and has 10 goals and five assists in his past 15 matchups. Matt Read had three goals and two assists in last season's three-game sweep of Buffalo.

Lecavalier doesn't have a point in six straight contests, one shy of matching a season high. Read hasn't scored a goal in 17 games since Dec. 11 and has four points in his last 13 contests.

The Sabres' Cody Hodgson has a goal and an assist in each of his last two games against Philadelphia. He has two goals and four assists in 44 games this season.

The last team to lose 10 in a row in regulation was Pittsburgh from Jan. 6-23, 2006.

Agony of defeat is wearing on Sabres

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

January 16, 2015

Let's make an unfortunate flashback to April 29, 2013.

"It may require some suffering," Darcy Regier, then the Sabres' general manager, said while unveiling the lose-a-lot rebuild plan he hatched with owner Terry Pegula and team President Ted Black. "It may well require some patience, but the payout is what it's about. ... I would like to think that people will give up some suffering in order to win a Stanley Cup."

It remains to be seen whether Buffalo will ever win a Cup. It certainly won't happen this year. This season is merely a continuation of the suffering.

Oh, the endless suffering.

The Sabres will host Philadelphia on Saturday as losers of nine straight games in regulation. Yes, that's a franchise record. No NHL team has done it since Edmonton in 2007, according to STATS. Being compared with anything the Oilers have done since 2006 is a bad, bad thing.

The last loss – Thursday's 7-0 blowout at the hands of slumping Minnesota – has demoralized the Sabres and renewed bickering as to whether the organization's plan to tank is worthwhile or morally corrupt. Being for or against tanking is irrelevant at the moment. It's the path the Sabres have chosen, and all the arguing in the world won't change it now.

But there is no debate that the rebuild is crushing the people inside First Niagara Center.

"Behind the scenes we've got an angry team, a disappointed team," coach Ted Nolan said Friday.

Players are yelling and screaming at each other. Nolan is frustrated that no one seems to be listening – to each other or him.

"It's extremely hard when you ask somebody to do something and they don't do it," Nolan said. "What can you do? ... You take the horse to the well, and it's up to him to bend over and drink it. You can't force someone to do something. You can ask him and ask him."

"The biggest thing is trying to relay a positive image, particularly with our young guys. Some of the older guys you're not going to change. That's just the way it is."

Despite looking defeated, Nolan continued to send messages Friday. Most of his practice was conducted without pucks. First, the players skated laps, then they repeatedly did breakout drills with an imaginary puck. Practice closed with a few more laps and a Nolan chat.

It was not a fun day at the rink.

"Punishment, learning all in one," center Zemgus Girgensons said. "It's definitely the right thing to do. We definitely need something to get us going. Maybe that will get in our guys' heads because no one wants to do that every day, that's for sure."

After the on-ice session, Nolan showed video of what the Sabres did wrong. They know what they did wrong, but the question is whether they will do anything to fix it.

"There's enough talk," forward Drew Stafford said. "I'm sick of the meetings. I'm sick of the keywords and all that.

"Just show something, show some sort of life, show some sort of response. There's no use beating it to death, analyzing it anymore, talking about it. I'm ready to move on. I know everyone in here is ready to move on and get back to work. It's almost beating a dead horse at this point talking about it. I'm sick of it."

While fans can find relief in looking toward a star-studded NHL Draft, the team is stuck in an endless loop of losses. The Sabres are 1-12-1 in the last 14 games.

"We've been thinking there's another day, another chance, but how many times are you going to say that there's tomorrow?" Girgensons said. "You've got today, and that's what matters really."

Normally, it'd be worth noting the Sabres are hosting a slumping opponent. Philadelphia has been shut out in back-to-back games as part of a 3-7-1 slide. Minnesota, however, was 0-5-1 before dismantling the Sabres.

So there's not much of a bright spot at the moment in Sabreland. The suffering that was predicted is about the only thing flourishing.

"Right now it's just trying to help each other out as much as we can, whether that's being hard on someone or just having discussions about what we can do better," defenseman Tyler Myers said. "A lot's been said. It's to a point where we've talked about it so much, we've hashed it out quite a bit, there's not much more we can say. We have to start doing."

Sabres notebook: Nolan not worried about job security

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

January 16, 2015

Ted Nolan knows the deal. "We're in a business of winning," the Sabres' coach said Friday. "You have to win and you have to compete. If you're not winning and you're not competing, then there's prices to pay."

Buffalo is not winning or competing. Nolan's team has lost nine straight games, including Thursday's 7-0 no-show at the hands of Minnesota. The drought could reach double digits Saturday when Philadelphia visits First Niagara Center.

Though there have been no rumblings that Nolan's job is in jeopardy as the rebuilding team struggles, he's aware the staff is being evaluated. He says he's not afraid of the consequences.

"I've never feared my position in any job I ever did in my life," Nolan said. "I'm not here to do anything but get this team playing better and try to get some of our younger players doing the right things in order for them to be better."

"The old slogan in sports is the easiest guy to change is the coach. That's the easy way. I've seen it done lots of times, and is it the right thing to do? I'm not too sure, but that's just the fact in our business."

"The one thing we are doing, we're not quitting. We're not coming here and worrying about that. I'm worrying about how we can get this thing turned around."

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The Sabres have lost four straight home games by a combined total of 17-2. After hosting the Flyers, the Sabres won't be back in their arena until St. Louis comes to town Feb. 5. It will give the beleaguered fans a break.

"I'm surprised that people are still showing up," Drew Stafford said.

The forward hopes his team gives the fans a decent parting gift against the Flyers.

"We owe it to them to put forth an effort that they can be proud of," Stafford said.

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After getting shut out for the eighth time in 41 games, the Sabres made the obligatory line changes during practice. Zemgus Girgensons centered for Chris Stewart and Brian Flynn. Torrey Mitchell was in the middle of Matt Moulson and Tyler Ennis. Phil Varone was flanked by Cody Hodgson and Stafford. Matt Ellis centered for Nicolas Deslauriers and Patrick Kaleta.

Defenseman Mike Weber skipped practice but is expected to be available against the Flyers.

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Nolan unhappily noted that Minnesota, already holding a 6-0 lead, put out its best players for a power play with three minutes left. The Wild scored to make it 7-0.

He hopes rebuild cornerstones such as Girgensons, Rasmus Ristolainen and Nikita Zadorov remember things like that.

"Hopefully Nikita, Ristolainen and Girgensons, they'll remember that a year from now when they can give out the lumps instead of taking them all," Nolan said. "When you're going through what we're going through, you're going to get a lot of bumps once in a while. You've just got to remember when you can give them back."

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Assistant coach Bryan Trottier missed practice because the New York Islanders honored him prior to their game against Pittsburgh. Trottier won four Stanley Cups playing for the Isles.

"We felt like Long Island embraced us," Trottier said. "We wanted to just dive right into the communities and be a part of everything. The invitations just never seemed to stop. The people just made us feel like such a part of Long Island."

Flyers seek to continue success against Sabres

By Adam Kimelman

NHL.com

January 16, 2015

FLYERS (17-21-7) at SABRES (14-28-3)

TV: CSN-PH, MSG-B

Season series: The Philadelphia Flyers won all three games against the Buffalo Sabres last season, including 4-3 Jan. 14 in Buffalo. Flyers forwards Matt Read, Vincent Lecavalier and Brayden Schenn each had three goals in the three games. Cody Hodgson led the Sabres with two goals and two assists. The Flyers have won eight of 10 games dating to the start of the 2011-12 season.

Flyers team scope: After a 4-0 loss to the Vancouver Canucks on Thursday, Philadelphia was closer in the Eastern Conference standings to the 16th-place Sabres (10 points) than they were to the New York Rangers (11 points), who hold the second wild-card spot into the Stanley Cup Playoffs. "I think it's not the best thing to look at the standings now," defenseman Mark Streit said Thursday. "We've got to gather ourselves and shake it off, this game, and wake up [Friday] and go back to work. There's nothing else we can do." The Flyers spent Friday watching video of their loss. With 37 games left in the regular season, the urgency is there to turn things around if there is any hope of salvaging a spot in the playoffs. "You worry about it but there's a lot of hockey," coach Craig Berube said Thursday. "Regroup tomorrow, go to Buffalo and win a hockey game. That's what we're going to worry about. We'll go over tonight's game tomorrow, talk about it. Get the guys refocused for Buffalo."

Sabres team scope: Buffalo has lost nine in a row and coach Ted Nolan is getting frustrated with his players. "It's extremely hard," Nolan said Friday, according to the Buffalo News. "It's extremely hard when you ask somebody to do something and they don't do it. What can you do? It's impossible to change everybody." Nolan said he's seen no quit from his players but he would like to see them follow the game plan better. "You take the horse to the well, and it's up to him to bend over and drink it," Nolan said. "You can't force someone to do something. You can ask him and ask him. People are not scoring, you're not scoring for a reason. You're not paying the price to score. You're not getting the puck out along the boards. You're not paying the price to get it out along the boards. Enough talking; we have to start doing." After losing 7-0 to the Minnesota Wild on Thursday, it was a rough practice Friday, spent mostly on skating drills that didn't involve the puck. "Punishment, learning all in one," center Zemgus Girgensons said, according to the Buffalo News. "It's definitely the right thing to do. We definitely need something to get us going. Maybe that will get in our guys' heads because no one wants to do that every day, that's for sure."

Coach Ted Nolan knows Sabres must improve quickly: 'If you're not winning... there's prices to play'

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

January 16, 2015

BUFFALO – The Sabres have lost a franchise-record nine consecutive games and 31 of 45 overall this trying season. They rank 29th in a 30-team league and dead last or close to the bottom in every major statistical category. They just lost 7-0 to a reeling Minnesota Wild team, their worst home defeat since 1977.

Of course, the Sabres, who host the Philadelphia Flyers tonight, were supposed to lose this season. But was the rebuilding club supposed to lose so badly this often? Opponents have outscored them 39-9 during their skid and 156-76 overall, shocking numbers in a low-scoring era of parity.

Very few observers expected the Sabres would be good. But many expected they would compete hard and showcase some grit most nights, hallmarks of coach Ted Nolan's past teams.

Close friend Pat LaFontaine brought Nolan back for a second tenure 14 months ago. Sure, general manager Tim Murray awarded Nolan a three-year contract extension weeks after LaFontaine resigned as president of hockey operations in March, but Nolan isn't truly Murray's guy.

Even in a deep rebuild with low expectations, Nolan's future could be shaky if the Sabres don't start performing better soon.

"I've never feared my position in the NHL," Nolan said Friday inside the First Niagara Center. "I never did in my life, because the only thing I know how to do is do what I do, and sometimes it's good enough, sometimes it's not. I'm not here to do anything but trying to get this team playing better and trying to get some of our younger players doing the right things in order for them to be better.

"We're in the business of winning, though. You have to win, and you have to compete, and if you're not winning and you're not competing, there's prices to pay."

Nolan knows "if you lose enough, you know what you're going to get."

"But who's going to worry about the rest of the bunch when that happens?" he said. "Usually when teams lose, there's a lot of changes. You have a lot to play for. You have to play for your contract, you have to play for your livelihood, so you don't want to be, 'Well, we're doing the right thing by losing.' No, you're not doing the right thing."

Nolan gave the Sabres a grueling 35-minute practice with no breaks Friday, skating them up and down the ice. They practiced without a puck for much of the session, making "imaginary" plays to emphasize communication and visualization.

"Pain makes people think more," Sabres center Zemgus Girgensons said. "If I was the coach, I would've done the same thing."

The Sabres are simply too soft.

"It's not punishment, it's what we have to do," Nolan said. "We have to get the pucks in deep. We have to get back, we have to change properly. Even our line changes are soft. The way we attack the puck is soft."

There are only so many things Nolan and his staff can do, however. Gone are the days when an underperforming player could simply be banished to the minors.

"You can take the horse to the well," Nolan said. "It's up to him to bend over and drink it. You can't force someone to do something."

Clearly, the awful season has been wearing on the players, who are tired of discussing their problems. Sabres winger Tyler Ennis mentioned Thursday team meetings have featured "yelling and screaming."

"It's to a point where we've talked about it so much ... there's not much more we can say," Sabres defenseman Tyler Myers said. "We got to start doing. Our execution is what it comes down to now."

But the Sabres can't execute the things they talk about.

"Enough talking, enough yelling and screaming at each other," Nolan said. "People see what they see out there, but behind the scenes we got an angry team, we got a disappointed team. We just got to find a way to fight through it. There's no one here that's going to come on a big white horse and save the day for us."

Sabres winger Drew Stafford believes "there's been enough talk."

"I'm sick of the meetings, sick of the keywords," he said. "Like today, a simple 35 minutes of skating, hard work, working on the breakouts. We have a great opportunity (tonight) to put forth an effort we can be proud of, show something for our fans that come out and support us."

"After a game like (Thursday), I'm surprised that people are still showing up. We owe it to them to put forth an effort they can be proud of."

The Sabres hadn't lost so badly at home since Montreal shellacked them 9-2 on Jan. 6, 1977. Like the Wild, which had lost six straight games, the Flyers, having been blanked two straight games, are struggling. They have only 17 wins, three more than the Sabres.

With the NHL All-Star break next week and a five-game road trip starting Sunday, tonight is the Sabres' last home game until Feb. 5.

"We want to end on a good note, but more importantly, just show something, some sort of life, some sort of response," Stafford said.

Notes: Strachan Strays, defenseman Tyson Strachan's pet adoption agency, will be selling their 2015 "Pucks & Paws" calendar at tonight's game for \$20. All proceeds benefit local pet charities. Sabres players posed with their dogs or rescue dogs. Each calendar has a signature. The calendar is also available at strachanstrays.com. ... Defenseman Mike Weber had a maintenance day Friday and should play tonight, Nolan said. ... Center Marcus Foligno (hand) has started skating on his own.

Sabres' Nolan not worried about his job

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 16, 2015

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- It's taken over half the season, but you knew eventually the topic of Ted Nolan being fired would come up.

With the team playing as poorly as it is, it's only natural that he be asked about it. Nolan said he has no concern about that, "I'd have concern if I'm not doing (my job), but I've never feared my position in any job I did in my life because the only thing I know how to do is do what I do and sometimes it's good enough and sometimes it's not."

I've known Nolan for many years and he feels there's only one way to go about coaching or life in general, "I'm not here to do anything but to try to get this team playing better and trying to get some of our younger players to do the right things to do the right things in order for them to be better."

Nolan walked away from a one year contract offer here and was fired in Long Island. He knows how this business works, "We're in a business of winning, you have to win and you have to compete and if you're not winning and you're not competing then there's prices to pay." Nolan added, "Usually when teams lose, there's a lot of changes and if you're losing, you're not doing the right thing."

There's no question Nolan's frustrated, "It's extremely hard. When you ask somebody to do something and they don't do it, what can you do? It's impossible to change everybody and the old slogan in sports is the easiest guy to change in sports is the coach. That's the easy way and I've seen it done a lot of times and is it the right thing to do, I'm not too sure, but that's just the fact of our business."

Nolan also said he has better things to think about, "The one thing is we aren't quitting and we aren't worried about that, I'm worried about how we can get this thing turned around."

Nolan had the Sabres skating and talking in practice

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 16, 2015

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- On Friday Ted Nolan did drills without pucks and he did drills with pucks. He wanted things done fast and right and he wanted loud communication on the ice.

After spending about 40 minutes doing that he took the team into the video room for more.

Many would think Nolan was punishing the team for Thursday's game, but he said that wasn't it, "No, it's not punishment, it's what we have to do. We have to get the pucks in deep, we have to work in certain positions, we have to get back, we have to change properly, our line changes are soft, the way we attack the puck is soft, those type of things we have to do with a little more intensity."

Ever since Nolan has arrived he's talked about how they're a quiet team. He doesn't like that because he feels loud communication on the ice is essential, "That's also part of our game, we don't talk. We don't let each other know how much space we have, what to do with the puck and be somebody's eyes when they don't see what's going on on the ice so, a lot of that stuff is position, we go over it over and over again, we talk about being a good, loud team, but when we get to the games, we don't do it."

Many of the players have said enough talk, actions are the only thing that counts and their head coach agrees with them, "We have meetings, we talk about certain things and we don't do it, so enough talking, enough yelling and screaming at each other, we've got an angry team, we've got a disappointed team because there's nobody that's going to come in here and a big white horse and save the day for us."

Ted Nolan teams usually aren't soft, but he can't change who the players are. He said, "You take the horse to the well and it's up to him to bend over and drink it. You can't force somebody to do something. You can ask him and ask him even nowadays, sending guys to the minors, that's not going to happen."

So the question is can he get through to them? Nolan said, "You put the people out there and hope that you communicate enough with them and show them enough examples of how it looks when they don't do it properly and how it does look when you do it properly." Nolan added, "They ask why they're not scoring, well you're not scoring for a reason because you're not paying a price to score, you're not getting the puck out along the boards because you're not paying the price to get it out along the boards."

Nolan also changed the lines going with:

Moulson-Mitchell-Ennis

Hodgson-Varone-Stewart

Flynn-Girgensons-Stafford (Gionta)

Deslauriers-Ellis-Kaleta

Mike Weber had a maintenance day, but Nolan said he hopes to have him play tomorrow.

From a players standpoint, they had to know coming to work Friday that they were in for a tough practice. Zemgus Girgensons said if he was the coach, he would've done what Nolan did, "It was everything, punishment, learning all in one, it's definitely the right thing to do, we had to get something to get us going and maybe it'll get into our guys heads because no one wants to do that every day, that's for sure."

Girgensons of course has been disgusted with the latest streak, "It's been 15 games now and in none of those games have we really been in the game to even tie it or do anything, so it definitely sits in your head, so we just need to get that one win."

Sabres go through tough skate Friday

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

January 16, 2015

The Buffalo Sabres went back to work Friday after an extremely disappointing loss at home on Thursday.

Sabres coach Ted Nolan skated the team hard for about 40 minutes at First Niagara Center with an emphasis put on dump-ins, positioning, being tougher on the puck and communicating. For much of practice, players skated without the puck.

Buffalo is currently on a nine-game losing streak and they'll look to snap it Saturday night when the Philadelphia Flyers come to town.

The players have already moved on from their 7-0 loss to Edmonton. For Sabres forward Drew Stafford, the tough practice was welcome because it's the start of their preparation for the next game and setting the tone for how they want to respond to their latest defeat.

"There's no use beating it to death, analyzing it anymore, talking about it. I'm ready to move on," he said. "I know everyone in here is ready to move on and get back to work. It's almost beating a dead horse at this point, talking about it so I'm sick of it."

At this point, talking about what they need to do better matters less and less than what they're actually doing on the ice.

"A lot's been said. It's to a point where we've talked about it so much. We've hashed it out quite a bit where there's not much more we can say. We've got to start doing," Sabres defenseman Tyler Myers said.

"Our execution is what it comes down to now, whether that's guys putting in more effort or putting in a little more preparation before a game, whatever it is. We all have to look at ourselves and ask ourselves what we can do to help the team get out of this."

While the team has battled injuries to key players to the point where they had five call-ups from the American Hockey League for a game a few weeks ago, the players don't see that as an excuse as to why they've now gone 1-12-1 in their past 14 games.

"Physically, we've had some injuries. We've had some new guys coming in and out. That doesn't help but at the same time, mentally it's been really, really challenging, really frustrating," Stafford said. "There's enough talk. I'm sick of the meetings, sick of the keywords and all that. Like today, just a simple 35 minutes of skating, hard work, working on the breakouts.

"We have a great opportunity tomorrow to put forth an effort that we can be proud of and show something for our fans. They come out and support us. After a game like last night, I'm surprised that people are still showing up. We owe it to them to put forth an effort that they can be proud of."

Younger players like 20-year-old Zemgus Girgensons saw the practice as both a punishment and a teaching tool from the coaching staff.

"It definitely makes you think," he said. "Definitely, pain makes people think more. If I was a coach, I would've done the same thing.

"...Lately, we've been thinking, 'There's another day, another chance.' But how many times are you going to say that there's a tomorrow? What you do today, that's what matters, really."

Buffalo has been outscored 39-9 during the losing streak. After the skate, Nolan had the team go through a 15-minute video session.

"When things were going well, we were working," he said. "People are not scoring. You're not scoring for a reason. You're not paying the price to score. You're not getting the puck out along the boards because you're not paying the price to get it out along the boards. Enough talking. We have to start doing."

Nolan hopes the messages get through.

"You take the horse to the well and it's up to him to bend over and drink it. You can't force someone to do something. You can ask him and ask him," he said. "Even nowawdays, send ya down to the minors, that's not gonna happen. It's been like that for a long time.

"Putting the people out there and hoping you've communicated enough with them and shown them enough examples of how it looks when they don't do it properly and how it does look when you do it properly."

Buffalo Jr. Sabres notebook

By Joe Ray

Sabres.com

January 16, 2015

While the weather outside has been cooling down, the Buffalo Jr. Sabres have been heating up the OJHL.

The Jr. Sabres have had a massive turnaround recently after dealing with some rough stretches early in the season as many new players acclimated themselves to the roster. Since the beginning of December, the Jr. Sabres have won nine of their past 12 games to push back into playoff contention.

"We've been playing better," forward Ryan Kuhn said. "The month of December turned our season around and we finally strung some wins together, beating some good teams, getting some confidence. Hopefully we can get rolling moving forward."

As is the case with many young teams, finding the resiliency to win close games in tough situations takes time. Buffalo found that out Wednesday when a 4-1 loss to the Oakville Blades at HARBORCENTER finished a stretch of three games in four days.

Buffalo opened this week with a 6-5 double OT win over the Pickering Panthers on Sunday, and an 8-2 win over the Milton Icehawks on Tuesday. The offense may simply have been plagued by the fatigue, as Wednesday was the first time the Jr. Sabres scored fewer than three goals in a game since November 24.

Finding ways to earn the gritty goals will be the key on nights when the team is not finding the fancy opportunities.

"In close games with good teams, we've got to find a way to play better physically and score some ugly goals instead of just looking for pretty ones," Kuhn said. "If we get that going, we should be good."

"It was a tough loss," forward Daniel LaFontaine added. "We had a few goals that we shouldn't have let in, but we played three games in four days. It's tough to pull it out here at the end."

The Jr. Sabres have 13 games left in their regular season schedule to cement a playoff spot in the OJHL's South-West Conference. Currently the team has a record of 16-22-1-1 (34 pts.), which puts them in the conference's eighth and final playoff spot.

The handful of players that have seen Buffalo capture two straight division titles will be the ones continuing the push to extend the winter momentum.

"The team's really coming together," Gabriel said. "We've got some guys coming back and we're starting to find our identity. Everyone's starting to work as a team and we're just trying to get everyone on the same page come February to keep the playoff run going."

MR. DECEMBER

Continuing his rise over the course of the season, Kuhn was a major catalyst for Buffalo's success over the past month and a half. For his efforts, the OJHL recognized Kuhn with South-West Conference Player of the Month honors for the month of December.

In seven December games, Kuhn registered nine goals and three assists. Three of those goals came in a December 5 comeback victory against Trenton that the Jr. Sabres captain pointed to as a trigger to the team's winning ways.

Kuhn was also more than willing to defer some of the honor to his linemates, Gabriel and Christopher Berger.

"That was a big honor, but I couldn't have done it without my teammates and my linemates specifically," he said. "It's just an award that comes from a team playing well."

The line has been a driving force for the Jr. Sabres over the past few weeks. Kuhn and Gabriel had scoring streaks of 13 and 14 games, respectively, come to an end in Wednesday's loss. Berger, the second-youngest player on the team, has points in seven of his last nine games.

"We found some chemistry and put the puck in the net," Kuhn said. "Overall, the last 13 or so games we've been rolling and it's been real fun."

"We're on the same page, and I think for us it's more about setting an example for the other guys and working hard," Gabriel added. "I think that's a big part of our success and we work together well."

STAYING HOME

Three Jr. Sabres have made college commitments for the 2015-16 season, and they'll all be staying in Western New York.

Gabriel and LaFontaine have both signed commitments to play for head coach Dave Smith and the Canisius Golden Griffins at HARBORCENTER next winter, while Kuhn will be heading north to play for the Niagara Purple Eagles.

"It's pretty cool staying home and playing for the home fans; and it's a beautiful rink to play in," Gabriel said. "I've been to a couple games and it's always a great turnout. Dave's been helping me along the way here, just making me comfortable."

A knee injury limited LaFontaine to 21 games last season, but the forward has come back with five goals and 10 assists in 25 games. He'll have a chance to continue growing around some familiar faces.

"It's good to know a few guys, so it will be much easier to come in as a freshman," Lafontaine said. "I'm really excited, can't wait for next year. Obviously, the HARBORCENTER is great, and it'll be a good couple of years for sure."

Kuhn is a Wheatfield native, so Niagara's proximity to the area where he began playing hockey was important to him.

"That was a big factor in my decision," he said. "It's nice to stay home with family and friends, and just be comfortable at home."

UPCOMING GAMES

- Saturday, January 17 @ Stouffville (7:30 p.m.)
- ***Wednesday, January 21 vs. Orangeville (7:30 p.m., HARBORCENTER)***
- ***Sunday, January 25 vs. Toronto Patriots (5:30 p.m., HARBORCENTER)***
- Monday, January 26 @ Hamilton (7:30 p.m.)
- ***Wednesday, January 28 vs. Toronto Jr. Canadiens (7:30 p.m., HARBORCENTER)***
- Saturday, January 31 @ Georgetown (7:30 p.m.)

