



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

January 27, 2015

Sabres-Flames preview

By Jordan Garretson

Associated Press

January 26, 2015

The Calgary Flames find themselves in the midst of a heated Western Conference playoff race coming out of the All-Star break. Bob Hartley is hoping better goaltending can help them end a five-year playoff drought.

They'll look to start the season's second half in strong fashion Tuesday night when they host the struggling Buffalo Sabres.

Calgary (25-19-3), a point ahead of Los Angeles for the West's second wild-card spot, won the first four on a five-game trip prior to a 6-3 loss in Anaheim on Wednesday. Goaltender Joni Ortio, who had limited opponents to five goals while starting the previous four games after being called up, gave up four goals on 11 shots.

Jonas Hiller, who hadn't started since facing 35 shots in a 6-5 loss to Florida on Jan. 9, stopped 14 of 15 shots in relief and will start Tuesday after Ortio was reassigned to Adirondack. Calgary's 2.64 goals-against average ranks third-worst among teams in playoff position, ahead of San Jose (2.67) and the Islanders (2.78).

"(Ortio) was playing really well and we were winning so no reason to change," Hiller told the team's official website. "At the end you want to have success as a team and we had that. Now I'll try to help the team to have more success. We're still in the picture. I think it's a great position we're in but from here it's not going to get easier."

All-Stars Johnny Gaudreau and Mark Giordano continued their strong play in Sunday's exhibition with Gaudreau recording two assists and Giordano posting one. Gaudreau had four assists in his last five games before the break while Giordano, who leads all defensemen with 40 points, had a goal and three assists in his last four.

The Flames appear likely to avoid a season-high fourth straight home loss as they take on the last-place Sabres (14-30-3), who have lost 15 of 16 and a franchise-worst 11 in a row. All 11 losses have come in regulation, the most consecutively since Pittsburgh lost 13 straight from Jan. 13-Feb. 12, 2004.

Calgary has no power-play goals in a season-worst five straight games, coming up empty on 14 opportunities. Buffalo has given up 13 power-play goals on 36 chances during its losing streak, however, and allows opponents to score on a league-high 26.2 percent of chances.

The Sabres went into the break on a particularly sour note on Jan. 18 at Detroit, squandering a 3-0 first-period lead in a 6-4 loss. That defeat dropped them to 0-10-1 on the road since Dec. 4.

"We gave our team an extra two days (off). It's been a real tough grind on all of us, trying to find our game and so forth. I think it did us real good," coach Ted Nolan said. "The guys were much fresher (Monday) on the ice, their spirits were more lifted. It's one of those things where it's good to get away and forget about it and start fresh."

Buffalo has been without right wing Brian Gionta (concussion) and defenseman Mike Weber (lower body) for the last 13 and two games, respectively, but both are expected to return.

Rookie Nikita Zadorov, tied for the team lead among defensemen with eight points, was suspended for failing to report to the team on time following the All-Star break.

The Flames lost 4-3 at Buffalo on Dec. 11 despite a 45-19 advantage in shots, their biggest advantage in a loss since outshooting Chicago 47-19 in a 3-2 road shootout defeat on Feb. 2, 2013. They've won six of the last seven meetings in Calgary, however.

Sabres suspend Zadorov for missing practice

By Staff Report

Associated Press

January 26, 2015

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — The Buffalo Sabres have suspended rookie defenseman Nikita Zadorov for failing to report to the team on time following the NHL all-star break.

The Sabres did not say how long the suspension would last. The penalty was handed down after Zadorov missed Monday afternoon's practice.

Buffalo general manager Tim Murray says he anticipates allowing the 6-foot-5 Zadorov to rejoin the team sometime this week during its three-game western road trip.

Zadorov had two assists in 20 minutes in the Sabres' last game, a 6-4 loss to Detroit on Jan. 18.

Also Monday, the Sabres recalled goalie Matt Hackett and forward Matt Ellis from the Rochester Americans of the AHL.

Sabres hoping to reset into winning mode

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

January 26, 2015

Drew Stafford spent his time getting to be a new dad while Ted Nolan shoveled snow in Northern Ontario.

The Buffalo Sabres had a prolonged break for the NHL All Star festivities and one of the edicts from above was to stop thinking about hockey.

The team reconvened on Monday afternoon at HarborCenter before flying to Calgary where they kick off a four-game road trip against the Flames at 9 p.m. Tuesday (MSG, Radio 550 AM).

The hope is that time away from the rink will help the Sabres set the reset button as they try again to end the franchise's longest losing streak, currently sitting at 11 games.

Stafford spent time with his wife, Hali, and son, Mason, who was born earlier this month.

"As frustrating and challenging as the hockey side of things can be, it definitely makes you realize life is good," Stafford said. "There are good things going on and you just ride on that and focus on those things you usually end up having a little bit more of a clear head, get rid of some of that negativity and it definitely helps."

Nolan went home to Northern Ontario, getting away from the NHL-centric world for a few days if not the trademark hockey weather.

"Some guys to go beaches, I go to shovel my deck off and enjoy my family and friends," Nolan said. "It was really good. You get to talk to people outside of hockey and how they view it. It makes you feel a little bit better when you talk to family and friends."

Players and coaches were pleased with the first practice back after an eight-day break. The hourlong practice was up-tempo and simple, which is ideally the way the Sabres would like to play the games for the entire game.

When last we saw the Sabres, you may recall, they were kicking some actually impressive hockey in the first period against the Red Wings in Detroit. They scored three goals in that period. They were playing solid defense while aggressive in the offensive zone. They were active and engaged and almost confident.

And then the wheels came off. Not slowly. In one big old swoop. By the end, that 3-0 first period lead turned into a 6-4 defeat and another loss.

"That first period we had, we were all over the puck," Stafford said of the Detroit game. "We were winning battles and we were dictating the pace of the play just by taking care of the puck, making sure we were eliminating our turnovers. It's as simple as that. Not giving them anything."

From the player's perspective, the problem is consistency. A great shift here. A nice period there. But nothing quite ties the performances together.

"If I had a direct answer I wouldn't be here talking to you about it," Stafford said. "It's one of those things I think you just need to start with one good period, each guy holds himself accountable as far as each shift, earning your next shift, doing something to contribute, being part of the solution every single shift. That will lead collectively to us coming together as a group."

The losing takes its toll on the collective and makes hitting that reset button all the more difficult. Brian Gionta, who returns to the lineup after missing 13 games with an upper body injury, sees a team that has been getting

too caught up in the emotional waves that happen within a game and within a season. The captain wants his room to better learn to let go of the bad and the good.

"I still believe in the team we have. I believe we can play much better," Gionta said. "The frustrating part is that we've shown it in the past. We just have to do it. ... It's that old cliché, you can't get too high and you can't get too low.

"If things are going bad, you've got to find a way out of it. You have to not take it home with you and that's not a bad thing. You've got to try and leave things behind and not let it eat you apart and try to get out of it as quick as possible. With this break hopefully we can come back with a new mindset and start fresh."

Sabres notebook: Hackett, back from knee surgery, gets call-up

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

January 26, 2015

Matt Hackett was sweating and he was thinking, the latter part being the most problematic for a goaltender.

The 24-year old returned from reconstructive knee surgery after blowing out his knee at the end of last year's season.

He returned to the net in Rochester, getting his physical and mental groove back after seven months away from the game. It took him three starts to earn his first win – a 21-save performance in a 3-2 win over Adirondack on Friday.

That earned Hackett another call-up to the Sabres and a chance to continue reconstructing his game.

"Goaltending is basically all between the ears, right?" Hackett said at HarborCenter, joining the Sabres on Monday. "My first game back I was sweating the whole time, I was so nervous. I didn't know what to expect. Even just thinking about, 'oh it could happen again. I could tear it again.' But I trust it. I trust the doctors. The mental part will come. It just takes a few games to get back into it. After the first 10 minutes you kinda forget about it and get back in the swing of things."

Hackett was recalled Monday after Michal Neuvirth suffered a lower body injury in a workout. Sabres coach Ted Nolan said Neuvirth would not be making the trip with the team which features four road games starting in Calgary Tuesday. Neuvirth's injury would be "not long long but long enough" Nolan said.

So welcome back, Matt Hackett.

This trip is familiar for Hackett, who made his Sabres debut in a 3-1 win at Edmonton last season. He appeared in eight games for the Sabres, including the second-last game of the season where he suffered the extensive knee injury.

"I was happy" with the rehabilitation Hackett said. "Seven months. They said it could be six to nine months so seven months. Did some good work, got back early. ... There's a few things I still want to work on, but there's nothing like a game. You get into a game you're back into those different situations you don't see very often. You've just got to react to them and just compete as hard as you can. It's all about competing no matter what happens."

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Nolan likes to remind the media that Nikita Zadorov is a teenager.

He certainly had a teenage moment on Monday.

The 19-year-old defenseman did not make it back to Buffalo in time for the team's first practice back from the All-Star break. As such, general manager Tim Murray announced he was suspended. In the press release, which officially called the offense "failure to report to the team on time following the NHL All-Star break," Murray did not spell out how long the suspension would be but said "we anticipate Nikita joining the team at some point during this week's western road trip."

"When you're a 19-year old kid, sometimes if you're not instructed to do things, you know how kids can be sometimes," Nolan said. "This will be a big, big learning curve for him. We'll deal with it when he gets back."

Added captain Brian Gionta, "It's part of learning to be a professional. I'm sure that message will be sent."

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Speaking of Gionta, the captain will return to the lineup against the Flames after missing 13 games with an upper body injury he suffered Dec. 21 when he was hit by Boston's Matt Bartkowski.

Gionta still won't specify what the injury was but did seem to rule out any type of concussion. "Upper body. It was not the head," he said.

Marcus Foligno is getting closer to returning after missing 13 games with a hand injury, but there still is no timetable.

Mike Weber, who missed two games with an undisclosed injury, will return.

Matt Ellis was recalled for the second time to the Sabres. He played in four games for the team before the All Star break. Serving as an alternate captain for the Amerks he has 13 points in 38 games for the AHL affiliate this season.

Flames open six-game homestand against Sabres

By David Kalan

NHL.com

January 26, 2015

SABRES (14-30-3) at FLAMES (25-19-3)

TV: MSG-B, BELL TV, SNW

Season series: Buffalo Sabres forward Matt Moulson scored two goals, including the game-winner, in their only previous game this season against the Calgary Flames, a 4-3 Sabres win on Dec. 11, 2014 at First Niagara Center.

Sabres team scope: The Sabres ended the first half of the season by losing 11 games in a row, and Buffalo is already facing new obstacles before the first puck has been dropped in the second half. Goalie Michal Neuvirth is out after sustaining a lower-body injury while working out during the All-Star break. Matt Hackett has been recalled from Rochester of the American Hockey League as a result. The Sabres will also be without young defenseman Nikita Zadorov, whom Buffalo suspended after failing to report on time following the break. "When you're a 19-year-old kid, sometimes if you're not instructed to do things, you know how kids can be sometimes," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said Monday. "This will be a big, big learning curve for him." Zadorov is expected to return to the Sabres at some point during their current road trip.

Flames team scope: Calgary is currently in Stanley Cup Playoff position with a one-point edge on the Los Angeles Kings for the West's second wild-card spot. The Flames will have the chance to pad their slim lead; they open the second half with a six-game homestand, the first three games of which all come against opponents outside of the playoff field. Calgary will have to contend with injuries, however; forward Curtis Glencross (lower-body injury) and defenseman Ladislav Smid (upper-body injury) remain out. To help fill the void, the Flames on Monday recalled forward Sven Baertschi, the 13th player chosen at the 2011 NHL Draft, forward David Wolf and defenseman Tyler Wotherspoon.

Many young players seeing ice time for rebuilding Buffalo Sabres team

By Jason Chen

Hockey's Future

January 26, 2015

The Buffalo Sabres have not won a game in the 2015 calendar year, but all eyes are on the future, as the rebuild continues. A string of injuries and poor performances by the Sabres' veterans opened up opportunities for some of the organization's top AHL players to showcase their skill in the big leagues, and although the results have been mixed, generally speaking the franchise is in good shape for the future.

General manager Tim Murray continues to add picks and prospects to the system. Most recently, in mid-December he added Jerry D'Amigo from Columbus for Luke Adam, who graduated from the Sabres' prospect list the previous season. D'Amigo has yet to make his Sabres debut.

Mikhail Grigorenko, C, 20

After playing for three different teams in each of his past two seasons, Grigorenko has been with the Rochester Americans for most of the season, allowing him to get comfortable and play a more defined role. Currently the Amerks' leading scorer with 30 points in 36 games, the talented Russian has certainly matured a lot physically. His strong performance under head coach Chadd Cassidy led to 12 appearances in the NHL, during which he collected a goal, an assist, and a minus-five rating.

The Sabres have struggled for much of the season, save for one stretch in December when the team won four straight games, and at 1.77 goals per game, are headed for the franchise's worst offensive output in history. Grigorenko has been called up in three separate occasions to provide some offense and produced mixed results, though he is still trending up. A late cut from training camp, Grigorenko should be ready to make a much more significant impact in the NHL next season.

Joel Armia, RW, 21

The biggest obstacle Armia has to overcome is the rash of injuries he has suffered since moving from Finland. His rookie season was marred by a hand injury that affected his play, and he finished seven goals in 54 games. He has already established a new career-high with 10 goals so far this season, but that total would be higher if not for injuries that have forced him to sit out 13 games. He is the Amerks' most efficient goal scorer on a per game basis.

Armia made his NHL debut just before Christmas, logging 14:47 against Detroit but did not register a shot on goal. It was a rather forgettable debut, though one game alone is not enough to gauge his long-term future. When healthy, he is usually one of the Amerks' best players and there should be little doubt about his ability to score in the NHL. He may get another call-up later this season, but his immediate goal is to stay healthy. At this juncture, he has an outside shot to claim a roster spot on the Sabres next year.

Johan Larsson, C/W, 22

The Sabres' patience with Larsson may be starting to wear thin. A proven scorer in the AHL, the Swedish utility forward cannot seem to find a role with the big club. With 68 points in his past 83 AHL games, his production in the NHL pales in comparison with six points in 41 games. In 12 games with the Sabres this season, he has recorded two points and a minus-one rating.

On his part, Larsson has expressed his frustration with the organization, unsure of what head coach Ted Nolan expects from him. After scoring points in consecutive games in late December, his ice time dipped over the next two games. He has been used primarily in a checking role despite playing a scoring role for the Amerks, which is a factor in his current identity crisis. For Larsson and the Sabres, perhaps a mutual parting of ways would be a

benefit for both sides. The Sabres have a plethora of other homegrown draft picks that they may be more interested in.

Nicolas Deslauriers, LW/RW, 23

A relentlessly physical winger, Deslauriers will always have a spot in Nolan's lineup, who preaches an aggressive style of play. Despite being a defenseman turned forward, there is still a lot to be desired on the defensive side of the puck, though he is scoring on a fairly regular basis with 12 points in 47 games playing primarily on the team's bottom two lines. After three full seasons in the AHL with the Kings organization, Deslauriers is considered a regular player for the Sabres and will soon graduate from the prospects list.

Long-term, Deslauriers does not possess the talent to become a top-six scorer, but should be able to fashion himself into a valuable third-line player who can skate, hit, fight, and score on occasion.

Tim Schaller, C/W, 24

An undrafted free agent out of Providence College who was a strong defensive player, Schaller has been a pleasant surprise on offense this season, leading the Amerks with 13 goals and later earning a six-game call-up with the Sabres. With his ability to play left wing or center, Schaller is a very versatile player. The Sabres have been quite pleased with Schaller's limited showing, and at this rate, he could carve out a future on the team, especially at the center position where the team lacks considerable depth.

To ask Schaller to be a consistent scorer while playing a solid two-way game in the NHL may be too much, but he should turn into a dependable third- or fourth-line player who can pitch in on the penalty kill. Of all the AHL call-ups made this season, Schaller has fared the best.

Phil Varone, C, 24

Like Larsson, Varone has cut his teeth in the AHL and remains one of the Amerks' top offensive players, but is having trouble sticking in the NHL. Also like Larsson, Varone is not sure what is expected from him. After scoring two goals in his second NHL game this season, Varone's ice time kept getting cut, including a season-low 6:19 against Philadelphia when his entire line was benched for much of the first period.

Size will always work against Varone, no matter how much stronger he gets or how physical he is willing to play. His long-term future with the Sabres is not clear and he may have hit his ceiling as a quality AHL forward.

Nikita Zadorov, D, 19

After sitting out the first month of the season due to internal debates about where his hockey development would best be served, the hulking defenseman has found a permanent spot on the Sabres blue line, often playing alongside Rasmus Ristolainen. Through 34 games, Zadorov has eight points, 37 penalty minutes, and a minus-11 rating while averaging 19:29 per game, which ranks fourth overall on the team.

A big bruiser who looks for the big play, Zadorov is still learning the nuances of playing defense in the NHL and learning how to pick his spots. While his ice time has crept up to nearly 20 minutes a game from the 16-18 minutes he was getting during his first month in the NHL, Zadorov still has bouts of inconsistency. Nolan has made him a healthy scratch on the rare occasion, but that Zadorov has handled himself fairly well as a 19-year-old speaks volumes about his physical maturity and potential. He and Ristolainen should form the team's future top defensive pairing.

Rasmus Ristolainen, D, 20

The Finnish defenseman has now appeared in 78 NHL games, meaning that he is no longer considered a prospect by Hockey's Future, but by no means does it mean he is ready to anchor a defense. Ristolainen's minus-23 rating

is a sore sight, but it is more a product of being matched against the opposition's top forwards and playing on a team that does not score very much. In fact, with eight points in 44 games, Ristolainen is not only tied for the scoring lead among the team's defensemen, he has also played the most games and the most even strength minutes.

There is no doubt that the former eighth overall pick is a franchise defenseman. Already in just his second NHL season he has improved quite a fair bit. Like most young players he still has inconsistent performances, but as he continues to get physically stronger and gain more experience, his game should become more consistent.

Mark Pysyk, D, 23

Pysyk is a steady defenseman who makes a good first pass out of the zone and skates quite well, but so far in his third pro season still does not have a good foothold on a roster spot with the Sabres. He appeared in 44 games with the Sabres the previous season but has spent most of the year with the Amerks, scoring 15 points in 40 games while serving in a captain's role during Drew Bagnall's absence.

Pysyk stayed with the Sabres until mid-October after suffering an injury during camp but was demoted and only briefly called up in late December. He appeared in four games, scoring a goal and averaged 18:26 in ice time.

2015 World Junior Tournament Update

The Sabres were well represented at the World Juniors, headlined by Sam Reinhart and the gold medal-winning Canadian national team. Playing on the team's top line with Max Domi (ARI) and Anthony Duclair (NYR), the line was unstoppable the entire tournament. Reinhart displayed composure and on-ice smarts, two strengths that made him Buffalo's top pick in 2014. Reinhart was tied for the scoring lead with 11 points and was named to the tournament all-star team.

JT Compher and Hudson Fasching suited up for Team USA, who had a disappointing showing and finished fifth in the tournament. Fasching played his usual power forward role and finished with three points in five games, one shy of matching his total from last year, while Compher was shockingly kept off the score sheet.

Despite his scoring prowess and devastating speed, seventh-round pick Victor Olofsson was held without a goal in seven games with the Swedish team. Olofsson's lone point, an assist, came on the power play in a 6-3 win over Finland in the quarterfinals. Goalie Jonas Johansson, a third-round pick from 2014, was slated to be Sweden's starter but missed the tournament due to injury.

Buffalo Sabres Prospect of the Month

Brendan Lemieux has been on a tear all season, scoring seven goals in October and November, but he nearly doubled that total in December with 13 goals in nine games, including a four-goal game against Sudbury. He has contributed in every way possible, scoring five times on the power play and once shorthanded, in addition to 36 penalty minutes. In just 40 games, he has already set a new career-high with 31 goals and topped the century mark in penalty minutes for the second straight year.

Sabres hopeful long break can help rejuvenate season

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 26, 2015

BUFFALO – Instead of jetting to a tropical locale during the NHL All-Star break, Sabres coach Ted Nolan went home to Northern Ontario to relax a bit and clear his mind.

“Guys go to beaches,” Nolan said Monday afternoon, “I go to snow and shovel my deck off and enjoy the family and friends.”

The Sabres, losers of a franchise-record 11 straight games in regulation entering tonight’s tilt in Calgary, sorely needed some extended time away from hockey. So with their last game before the break Jan. 18, Nolan gave the reeling Sabres two extra days off to recuperate mentally and physically.

“It’s been a real tough grind on all of us trying to find our game,” Nolan said inside HarborCenter after the team reconvened for a long practice.

The Sabres, who haven’t won since Dec. 27, looked fresher and more spirited Monday, Nolan said. He’s also feeling better. The 56-year-old spent some of his time home talking to people outside of hockey and hearing how they view his rebuilding team’s current predicament.

“It makes you feel a little bit better when you talk to family and friends on how to approach things,” Nolan said.

Brian Gionta’s approach should help the Sabres greatly. The captain, out with an upper-body injury since Boston’s Matt Bartkowski hit him high Dec. 21, will return tonight against the Flames following a 13-game absence.

The 36-year-old winger spent the break at home with his family.

“The hope is to come back kind of renewed,” Gionta said. “It actually came at the right time. We were able to have a longer than normal break. We were able to get away from things, forget about some things and hopefully refresh and get a new attitude going forward.

“I still believe in the team that we have, we can play much better, and that’s the frustrating part, that we’ve shown it in the past.”

Gionta, of course, was referring to Sabres’ torrid 10-3 run in November and December, their hottest stretch in years. But the Sabres have followed that up by going 1-14-1. They went 1-12 without Gionta.

“He’s our captain for a reason,” Sabres winger Drew Stafford said about Gionta. “It’s one of those things where you take a veteran guy like that out of the lineup, solid contributor, two-way player. It’s just one less guy you got to worry about out there as far as him pulling his weight.”

Gionta still wouldn’t reveal the injury. Although he landed on his face, it wasn’t a head injury, he said.

“I still got to play against the guys,” he said smiling.

The Sabres held Gionta out until now so he had extra time to recover.

“It was a smart move,” Gionta said. “It was the right play to do that even it was tough to do. As a competitor, you want to be out there as quick as possible. But the week did make a big difference.”

Gionta's presence allowed Nolan to reunite one of the team's best trios from earlier this season. He immediately put the veteran back on the right wing beside center Torrey Mitchell and Brian Flynn.

"You take a second line from anybody in this league, it's a big loss, and especially for us," Nolan said.

With some big losses piling up – the Sabres have been outscored an astounding 49-16 during this epic skid – Stafford's grateful for some new perspective. His wife, Hali, recently gave birth to a boy, Mason.

"As frustrating, as challenging as the hockey side of things can be, it definitely makes you realize life is good, there's a lot of good things going on," Stafford said. "So (when) you just ride on that and focus on those things, you usually end up having a little bit more of a clear head and you can get rid of some of that negativity."

Stafford spent the break at home, which "was good and bad."

"It was mainly just making sure I could do everything I could for the wife since I'm kind of useless," he said. "At the same time, it's pretty nice coming home and seeing the little guy and seeing him start to learn a few new things and look around a little bit more."

Nikita Zadorov gets stuck in Dominican Republic, suspended by Sabres

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 26, 2015

BUFFALO – When the Sabres began their first post-NHL All-Star break practice Monday afternoon, Nikita Zadorov was absent.

Where was the 19-year-old defenseman? Apparently, stuck in the Dominican Republic.

The Sabres announced at 2:41 p.m. Monday they had suspended Zadorov after he failed to report back to the team on time following the break.

“What can you do?” coach Ted Nolan said after the Sabres practiced without Zadorov inside HarborCenter. “The travel conditions sometimes get in the way. That’s how it is.”

In a statement, general manager Tim Murray said Zadorov would join the team in Calgary, where the Sabres continue their five-game road trip tonight. Nolan wasn’t sure about the length of the suspension.

“We’ll deal with it when he gets back,” Nolan said.

Zadorov’s flight from the Dominican Republic was oversold by six people, Rolland Hedges, Zadorov’s agent, told the Times Herald.

“He’s upset,” said Hedges, who said “everything” was tried to get him back on time.

Zadorov’s flying back to Buffalo with his girlfriend. He will then join the team in Calgary, Hedges said.

Hedges is hopeful the suspension will be lifted when Zadorov meets the team.

Zadorov’s maturity has been a big issue throughout the season. Nolan sat him much of October before he earned a spot. The Russian was also scratched twice earlier this month.

“When you’re a 19-year-old kid, sometimes if you’re not instructed to do things, you know how kids can be sometimes,” Nolan said. “But this will be a big, big learning curve for him. But we’ll deal with it when he gets back.”

In other news, the Sabres recalled goalie Matt Hackett from Rochester on Monday because Michal Neuvirth suffered a lower-body injury working out during the break.

“Little bit banged up yesterday on the skate, so he won’t be making the trip with us,” Nolan said about Neuvirth.

Neuvirth will be sidelined “not long, long, but long enough,” Nolan said. The injury isn’t related to his hip ailment from last season.

Hackett tore up his right knee April 12 in Boston. The 24-year-old rehabbed with the Sabres all season before they sent him to the AHL late last month for some game action. He’s 1-2 with a 3.10 goals-against average and .886 save percentage in three games.

“They said it could be six to nine months,” said Hackett, who believes he’s close to 100 percent. “So seven months, I thought I did some good work and got back early. I’m happy with where my knee’s at right now.”

The Sabres also summoned center Matt Ellis from Rochester before they left. Nolan said the 33-year-old could stay for a while.

"He'll add that professional leadership, which we need," Nolan said.

Ellis played four games prior to the break.

Nolan also said defenseman Mike Weber (undisclosed) will play tonight. Center Marcus Foligno (hand) was examined Monday and is "getting closer."

Sabres get back to work

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 26, 2015

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Sabres were back at HARBORCENTER for their first time on the ice as a team since last Sunday's game in Detroit.

Nikita Zadorov, Michal Neuvirth and Marcus Foligno were all missing for practice.

Zadorov has been suspended by Tim Murray for not getting back for practice. Ted Nolan said it's just part of the learning curve, "Yes it is, when you're a 19 year old kid sometimes if you're not instructed to do things, you know how kids can be sometimes. This will be a big, big learning curve for him, but we'll deal with him when he gets back."

Nolan said Brian Gionta is ready to play as is Mike Weber. Michal Neuvirth suffered a lower body injury while working out with some of his teammates over the weekend and didn't go on the trip. Matt Hackett was called up.

Hackett's missed most of the season after knee surgery, but has gotten three games in with the Amerks, going 1-2-0 with a 3.10 goals against and .886 save percentage. Hackett had been working out in Buffalo for the first three months and likes where his knee is at, "It's been good and exciting. The first game I was pretty nervous, I didn't know what to expect, but it felt good."

Matt Ellis was also recalled for the trip and maybe more.

The Sabres were sliding fast before the break. Buffalo's last game was Sunday while some other teams played through Wednesday. Nolan felt his team needed the extra time, "We gave our team an extra two days, it's been a tough grind on all of us trying to find our game, so I think it did them a world of good. The guys looked fresher on the ice and their spirits were more lifted, so it was good to get away and start fresh."

Nolan is excited that his captain Brian Gionta is ready to play. He'll be back on wing with Torrey Mitchell and Brian Flynn. Nolan said, "You take a second line away from anybody in this league and it's a big loss, especially for us to lose two and then Flynn's by himself, but we have them back and that's great."

Gionta got cartwheeled in the Boston game and hasn't played since. He wouldn't say what the injury was, but did confirm it was not a head injury. Gionta practiced for the week leading up to the break and almost played, he said, "I feel great, it was the smart move, it was the right play to do that, but it was tough to do. As a competitor you want to be out there as soon as possible, but the week made a big difference."

The team was livelier at practice and Gionta said, "That's the hope, to come back kind of renewed. It actually came at a good time. We had a longer than normal break and get away from things and forget about some things, refresh and get a new attitude going." Gionta added that he hasn't given up, "I still believe in the team we have and I think we can play much better which is the frustrating part is we've shown it in the past and we just have to do it."

This is actually a continuation of a five game road trip that started in Detroit last Sunday. Buffalo visits Calgary on Tuesday.

Sabres regroup after long break

By Steve Vesey

WIVB

January 26, 2015

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - Coming off their first team practice in more than a week today, the Buffalo Sabres spoke like a team that needed the break.

The Sabres went into the All-Star break with an eleven-game losing streak, and just one win in the last 16 games.

"A lot of guys were able to get out of town and clear their heads a little bit. That was needed for us," said forward Drew Stafford. "It was very important for us, not necessarily physically, but mentally to be able to recharge the batteries, clear the head, and come back with somewhat of a clean slate."

The team also gets captain Brian Gionta back in the lineup this week, after missing a big chunk of time with an upper body injury.

"I still believe in the team that we have, that we can play much better. That's the frustrating part, that we've shown it in the past. We just have to do it," said Gionta.

The Sabres hit the road after practice, with a matchup at Calgary on tap for Tuesday night.

Hackett & Ellis recalled from Amerks

By Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

January 26, 2015

The Buffalo Sabres today announced the team has recalled goaltender **Matt Hackett** and forward **Matt Ellis** from the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League (AHL).

Both players were on the ice at HARBORCENTER for Monday's practice, and will travel with the team for a four-game road trip that begins Tuesday in Calgary (9 p.m. ET, MSG/Bell; WGR 550).

Hackett's recall was necessitated by an injury to goaltender **Michal Neuvirth**.

"Michal sustained a lower-body injury while working out during the All-Star break and will miss some time," said Sabres General Manager Tim Murray. "He will not join the team for our trip out west this week."

Hackett (6'2", 171 lbs., 3/7/90), who began the season on injured reserve with the Sabres, returns to Buffalo after joining the Americans before the AHL All-Star break in January for his first three starts of the season, going 1-2-0 with a 3.10 GAA and .886 save%. Hackett earned his first win of the season with a 21-save performance in a 3-2 victory over Adirondack on Friday.

The London, Ontario native appeared in eight games for the Sabres during the 2013-14 season, including a 35-save outing in his Sabres debut, a 3-1 win at Edmonton. Hackett has appeared in 21 NHL games in parts of three seasons with the Sabres and Minnesota Wild, compiling a 4-13-0-1 record, .912 save% and 2.82 GAA.

Hackett was drafted by Minnesota in the third round (77th overall) of the 2009 NHL Entry Draft and acquired by the Sabres on April 3, 2013.

Ellis (6'0", 208 lbs., 8/31/81) will join the Sabres for his second recall of the 2014-15 season after appearing in four NHL games leading up to the All-Star break. In parts of nine NHL seasons with the Sabres, Los Angeles Kings and Detroit Red Wings, Ellis has appeared in 321 games and recorded 47 points (20+27).

Serving as an alternate captain for the Amerks this season, Ellis has seven goals and six assists in 38 games played.

MONDAY'S PRACTICE LINES

26 Matt Moulson – 63 Tyler Ennis (Zemgus Girgensons did not practice)

65 Brian Flynn – 17 Torrey Mitchell – 12 Brian Gionta

80 Chris Stewart – 19 Cody Hodgson – 21 Drew Stafford

44 Nicolas Deslauriers – 37 Matt Ellis – 36 Patrick Kaleta

DEFENSEMEN ON ICE

4 Josh Gorges, 6 Mike Weber, 24 Tyson Strachan, 57 Tyler Myers,

41 Andrej Meszaros, 55 Rasmus Ristolainen, 61 Andre Benoit

GOALIES

1 Jhonas Enroth

31 Matt Hackett

Sabres prospects report

By Kris Baker

Sabres.com

January 26, 2015

As teams prepare for the home stretch of the 2014-15 season, it's time to gauge the progress of the Buffalo Sabres goaltending prospects developing at home and abroad.

Cal Petersen (2013, fifth round) turned in a masterful 37-save performance Friday as Notre Dame gave up a late goal to take a 3-2 loss at Northeastern. The goal, which came off a two-on-one rush with 1:30 remaining in regulation, did nothing to sour an excellent 60-minute effort from the freshman goaltender. The following night, Petersen stopped 22 of 26 shots as the Fighting Irish were swept by the Huskies 4-2.

Petersen, who has taken control of Notre Dame's goaltending duties with nods in eight of their last nine games, has amassed a 6-10-2 record with a 2.68 GAA, .904 save% and two shutouts in his first 17 collegiate starts.

Meanwhile in Sweden, the duo of **Jonas Johansson** (2014, third round) and **Linus Ullmark** (2012, sixth round) logged solid performances with one emerging clear from the injury bug and the other remaining nagged.

Johansson continued working with Brynas IF J20, posting back-to-back 34-save outings in a 7-4 win over Timra IK J20 and a 4-0 loss to Malmo Redhawks IF. On Sunday, Johansson allowed two goals in the first five minutes, but again finished with 34 saves while stopping all three shootout attempts in a 5-4 victory over Frolunda HC J20. Johansson has gone 3-1 with a 3.12 GAA and .912 save% in four starts since returning from a month-long injury that forced him to miss the 2015 IIHF World Junior Championship.

The reigning Honken Trophy winner as the Swedish Hockey League's Best Goaltender, Ullmark returned to action Thursday for the first time since Jan. 3, stopping 30 of 32 shots as MODO earned a 3-2 overtime win over Djurgarden IF. The luster from the sparkling performance quickly wore off as Ullmark, who had missed the previous five games with a groin injury, did not make the weekend trip to Jonkoping after suffering a setback in Friday's practice. Ullmark's status should be available early in the week as MODO prepares for Wednesday's visit to Frolunda HC.

OHL

After notching a pair of helpers in Thursday's 4-3 victory over Barrie, **Justin Bailey** (2013, second round) erupted for two goals and two assists Friday to earn the game's first star as Sault Ste. Marie claimed a 7-5 triumph at Mississauga. Bailey was blanked in Sunday's win at Guelph, leaving him with 29 goals and 54 points entering the final week of January. The Greyhounds have won all eight games since acquiring Bailey from Kitchener.

Jean Dupuy posted a three-point week as Sault Ste. Marie earned three straight road victories. The hard-nosed forward was held off the scoresheet in Thursday's win at Barrie, but rung up an empty-net goal and an assist on Friday to help the Greyhounds past the Steelheads. On Sunday, Dupuy scored the game-tying goal midway through the third period as the Hounds earned a 6-5 shootout victory at Guelph. Dupuy's marker, his 11th of the year, elevates his career-high point total to 32 in 38 games.

Eric Cornel (2014, second round) scored his 10th goal of the year Thursday as Peterborough was defeated by Oshawa 5-2. The redirection marker was Cornel's first in six games and second in his last 17 outings. Cornel kept at it on Sunday, assisting on the game-winner with 5:34 left in regulation as the Petes snapped a four-game skid with a 3-2 victory over Belleville. Cornel has points in three straight games for a total of 33 through 42 outings.

Nicholas Baptiste (2013, third round) assisted on a Connor McDavid marker Friday as Erie earned a 3-2 come-from-behind win at Guelph. The speedy winger amped it up on Sunday, collecting a goal and two assists as the

Otters defeated Owen Sound 7-3. Baptiste has posted seven multi-point efforts in his first 20 games with Erie, boosting his season totals to 16 goals and 34 points.

Brendan Lemieux (2014, second round) added an empty-net goal to his stack last week as Barrie won once in three tries. After ripping off 15 goals in an 11-game stretch, Lemieux has scored just twice in his next eight contests. Through 40 games, Lemieux remains as league leaders with 31 goals (5th), 18 PP goals (1st) and 106 PIM (2nd).

WHL

Sam Reinhart (2014, first round) didn't light the lamp last week, but he did rack up six assists to help the Kootenay ICE to four consecutive victories. Reinhart has produced 10 goals and 29 assists in 24 games this season, including points in eight straight games. The ICE have 23 games remaining on the regular season schedule, and currently sit fourth in the Central Division with a record of 26-22-0-1 (53 pts.)

Brycen Martin (2014, third round) notched one assist Sunday as Saskatoon extended their winning streak to five with a 3-0 shutout of Prince Albert. The night before, Martin earned the first fighting major of his junior career as the Blades skated to a 6-1 victory over Moose Jaw. In the game's 34th minute, Martin stepped up and dropped the gloves with Warriors' tough customer Jaimen Yakubowski. A week ago, Yakubowski left his feet for a big hit on Reinhart in a game versus Kootenay.

NCAA

Providence defenseman **Anthony Florentino** (2013, fifth round) finished with a plus-two rating Friday in a 7-3 win at Massachusetts-Lowell, and then scored off a power play one-timer on Saturday as the Friars earned the conference sweep with a 4-1 victory. The weekend output gives the sophomore defender two goals, nine points and a team-best plus-15 rating through 24 games.

Providence defenseman **Mark Adams** (2009, fifth round) finished with one shot on goal and a minus-one rating in the home-and-home set with Massachusetts-Lowell. The fifth-year senior returned to action after missing the previous seven games due to injury.

Judd Peterson (2012, seventh round) struck for his third goal of the season Saturday as St. Cloud State coughed up a two-goal lead in the third-period to take a 3-2 loss to Western Michigan. With 1:44 remaining in the opening frame, Peterson took a pass from the boards and got a quick shot off from the left face-off circle to give the Huskies a 1-0 lead at the first intermission. The freshman forward, who failed to register in the Huskies' 7-0 thrashing of the Broncos on Friday, has three goals and five points in 24 collegiate games.

Freshman center **Connor Hurley** (2013, second round) was unable to contribute as Notre Dame dropped a pair of key conference decisions at Northeastern. Hurley has now been blanked in five straight games, leaving him with 11 points (3+8) through 25 games.

Hudson Fasching contributed two shots on goal Friday as No. 17 Minnesota was outgunned by No. 1 Minnesota State 4-2 at the North Star College Cup. Fasching led all Gophers forwards with four shots on goal as Minnesota closed the weekend with a 2-1 loss to Minnesota-Duluth in Saturday's third place game. After scoring five goals in his first eight games, Fasching has produced just one in his next 13.

Christian Isackson (2010, seventh round) resumed his role as a fourth-line center for the Gophers in the weekend losses to Minnesota State and Minnesota-Duluth. In 22 games, Isackson has three points (1+2) and a plus-two rating.

J.T. Compher (2013, second round) notched a power play assist Friday as No. 16 Michigan bested Wisconsin 7-4. The sophomore center had four shots on goal Saturday as the Wolverines pasted the Badgers 6-0. Compher, who began the season with a 10-game goal drought, has collected 13 points (4+9) at the 20-game mark.

Wisconsin senior winger **Brad Navin** (2011, seventh round) closed the weekend with three shots on goal and a minus-three rating as the Badgers were swept by Michigan. Through 20 games, the senior co-captain has one goal and three helpers.

Max Willman logged a cumulative minus-three rating as Brown dropped a pair of ECAC road battles at Clarkson and St. Lawrence. The 19-year-old freshman has two points (1+1) this season for a struggling Bears squad that has won just four of their 18 games.

Sean Malone remained out of the lineup with an undisclosed injury as Harvard lost 3-2 at Cornell before trouncing Colgate 6-1 the following night. Malone has played in just three of the Crimson's 18 games this season, producing two goals, five points and 10 shots on goal.

USHL

Christopher Brown (2014, sixth round) produced one assist over the weekend as Green Bay suffered a pair of home losses to Sioux City. Brown remains the Gamblers' leader with 12 goals, but has yet to score in eight games of 2015. The Gamblers have lost all eight of those contests.

Sweden

Gustav Possler (2013, fifth round) recorded two assists including one on the game-winner in MODO's Thursday victory over Djurgarden IF, and was then blanked in 15:54 of work as MODO dropped a 1-0 overtime decision at HV 71 on Saturday. Possler has appeared in 37 games, producing nine goals, 19 points and 92 shots on goal.

Victor Olofsson (2014, seventh round) was dispatched to MODO's J20 squad Saturday, scoring a goal and an assist in a 5-1 win over Orebro HK J20. On Sunday, Olofsson recorded three shots on goal in a 3-0 loss to Farjestads BK J20. Olofsson entered the junior ranks after scoring 10 goals in 35 games for MODO's SHL entry.

Bird is the word

By Joe Ray

Sabres.com

January 26, 2015

Winning 25 games in a row is a sensational feat.

Regardless of the sport or the level of play, to keep a team focused, determined, and motivated enough to win every game over a period of 63 days is a testament to strong coaching and a tightly-knit group of players. That is exactly what the 18U Buffalo Jr. Sabres have created this season, and head coach Jamie Bird has been the reason behind much of that success.

"Once we got past 17 or 18 games, we realized that we have to address the elephant in the room," Bird said. "We addressed it as coaches, and just told the guys that we will think of the streak when the season is over. Then you can look back on it. But now there's no reason we have to sit on 17 games – why not go for 18?"

The driving force that began the 25-game winning streak (from Oct.18-Dec. 27) – the nation's longest this season at the 18U level – was opening up the team's new home at HARBORCENTER with seven consecutive wins on First Niagara Rink.

After sweeping a two-game weekend series with the Boston Generals in mid-October, the Jr. Sabres entered the HARBORCENTER Cup 18U tournament as the host team. Winning five straight games to take home the championship trophy was no small feat. Buffalo posted shutouts in three straight games to start the tournament, one of which was a 3-0 blanking of a Chicago Mission team that was ranked top five nationally entering the event.

The Jr. Sabres defeated the Buffalo Saints in a hard-fought 4-3 win in the semifinals before facing off with a strong Victory Honda (Michigan) club in the championship game. An early 2-0 lead for Buffalo kept them ahead on the way to capping a 4-2 championship victory.

Throughout the entire tournament, Bird said his team felt a quiet confidence hosting the tournament in their new home rink. The win streak reached nine games at the end of the HARBORCENTER Cup, and the Jr. Sabres never looked back.

"Once we moved in there and we had that tournament the first weekend, it was a whole different attitude and way that we looked at ourselves that weekend," Bird said. "We played some really good teams and we beat them. It just took us to a whole separate level."

Following the HARBORCENTER Cup win, the Jr. Sabres moved on to the New York State sectional tournament, winning all six of their contests at the Northtown Center in Amherst. In those six games, the Jr. Sabres outscored their opponents 29-6 and dominated the best local competition to earn the top seed in the state tournament.

The final 10 games of the winning streak saw Buffalo defeat a number of top-ranked teams at two showcase tournaments in Michigan, in addition to victories over teams from across the northeastern United States.

The key to the team's success came down to how the team was constructed in the preseason. Bird lauds the talents of every player on his team, noting that the ability to run all four lines in any situation was a huge asset for his team.

"The four-line philosophy is advantageous because you're playing against a lot of teams that don't have that luxury," Bird said. "Those 25 games [in the winning streak], I think half of them we just pulverized teams in the third period. The players saw how that was contributing to our success."

"It was evidence after a while that the players realized the coaches knew what we were doing; that we were beating teams up in the third period and they had nothing. It's hard to escape that kind of proof when it's right in front of your eyes."

The team-wide success has created recognition for the players from outside programs. Bird says at least six players have received offers for next season, and defenseman Michael Bevilacqua was promoted to Buffalo Jr. Sabres Junior 'A' (OJHL) team at the start of January.

Creating a team where every player has a defined role and a chance to succeed is no small feat. In order to accomplish this, Bird brought in Ric Seiling and Geoff Peters as assistant coaches.

Seiling was drafted by the Buffalo Sabres in 1977 and played for the team for nine seasons. As a savvy, two-way forward playing under legendary coaches like Scotty Bowman and Roger Neilson, Seiling brought the ability to train players to the point where they can play in any game situation.

"I've learned one thing, that there is no right way. There's only the way that works with your style," Seiling said reflecting on his time in the NHL. "What we have to do with these kids is assess where their strengths and weaknesses are, build their weaknesses up, and play to their strengths."

Peters joined the coaching staff with the 18U Jr. Sabres after a lengthy career in the American Hockey League. A veteran of 351 AHL games, and a member of the Rochester Americans from 2003 to 2005, Peters brings a little more edge to the table and has the ability to light a fire in his players' bellies.

"For me, I like to think that I'm the energy guy," he said. "I like to get the kids fired up and just get them going. To me, it's about hard work and preparation and dedication and the will to win."

At the center of the coaching equation is Bird, who joined the Jr. Sabres organization with nearly a decade of experience coaching players at the midget minor (16U) and major (18U) levels with the Rochester Monarchs. As a player, Bird had a five-year professional career which included stints in the AHL, ECHL, United Hockey League and Central Hockey League

Prior to his professional years, Bird had the chance to play under a number of influential coaches in four years in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League. With the Hull Olympiques, Bird played for head coach Bob Mongrain, who was a member of the Rochester Americans and Buffalo Sabres from 1979 to 1985. One of Mongrain's assistants was Claude Julien, current head coach of the Boston Bruins, and the NHL's Coach of the Year in 2009.

Bird was a mobile, offensive defenseman in his playing days, and that continues to be one of his main philosophies while teaching youngsters from behind the bench.

"We have a really active defense, and I think that's just a holdover from when I was playing," Bird said. "I think over the years I've recognized that I favor those kinds of defensemen. The way the game's played today, you really have to have good skating defensemen."

Bird has drawn high praise from his assistant coaches for his work with the team throughout the season.

"Jamie's been coaching at a high level, and he's a very knowledgeable hockey guy," Peters said. "You can tell how much he loves the game of hockey. He's very good at the X's and O's; he can adjust what we do in-game. He reads the game very well."

The Jr. Sabres have five games left on their schedule before entering postseason play, beginning with the Tier 1 Elite Hockey League playoffs in February. Currently eighth in the Tier 1 EHL standings (with a record of 16-10-2), the Jr. Sabres have defeated four of the seven teams slotted ahead of them in regular season play this season.

On a national level, Buffalo's overall record of 37-13-0 has them ranked 15th overall by MyHockeyRankings.com, positioned behind teams like the St. Louis Blues and Michigan's Belle Tire.

Following the T1 EHL playoffs, the Jr. Sabres will head into the New York State Tier 1 18U championships from March 6-8 at the Northtown Center. How the team fares at that tournament will determine whether they'll advance to the national championship, which also takes place at the Northtown Center from March 26-30.

"If they have an opportunity to walk away with a championship, whether that's a national championship or a league championship, there's an opportunity there and that stays with you forever," Peters said.

This year has been a success by any measure for Bird and the Jr. Sabres. Capping off the season with another long win streak in the state and national tournaments would be the perfect ending.

"State championship tournaments are an objective right from the start, and the ultimate goal is to win that and go to Nationals," Bird said. "We've played against a lot of the teams that would be at nationals, so it's just making sure that we do what we're supposed to do when it matters."