



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Nash has goal, assist in Rangers' 3-1 win over Sabres

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

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BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — It took 14 seconds into his first NHL game for Mackenzie Skapski to give up his first career goal. The New York Rangers' 20-year-old goalie proved to be perfect over the rest of his debut.

After being beaten by Matt Moulson on the first shot, Skapski stopped the final 24 he faced in a 3-1 win over the Buffalo Sabres on Friday night. Rick Nash had a goal and assist, while Carl Hagelin and Mats Zuccarello also scored for New York.

"Super pumped," Skapski said, noting the victory came on his father's birthday. "I couldn't have scripted it better."

Even the opening minute?

"I think I rebounded well from that," Skapski said. "It's tough to really sit back right now and acknowledge I got my first NHL win, so hopefully there's many more."

Coach Alain Vigneault was pleased how Skapski and the Rangers responded to the opening goal, when Moulson was left untouched in front to redirect Torrey Mitchell's centering pass.

"It wasn't the way we wanted to start, but sometimes stuff happens on the ice," Vigneault said. "But after that, I thought we played a pretty solid game."

The Rangers improved to 8-1-2 in their past 11, defeated Buffalo for the sixth straight time, and extended their road winning streak to a season-best five straight.

Buffalo, coming off a 3-2 shootout win at Philadelphia on Thursday, dropped to 1-4-1 in its past six.

The Sabres didn't muster many chances after the opening minute in a game they were outshot 31-12 through two periods and 43-25 overall. Buffalo, which has produced a league-low 102 goals has failed to score three or more in regulation in 19 of its past 23 games.

"Getting 12 shots in the first two periods on a young kid isn't good enough," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said. "We've got to challenge him. We've got to make him work for it. We started to do a little bit of it in the third, but it was just too late."

Buffalo defenseman Mike Weber did not return after sustaining an upper-body injury in the first period.

Hagelin tied the score 5:51 in when he was sent in alone by J.T. Miller's long flip pass from deep in the Rangers' zone. Hagelin skated in alone and sneaked a shot through Michal Neuvirth's legs. Offsides wasn't called despite a replay showing Hagelin crossing Buffalo's blue line a step ahead of the puck.

There was no debating the Rangers' two second-period goals.

Nash scored his 37th of the season by one-timing Derick Brassard's hard cross-ice pass from the left wing during a 3-on-2 break 37 seconds into the period.

Nash then set up Zuccarello's goal some 7 minutes later. Streaking up the right wing, Nash blew past defender Andre Benoit and cut across the front of the net while drawing Neuvirth with him. Nash's shot hit the post and the puck caromed back into the slot where Zuccarello snapped it in the unguarded net.

Skapski was New York's sixth-round draft pick, and had gone 12-7-3 at AHL Hartford before being called up on Feb. 4.

His best save came during a Sabres power play early in the third period when Chris Stewart's shot from the high slot changed direction twice and trickled past the goalie. Skapski, however, reached back to glove the puck before it could cross the goal line.

"I thought he stayed with his strengths and just stayed relaxed," defenseman Ryan McDonagh said of Skapski. "I'm just glad that he could be a big part of our two points tonight."

NOTES: Sabres LW Evander Kane attended his first game in Buffalo since being acquired in a trade with Winnipeg last week. Kane is recovering from season-ending shoulder surgery he had shortly before the trade. ... Vigneault got his 502nd career win to move into 18th place on the NHL list, one ahead of Pat Quinn. ... Sabres D Josh Gorges is expected to miss the remainder of the season after a second evaluation of a lower-body injury confirmed the initial diagnosis last week. ... The game was originally scheduled for Nov. 21 but postponed due to a snowstorm that paralyzed much of the Buffalo region.

Kane seeks chance for a fresh start with Buffalo Sabres

By John Wawrow
Associated Press
February 21, 2015

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Forward Evander Kane had a difficult time adjusting to playing in what he called "a fishbowl" of a hockey-mad city like Winnipeg, and felt a change of scenery was long overdue.

The fourth player selected in the 2009 draft will get the opportunity to enjoy a "fresh start" — a phrase Kane repeated three times during his introductory news conference Saturday — in Buffalo as a key piece on a Sabres team rebuilding from scratch.

"Sometimes things just don't work out," Kane said, of the five-plus seasons he spent with the Jets franchise, which relocated from Atlanta to Winnipeg in 2011. "I'm looking forward to moving on to bigger and better things here in Buffalo."

For now, Kane will have to wait until next season. With his left arm in a sling, the 23-year-old is recovering from season-ending shoulder surgery earlier this month.

Though the operation was more complex than initially anticipated, Kane expects to be ready for the start of training camp in September.

Kane was the central figure for Buffalo in a seven-player trade struck on Feb. 11. The Sabres also acquired defenseman Zach Bogosian and prospect goalie Jason Kasdorf. In exchange, they sent defenseman Tyler Myers, forward Drew Stafford, two prospects and their third of three first-round draft picks to the Jets.

Kane is a three-time 19-goal-scorer, and enjoyed his best season in 2011-12, when he had 30 goals and 27 assists. At 6-foot-3 and 225 pounds, he also provides a physical presence.

The trade was completed a little over a week after Kane and the Jets had the latest in a series of falling outs.

Kane, who openly questioned his tenure in Winnipeg last summer, was a healthy scratch for a game at Vancouver against his hometown Canucks on Feb. 3. A few days later, Kane elected to have surgery on a shoulder that had been bothering him for much of the season — and had popped out in a game against Philadelphia a week earlier.

Without going into detail, Kane disputed a report that he was benched because he showed up to a team meeting wearing a tracksuit. He did confirm he had asked to be traded, and added he had difficulty adjusting to Winnipeg after opening his career in Atlanta.

"Winnipeg is a very small town, but it's a big hockey market. It's a bit tougher than Vancouver or Toronto, where you can get away a little bit," Kane said. "Being a Winnipeg Jet was something that everybody knew who you were. They always wanted to talk to you, which is great."

And yet, he added: "Negative things can take a toll a little bit."

The Sabres are popular in Buffalo, but can also be overshadowed by the Bills, especially during the NFL season.

Kane also made off-the-ice headlines. After signing a six-year, \$31.5 million contract in 2012, Kane posted a picture on his Twitter account of himself holding a large wad of money to his ear as if it were a phone. Last year, Kane posted a picture of himself doing a pushup with stacks of money on his back.

"Let's just put it this way, I think I'm definitely excited to have a fresh start," Kane said.

The Sabres envision Kane playing a first-line role alongside Sam Reinhart, the No. 2 pick in last year's draft, and whomever they select in the draft in June. Already owning the NHL's worst record, the Sabres (17-38-4) would secure one of the first two draft picks — and the chance to select highly-regarded forward prospects Connor McDavid or Jack Eichel — if they finish last.

"He's going to be a big part of any success we have here, I believe." Sabres general manager Tim Murray said, referring to Kane, after making the trade.

Kane sees potential in the Sabres' rebuilding plan. After spending much of this season in a secondary role in Winnipeg, Kane is looking forward to the possibility of enjoying an expanded role.

"I think they're headed in the right direction," Kane said. "They have a lot of good young prospects. And obviously, getting a top pick will only speed that up."

Predators-Sabres preview

Associated Press

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The Nashville Predators have more points than anyone in the NHL largely due to their consistency, as they haven't lost more than two straight games all season.

They couldn't ask for a better opponent to face as they try to avoid their first three-game skid.

The Predators look to get back on track and avoid coming up empty on their road trip Sunday night against the league-worst Buffalo Sabres.

Nashville (39-13-7) fell behind 3-0 early in a 5-2 loss to the New York Islanders on Thursday to kick off the trip, ending its six-game winning streak, then had to settle for one point Saturday in a 3-2 shootout loss at Philadelphia.

"We were slow getting off the mark," said coach Peter Laviolette, who returned to face the team he coached for parts of five seasons. "I thought the second half of the game, we showed up and looked pretty good."

Cody Franson and Mike Santorelli made their Predators debuts after being acquired from Toronto on Feb. 15. Neither recorded a point.

Mike Fisher has four assists in five games and set up Nashville's game-tying goal Saturday, but wasn't pleased as he watched his team get outshot 13-3 in the first period. The Predators have been outshot 116-91 over the past three games.

"We've got to be better," Fisher told the team's official website. "You go through some ups and downs, and I feel like we haven't been on our game the last little bit. We've got to turn it around and learn from this."

"Sometimes you've got to focus on (parts of the game) in order to be successful and get back to them."

Pekka Rinne started his sixth consecutive game Saturday and will likely enjoy a night off Sunday in favor of Carter Hutton. Hutton went 4-1-2 despite a 2.81 goals-against average in seven starts when Rinne was out with a sprained knee.

One of his best starts this season was the only one he's made since Rinne returned. Hutton stopped 34 shots Feb. 8 in a 3-2 shootout win at Florida.

He might not be tested nearly that much against the Sabres' anemic attack.

Buffalo (17-38-4) was held to one goal for the fourth time in five games in Friday's 3-1 loss to the Rangers, and continues to threaten historic levels of futility. Averaging 1.73 goals, the Sabres are on pace to be the lowest-scoring team since the advent of the Original Six in 1942.

"In hockey, you need to make sure you make good decisions with the puck," coach Ted Nolan said before Friday's defeat. "When to go, when not to go, guys staying high - all those things that good teams do. But if you don't work, those things ain't going to happen. So we're working."

They've at least been better defensively this month. Buffalo yielded an average of 3.56 goals in its first 50 games, but it's surrendered just 2.22 per contest in nine this month.

With a lack of offensive production, though, Michal Neuvirth has lost four of his five starts despite a .938 save percentage since returning from a lower-body injury. Backup Anders Lindback has yet to play since he was

acquired from Dallas on Feb. 11, but perhaps that will change against the team with which he spent his first two NHL seasons.

Hutton looked plenty convincing against the Sabres in getting the start both times in last season's series, stopping 56 shots as Nashville outscored Buffalo 10-2 in a pair of easy wins.

Shea Weber had three goals and an assist in those contests.

Back to the drudgery of losing

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 20, 2015

Because the present is rarely pretty in Sabreland – Friday night's 3-1 loss to the New York Rangers being a perfect example – Buffalo fans are eager to look toward better days. A huge part of the future will be front and center Saturday.

The Sabres will introduce Evander Kane at a noon news conference in First Niagara Center. The team's top left wing and highest-paid player is in Buffalo for the first time since being acquired from Winnipeg on Feb. 11.

"I definitely felt a very warm welcome from everybody," Kane said during a second-intermission interview on WGR-AM 550. "From talking to management and a lot of the players, they're looking to turn the page and I'm looking forward to it. I think it's a great opportunity for me to come in and be part of this turnaround.

"I'm going to work as hard as I can to make this a better team."

Kane is out until next season after having surgery to repair a torn labrum in his shoulder this month. He watched the loss to the Rangers, giving him an up-close look at the disparity between Buffalo and a Stanley Cup contender.

The Rangers outclassed the Sabres from the 15-second mark to the final buzzer in front of 19,070 fans, including a large contingent of vocal Blueshirts backers. New York outshot the Sabres, 43-25, including 16-6 in the opening period and 15-6 during the second.

"We played maybe 15 minutes out of the 60, to be honest with you," Sabres center Torrey Mitchell said. "They were fast, they were jumping on us, and we didn't have a response."

New York improved to 5-0-1 in the last six games and 24-6-2 in the last 32. Buffalo fell to 17-38-4 this season.

New York pulled away with a two-goal second period. It started right away.

Wide-open Rick Nash took a cross-ice pass from Derick Brassard and put home his 37th goal with just 37 seconds gone. The winger has 32 even-strength goals compared to 77 for the entire Sabres team.

The Rangers again used their speed to make it 3-1 with 8:05 gone. Nash clanked his breakaway chance off the post, and the carom went directly to Mats Zuccarello in the slot. With Michal Neuvirth out of position after dealing with Nash, Zuccarello easily found an empty net to give New York some breathing room.

"Their skill set took over in that second period," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. "There's going to be some nights where the other team is going to be a little bit more highly skilled than us."

The Rangers, who'd used Cam Talbot in net during all eight games with Henrik Lundqvist injured, elected to give Mackenzie Skapski his first career start. Buffalo gave the 20-year-old a rude welcome to the NHL.

Matt Moulson scored just 14 seconds into the game, Buffalo's quickest goal since Tyler Ennis scored at the 10-second mark Nov. 13, 2013. Skapski had no chance with Moulson alone in front to deflect a pass from Mitchell for his 300th career point.

"That's what we were saying before the game, just jump on this kid and get some shots to the net and put pressure on him," Mitchell said. "But we just couldn't generate anything."

New York responded with eight of the next nine shots to tie the game. As Carl Hagelin sped down the ice, J.T. Miller skipped a pass by defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen to set up his linemate for a breakaway. Hagelin easily beat Neuvirth through the pads with 5:51 off the clock.

The Rangers had a glorious opportunity to take a 2-1 lead, but Buffalo's penalty killers successfully fought off a five-on-three that lasted 1:45. It was one of the team's few highlights of the night.

The Sabres, who are in the midst of four games in six nights, will take Saturday off. They return to the ice Sunday when the Nashville Predators come to First Niagara Center.

"It was a tough game," said Neuvirth, who has stopped 110 of 116 shots during his last three starts. "I'm happy with the way I played the last three games. It's a great opportunity to get a start and show I can play."

Ristolainen, Zadorov need work to develop

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

February 20, 2015

In November, Rasmus Ristolainen and Nikita Zadorov were chewing up minutes in Pac-Man fashion on the Buffalo Sabres' defense. Neither are doing so anymore. It's something that bears watching over the final 23 games of this train wreck of a season.

The master plan, of course, calls for the two kids to be studs for years on the team's back end. And there have been plenty of times this year you could see why. They're both big. They can skate. They play with snarl.

Ristolainen is clearly the guy who engenders the most confidence from Ted Nolan, which doesn't matter since he's not likely to have him as coach next season. But the impression is pretty clear that he's the front office's choice as well.

Still, while Zadorov was a healthy scratch for the sixth time since the new year during Friday's mostly dreary loss to the New York Rangers, Ristolainen was on pace for as little of the ice as he's seen in 2015 as well.

The 20-year-old played just three minutes in the first period, getting burned on Carl Hagelin's breakaway goal that got the Rangers even. His ice time jumped up the rest of the way out of necessity after Mike Weber was injured and didn't return for the final 40 minutes. Ristolainen finished at 17:55.

Ristolainen has played over 20 minutes in 22 games this season, and he eclipsed 24 minutes eight times. But in the last 13 games, he's hit 20 minutes just twice. Some of it is because he's hitting that wall young players hit. Some of it is because the Sabres are pulling back on his ice time.

"I like playing more minutes, but I know there was a tough couple weeks or so where I didn't play too well," Ristolainen said. "Hopefully I'll play better and try to get as many minutes back as they give me."

Zadorov has three goals, 10 assists and a minus-12 rating. Ristolainen has four goals, seven assists and an ugly minus-27 rating. Now, especially since the Sabres pretty much don't score at all, it's hard to really classify plus-minus numbers.

Still, the kid is 822nd in the league out of 826 players and second from the bottom of all defensemen. You would expect him to be better than that.

(Ugly asides: The only defenseman in the NHL worse than Ristolainen is Sabres veteran Josh Gorges, who's likely to be done for the season and sitting on his minus-28. The worst plus-minus in the league? Buffalo forward Chris Stewart at minus-30).

"I'm not proud of it and I know it's not good," Ristolainen said. "But it is what it is. I don't look at it."

Opposing teams have started to attack Ristolainen more than earlier in the season. And the Sabres simply create no offensive attack, so that puts undue pressure on whichever pair is playing defense. As Tyler Myers said when he got to Winnipeg, playing defense in Buffalo creates some tough minutes all the time.

"I have to be better in the defensive zone and then I can do more and help my teammates on offense," Ristolainen said. "I think I can score."

Nolan said before Friday's game he wants Ristolainen and Zadorov to be unhappy their ice time has been cut. It's easier to have them mad at the coach, he theorized, than to have them overmatched night after night.

"Hope is a good thing once in a while, but you've got to make sure you put the kids in a position of success versus failure," Nolan said. "Hopefully you make the right decisions."

Newcomer Zach Bogosian is getting Myers' minutes and then some since the big trade with Winnipeg. Weber had been pretty good for the last month until getting hurt Friday, and Andre Benoit had been playing his best hockey of the season alongside Bogosian until regressing in this game as well.

Ristolainen has been a mainstay since day one of the season, while Zadorov's season has been full of dramatics.

Zadorov, remember, was scratched during the rookie tournament in Traverse City, Mich. He showed up to training camp overweight and didn't play until November. And that little travel faux pas returning from the Dominican Republic after the All-Star break certainly didn't help either.

From his days in junior hockey, Nolan knows the trouble that can develop from overfeeding a 16- or 17-year-old to opponents who are 19 and 20. The Sabres did a little too much of that earlier in the year with Ristolainen and Zadorov. Some games, it worked fine. Sometimes, it was a problem.

They seemed to play better as a pair and struggled more when apart. So the recipe the rest of the way should be this: It would be nice to see Ristolainen and Zadorov back as an every night pair. They should get 17-20 minutes a game. They need the work. They should be trying to be better in March than they were in January and February.

The Sabres are rolling out Evander Kane for his introductory press conference Saturday. They're well on the way to getting Connor McDavid or Jack Eichel in June. They're ostensibly going to be trying to win come September. Right? RIGHT? They need their pair of No. 1 picks from 2013 ready to cut way back on the growing pains.

"I don't look at it that I'm ahead or behind of what people think," Ristolainen said. "I'm just trying to play better. There are some up and downs. I want to get to the level that I can be pretty good every night."

Sabres notebook: Gorges looks to be done for the season

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 20, 2015

Josh Gorges will likely watch the rest of the Sabres' season. Mike Weber might miss significant time, too. Nikita Zadorov could join them on the sidelines every now and then.

Gorges, who hasn't played since Feb. 10 because of a lower-body injury, is close to being shut down until next year.

"It's leaning that way, but we'll see in the next little bit here," Buffalo coach Ted Nolan said Friday. "He's getting final information. He'll make a final decision in probably 24 to 48 hours."

If Gorges is indeed done, he'll close a disappointing first season with the Sabres. Acquired via trade from Montreal in July, Gorges has no goals, six assists and a minus-28 rating in 46 games. He leads the Sabres with 148 blocked shots and is skating 22:21 per night.

Weber suffered an upper-body injury during the first period of a 3-1 loss to the New York Rangers and did not return.

"He took a pretty good hit," Nolan said. "He's getting evaluated now as Josh Gorges is, so it looks like we can lose a couple there, for sure."

Zadorov, meanwhile, was a healthy scratch. The 19-year-old has one goal and seven points during his last nine games, but Nolan hasn't been enamored with Zadorov's overall play.

"We found he's getting a little overwhelmed lately, so we're going to give him a day off," Nolan said. "In order for the proper development to take place, you can't keep putting him and keep putting him. You have to sit back and watch and learn."

Tyson Strachan took Zadorov's place in the lineup. The rookie is averaging 19:05 of ice time during his 42 games, but he's been scratched six times during the last six weeks.

"He's going to be a heck of a player," Nolan said. "He really is, but you have to be patient. You have to wait instead of just throwing him and hope. Hope is a good thing once in a while, but you've got to make sure you put the kids in a position of success versus failure."

"We'll hopefully make the right decisions and give him a little break here and there and look forward to seeing him. When he's 23, 24 years old, he's going to be a specimen in this league, for sure."

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Michal Neuvirth, who won Thursday for the first time since November, started in goal for the fourth straight game. Nolan has no timetable for inserting backup Anders Lindback, acquired last week in the trade that sent Jhonas Enroth to Dallas.

"We'll just ride the horse," Nolan said. "As long as he's galloping down the road, we'll ride him. If he gets a little tired, we'll tie him up for a game and put the other one in."

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When Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist went to the sidelines with a neck injury Feb. 4, New York was allowing 2.3 goals per game. They entered Friday night with 26 goals allowed in their eight games without Lundqvist, an average of 3.25.

Still, New York arrived in Buffalo on a 5-1-2 run without the Olympian.

"You've got to look at the bottom line, and the bottom line is our record's pretty good," Rangers coach Alain Vigneault said. "This game is about winning and finding ways to win. Maybe we've given up a few more goals, but when need be, we've scored a couple more also. That's what this game's all about. It's about W's, and that's what we're working on."

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NHL.com has unveiled a new statistics page, complete with advanced stats such as Corsi, Fenwick and zone starts. The league uses "shot attempts" for Corsi and "unblocked shot attempts" for Fenwick.

The additions are the first in a four-step process to revamp NHL.com/Stats during the next year.

"Hockey is extremely fast-paced with very little stoppage in play, which results in many aspects of the game failing to show up in the box score," said John Collins, the NHL's chief operating officer. "The new NHL stats platform goes beyond data to offer insights that will help avid fans go deeper and help casual fans understand the game better. There are also unlimited storytelling opportunities as we provide our fans with a personalized and interactive experience."

A clean slate for Kane

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 21, 2015

Wearing a sling, a Sabres sweatshirt and a confident smile, Evander Kane didn't look like a bad teammate, immature kid or a quitter, some of the descriptions that have accompanied him lately. He looked like a happy young man eager to embrace his fresh start.

"I'm looking forward to moving on to bigger and better things here in Buffalo," Kane said Saturday during his introductory news conference in First Niagara Center. "The organization has been fantastic in how they've treated me so far and the way they've brought me in. I'm really happy, my parents are happy, and that's a good thing as well."

Kane is spending his first weekend in Western New York since being acquired by the Sabres in a blockbuster deal Feb. 11. He, his parents and a friend are watching games (including Sunday's visit by Nashville), taking in the snow-covered sights and meeting members of an organization that wanted him as much as he wanted a new team.

The Sabres are going to make Kane a marquee attraction when he's ready to play next season, and the 23-year-old is eager to embrace the leading role.

"I've been ready to do that for a while now," the sixth-year veteran said. "That's one of the exciting things I think that the opportunity here in Buffalo brings is to be able to do that. That's something I'm looking forward to."

While Kane is eager to move on from a tumultuous stay in Winnipeg, there needs to be one last look at how the talented, physical, goal-scoring left winger landed in Buffalo.

After an incident with teammates (reportedly centering around a track suit being worn at the wrong time and ending up in a cold tub), Kane failed to show up for a game and followed that by electing to have season-ending surgery. Shortly after the scalpels were put away, Winnipeg sent Kane to Buffalo as part of an eight-piece deal that had Tyler Myers moving to the Jets.

So ... what happened during those last few days in Winnipeg?

"I'm not really going to get into the details of what happened," Kane said. "Was I wearing a track suit? No, but like I said, it's something that tends to get blown out of proportion, especially playing in a Canadian market. There's been numerous things that have happened in the past that are completely false, and we'll leave it at that."

"The week that it happened, it was probably fun for the media and not fun for others. It's part of the business, and it's something that doesn't really bother me that much."

Kane insisted multiple times that the negative remarks about his character are overblown and something he doesn't take personally.

"I know the type of player and type of guy I am," Kane said. "The people that are around me and manage me, they know that as well. That's what matters the most."

"It really doesn't bother me as much as people might think it does. It gives me a good laugh sometimes."

His time in Winnipeg featured too few chuckles. Drafted fourth overall in 2009 when the franchise was in Atlanta, he attracted attention on and off the ice during four seasons in Manitoba.

"I had asked for a trade in the past, so I guess maybe it was overdue," Kane said. "Winnipeg is a very small town, but it's a big hockey market. It's a little tougher than a Vancouver or Toronto where you can maybe get away a little bit. It's a fishbowl.

"Being a Winnipeg Jet is something that everybody knew who you were, and they always wanted to talk to you, which is great. That was one of the things that you definitely enjoy, but negative things can take a toll a little bit."

The final act in Winnipeg was his decision to repair a torn labrum in his left shoulder. The Jets are trying to make the playoffs, but this month's surgery put Kane out for four to six months.

"I was playing hurt with a majority of injuries through the course of the season," he said. "It just took a toll, and it was time for me to get my surgery done.

"The surgery was a little bit more complicated in terms of what they originally thought it was. There's a hole actually in my shoulder as well, but everything's fixed and good to go now."

He's confident he'll be fully recovered by training camp in September. He'll do most of his rehab in his hometown of Vancouver.

"I have lots of time to get healthy, and that's something I thought about coming to that conclusion to get the surgery done," he said. "It's not going to change my game. I'm not going to second-guess going into a corner and taking a hit.

"I'm already looking forward to next year, but the team's still playing. It's kind of tough to balance that a little bit, but it gives me an opportunity to get healthy and finally get my body back to where it needs to be so I can perform my best."

Kane's best was a 30-goal, 57-point season in 2011-12. He'll need first-line teammates to make that happen again. After talking with his agent, he thinks the Sabres can quickly build their roster.

"Obviously, the organization is in a position to most likely be picking really high, if not No. 1, so that's definitely an exciting possibility," he said. "I don't think they're going to be sitting around waiting years and years and years to rebuild this thing. I think they're trying to do it as soon as possible.

"Before I got to the NHL, I won at all levels and won a lot," said the junior hockey and world junior champion. "It's definitely been tough not winning at this level, so that's something I want to change."

Kane got the biggest change possible, a trade out of a place he didn't want to be. His chance to start anew is here.

"Sometimes things just don't work out," Kane said. "Now I have an opportunity to be a Buffalo Sabre and have a fresh start. That's something I'm really excited about."

There can be a fine line between risk and reward

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

February 21, 2015

Evander Kane sure left some terrible last impressions in Winnipeg. As for first impressions in Buffalo, things went much better.

Kane went all “fresh start” on us during his introductory news conference with the Buffalo media Saturday in First Niagara Center. The Sabres were big on the clean-slate theories when the blockbuster with Winnipeg was announced 11 days ago, and Kane certainly followed that mantra Saturday.

He was firm and confident with his answers. You just have to hope it wasn't a performance.

I once had a longtime Big 4 assistant basketball coach explain to me about his keys to recruiting at-risk players. He crystallized it as the theory of Good Crazy vs. Bad Crazy.

You want some Good Crazy on your team. But just some. It's that guy who has an element of huge reward but major risk every time he comes into the locker room and steps onto the court, field or, in this case, the ice.

But players like that can bring Bad Crazy too. Every so often, it's going to come out. They simply can't help themselves. And your team has to be able to withstand that storm and get the outlier back into the team concept before he breaks away for good and maybe destroys the team in the process.

The Jets either couldn't get Kane back or decided it simply wasn't worth the effort anymore.

Asked directly about what kind of person he is, what kind of teammate he is and how he needs to be different here, Kane deked in every which way with his answer.

“Let's just put it this way: I think I'm definitely excited to have a fresh start,” Kane said. “I'm looking forward to moving on to bigger and better things here in Buffalo. The organization has been fantastic in how they've treated me so far and the way they've brought me in. I'm really happy. My parents are happy. That's always a good thing as well.”

That's a non-answer in this corner's book. Kane said he was only concerned with how his closest family, friends and advisers view him and dropped the “speculation” bomb about the infamous stories that emerged from his final days in The Peg. Just as he did with ESPN.com the day after the trade.

The one part of his talk where Kane failed was at the clear-the-air moment he was given. Did you come to the rink in Vancouver in a track suit? Did your teammates throw it in the shower? Did you pretty much take your pucks and sticks and go home and say it was time to have shoulder surgery?

“I'm not really going to get into the details of what happened,” he said. “Was I wearing a track suit? No. It's something that tends to get blown out of proportion, especially playing in a Canadian market. There's been numerous things that have happened in the past that are completely false, so we'll leave it at that.”

But when those “false” things have been widely reported and refuted by no one, that's a pretty good indication of what's true and what's false too.

Still, it was understandable to hear Kane talk about living and playing in the “fishbowl” of Winnipeg. That might sound bizarre unless you've actually made the trip to Manitoba to see a Jets game. When the Sabres were there in December, there were easily a couple dozen reporters and maybe more in the Jets' locker room following the

morning skate pondering various story angles. The largest scrum of the morning? Waiting for Kane to emerge. When you see that many media, you know you're not in, say, Carolina.

Buffalo is a huge hockey town, but the Bills are here, too, to chip away at a good portion of that attention at least until January. I doubt the CFL's Blue Bombers make a dent into the circus surrounding the Jets.

So as a media town, without any regional sports networks and minus a plethora of outlets filled with veteran reporters, Kane will have it much easier here. As for on the ice, that remains to be seen.

He had a serious shoulder surgery, a torn labrum that was worse than expected. But there doesn't seem to be any residual concern from either Kane or General Manager Tim Murray that he'll be ready for training camp. Or that Kane's power game up and down the wing will need to change some.

The one thing you hear about Kane on the wing is that he likes to have the puck. He's not desperate to have someone to feed it to him to be able to do anything with it (see: Moulson, Matt).

And although the instant analysis is that Kane will go nicely on the wing with either Connor McDavid or Jack Eichel, perhaps he might be better suited to be on Sam Reinhart's wing. Remember, whichever McEichel winds up in Buffalo is going to want the puck a lot too. And there's only one piece of vulcanized rubber on the ice at a time.

We might find out Reinhart will be the one better suited to have a winger creating a lot of the action around him. That kind of talk is what makes this trade interesting. The Sabres gave up a ton – four current or future No. 1 draft picks – to get Kane, and he needs to produce a lot and make others around him better from Shift One.

Kane has scored more than 19 goals in a season in his career only once, but Buffalo gave up so much he better morph into a player who regularly scores 35-40. He's never played in a single playoff game and basically got dumped by this year's Jets, the first team with which he could have seen the postseason.

But this is new to him. He won a Memorial Cup in junior hockey in Vancouver, and a gold medal with Canada at the World Junior Championships. That's in his favor.

"Before I got to the NHL, I won at all levels. Won a lot," Kane said. "So it's definitely been tough not winning at this level. That's something I want to change for sure."

It's really all pretty simple. Be a good teammate. Don't be a distraction, as in don't flaunt your gobs of money on Twitter and Instagram. Just show up and play.

Put the puck in the net, leave Winnipeg behind forever.

Saturday was a good first step, but it should be easy behind a podium. Kane is paid to be more than able on the ice. We'll start to see come October. Good Crazy better win out.

Skapski wins debut for Rangers against Sabres

By Joe Yerdon

NHL.com

February 20, 2015

BUFFALO -- Mackenzie Skapski made his first NHL game a memorable one.

The New York Rangers goalie made 24 saves in a 3-1 win against the Buffalo Sabres at First Niagara Center on Friday.

Skapski allowed a goal on the first shot of the game, at 14 seconds, by Sabres forward Matt Moulson. Moulson was alone in front of the net when he received a pass from Torrey Mitchell to score his ninth goal of the season.

"Yeah, it's not the start I wanted, that's for sure," Skapski said. "I think I rebounded well from that, and I think I was fighting some pucks in the first period, and in the second and third I was pretty calm, cool and collected."

Skapski (20 years, 250 days old) is the third-youngest Rangers goalie to win his NHL debut, according to Elias Sports Bureau. John Vanbiesbrouck (18 years, 92 days) and Lorne Anderson (20 years, 237 days) were younger.

Skapski is the first Rangers goalie to win his NHL debut since Dan Cloutier on Jan. 3, 1998.

"I'm very happy for him," Rangers coach Alain Vigneault said. "You always want to remember your first NHL game. He's going to remember it. He's going to remember the first shot and the first goal, but after that he shut them down and that's the important thing."

Skapski made 11 saves through two periods, but in the third the Sabres had two power plays and outshot the Rangers 13-12.

"He just let his play do the talking," Rangers captain Ryan McDonagh said. "He was real relaxed out there. Obviously at the start of the game, giving up a goal first shot is not ideal in that it could go either way for him. It could make him real nervous and antsy, but I thought he stayed with his strengths and just stayed relaxed and calm in there.

"I'm pretty sure he had a smile on his face all the way through the game. He made some big saves for us on the penalty kill as the game went and really did his part for us to get a big two points."

Skapski had been the backup to Cam Talbot since Henrik Lundqvist was sidelined with a vascular injury Feb. 2. Skapski was the 170th pick of the 2013 NHL Draft.

"I don't know if we let him off the hook. We just couldn't get in," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. "Letting him off the hook is if you have a chance to do it. We didn't have a chance to do it. We couldn't generate. We couldn't get in. Certain nights the other team is going to be a little bit more highly skilled than us. But ... we didn't quit. We battled back a little bit in the third. We just didn't have enough."

The Rangers (35-16-6) have a point in seven straight games and have won five of the past six. The Sabres (17-38-4) have lost 10 of their past 11 home games.

Rick Nash's 37th goal of the season gave the Rangers a 2-1 lead 37 seconds into the second period. He received a pass across the zone from Derick Brassard and took a slap shot that beat Sabres goalie Michal Neuvirth. Brassard's assist extended his point streak to six games.

"Yeah, that was a great pass," Nash said. "It was coming in hard. It was heavy and I was just trying to get it on net."

Carl Hagelin made it 1-1 with a breakaway goal 5:51 into the first period. Hagelin picked up a loose puck after a J.T. Miller pass was deflected by Sabres forward Brian Gionta. Hagelin broke in alone against Neuvirth and shot the puck through the goalie's legs for his 14th goal of the season.

"Yeah, it's a tough bounce," Gionta said. "Obviously, unfortunately it goes off my stick and gets by [Ristolainen] there. Borderline offside, too, I think at the time. But regardless, we've got to stick with it and find a way to come out of that. It's not an excuse for sure."

Mats Zuccarello made it 3-1 with his 12th goal of the season 8:05 into the second. Nash got behind Sabres defenseman Andre Benoit and drew Neuvirth out of position. The shot went off the near post and in front of the net to Zuccarello.

"I was a little lucky," Nash said. "I was trying to shoot it. It hit that perfect area where it bounced back in front. So it was a good bounce."

Neuvirth made 40 saves; he has 138 saves on 146 shots in his past four starts.

Sabres defenseman Mike Weber left the game after the first period with an upper-body injury and did not return. Defenseman Josh Gorges missed his fourth game with a lower-body injury.

"He took a pretty good hit," Nolan said. "He's getting evaluated now, as Josh Gorges is. So we'll say, we can lose a couple there for sure."

Predators visit Sabres, look to end two-game slide

By David Satriano

NHL.com

February 21, 2015

PREDATORS (39-13-7) at SABRES (17-38-4)

TV: FS-TN, MSG-B, BELL TV

Season series: The Nashville Predators swept two games from the Buffalo Sabres last season, outscoring them 10-2. Predators defenseman Shea Weber had three goals and an assist, and forwards Craig Smith and Colin Wilson each had a goal and two assists.

Predators team scope: Nashville has lost two straight games (0-1-1) following a six-game winning streak, but hasn't lost three games in a row all season. "We've got to be better, and better than we were the other night on Long Island too," forward Mike Fisher said following a 3-2 shootout loss to the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday. "You go through some ups and downs, and I feel like we haven't been on our game the last little bit. We've got to turn it around and learn from this. We got a point and we'll roll into Buffalo tomorrow." Defenseman Cody Franson and forward Mike Santorelli each made his debut with the Predators after being acquired in a trade with the Toronto Maple Leafs last weekend. "It was exciting to finally get a game under our belts," Santorelli said. "I just wish we would have had a different outcome in the end." Smith has six points (four goals) in his past four games.

Sabres team scope: Buffalo defenseman Mike Weber (upper-body injury) is unlikely to be in the lineup Sunday, and forward Josh Gorges (lower body) will not play. Weber left a 3-1 loss to the New York Rangers on Friday after a hit and didn't return. Gorges has missed the past four games and could be out for the rest of the season. Forward Nicolas Deslauriers moved to defense after Weber was injured and could play there again Sunday. "I thought he did pretty good for a young guy who was just learning to be a winger in the National Hockey League to step back and play a position he played a couple of years ago," coach Ted Nolan told the Sabres website. Goalie Michal Neuvirth has allowed eight goals in his past four games and has a .945 save percentage. The Sabres have lost their past four games on home ice.

Kane sees Sabres as 'headed in the right direction'

By Joe Yerdon

NHL.com

February 21, 2015

BUFFALO -- Forward Evander Kane was formally introduced as a member of the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday and said he's ready to move on to this opportunity.

"It's definitely exciting to be here and meet the guys and see the city a little bit," Kane said at First Niagara Center. "The facility that they have here, it's pretty phenomenal. My excitement was definitely met since first coming here."

The Sabres acquired Kane on Feb. 11, with defenseman Zach Bogosian, from the Winnipeg Jets in a trade for defenseman Tyler Myers, forward Drew Stafford, forward prospects forwards Joel Armia and Brendan Lemieux, and a first-round pick in the 2015 NHL Draft.

Forward Evander Kane was formally introduced as a member of the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday and said he's ready to move on to this opportunity.

Kane played six seasons for Winnipeg. He was traded amid reports of discord with teammates and after season-ending surgery on a torn labrum in his left shoulder.

"Obviously it was a situation that was ... unique and, I guess, fun for some people," Kane said. "But sometimes you need a fresh start. Like I said, I was playing hurt with a majority of injuries through the course of the season. It just took a toll. It was time to get surgery done."

"[It was] fun for the media, not fun for others. It's part of the business and not something that really bothers me too much."

Kane had surgery Feb. 7 with 4-6 months of recovery expected. His left arm was in a sling Saturday.

"The surgery was a little more complicated than they thought it was," Kane said. "There's a hole actually in my shoulder as well. But everything is fixed and good to go now. I'm looking forward to getting healthy again for sure."

Kane joins the Sabres in the middle of a rebuild, but one that will be accelerated by the addition of him, Bogosian, and a top pick in the 2015 draft. The Sabres (17-38-4) are last in the NHL with 38 points.

"No team wants to be in this position. No organization wants to be in this position," Kane said. "I think they're doing everything they can to turn it around. As players, you're not trying to finish in last place, you're not trying to lose hockey games. I think everybody has that hunger to get better."

The Sabres have forwards Tyler Ennis and Zemgus Girgensons, who have emerged as leaders up front, and defensemen Nikita Zadorov and Rasmus Ristolainen, who have earned spots as everyday NHL players. The Sabres also have forward Sam Reinhart, the second pick of the 2014 NHL Draft, and could wind up with either highly touted forward Connor McDavid or forward Jack Eichel this June.

"I think they're headed in the right direction," Kane said. "They have a lot of good, young prospects. Getting a top pick will obviously speed that up. I don't think they're going to be sitting around trying to wait years and years and years to rebuild this thing. I think they're trying to do it as soon as possible, and obviously when players get better, that also helps too. Hopefully we'll all get better."

Kane, 23, said he will rehabilitate his shoulder at home in Vancouver, stick to the plans laid out by his doctors, and be ready for training camp in September.

"Winnipeg is a very small town, but it's a big hockey market," Kane said. "It's a little tougher than Vancouver or Toronto where you maybe get away a little bit. It's a fishbowl. Being a Winnipeg Jet was something that everybody knew who you were and they always want to talk to you, which is great, and that was one of the things you definitely enjoy. But ... negative things can take a toll a little bit.

"I'm happy to be a Buffalo Sabre and I'm looking forward to meeting the fans and all the people here."

Kane says trade was 'maybe... overdue'

By Ken Wiebe

Winnipeg Sun

February 21, 2015

TORONTO - Evander Kane was clearly ready for a change.

As the former Winnipeg Jets winger made his first public appearance after the blockbuster deal that sent him to the Buffalo Sabres, Kane sounded like a guy who is happy to be moving on from the seemingly never-ending soap opera that seemed to be following him around during his time in Manitoba.

"I guess maybe it was overdue," Kane told reporters in Buffalo, N.Y. on Saturday. "Sometimes things just don't work. Winnipeg is a very small town, but it's a big hockey market. It's a little tougher than a Vancouver or a Toronto, where you can maybe get away a little bit. It's a fishbowl. Being a Winnipeg Jet was something that everybody knew who you were. They always wanted to talk to you, which is great, and that was definitely one of the things you enjoy. But negative things can take a toll a little bit.

"I think obviously it was a situation that was unique and I guess fun for some people. Sometimes you need a fresh start. I was playing hurt with a majority of injuries throughout the season, just took a toll and it was time for me to get my surgery done."

Kane was quick to deny the reports that a locker-room incident may have expedited his departure.

And what about the story about the track suit that was thrown in the shower by Dustin Byfuglien in Kane's hometown of Vancouver?

"I think that's what it was, just speculation. I'm not really going to get into the details of what happened. Was I wearing a track suit? No. But it's something tends to get blown out of proportion, especially playing in a Canadian market," said Kane, who had 10 goals and 22 points in 37 games this season for the Jets. "There's been numerous things that have happened in the past that are completely false. So we'll leave it at that."

Kane made numerous headlines for his on and off-ice antics during his tenure with the Jets, but he's not worried about anything that's happened in the past.

"I'm not concerned about it at all, to be honest. I know the type of player, the type of guy I am. The people that are around me and manage me, they know that as well. That's what matters the most."

Does Kane believe there's a misconception about the type of person he is?

"It's pretty straightforward. People have their opinions and are entitled to them," said Kane, who was chosen fourth overall in the 2009 NHL Draft and has 109 goals and 222 points in 361 NHL games. "I have mine. It really doesn't bother me as much as people think it does. It gives me a good laugh sometimes."

Moving to the Sabres from the Jets means that Kane will have missed the playoffs in each of his five NHL seasons, a streak he'd like to end soon.

"Before I got to the NHL I won at all levels. I won a lot," said Kane. "So it's definitely been tough winning at this level. That's something I want to change, for sure. I think (the Sabres) doing everything they can to turn it around. Obviously, I think as players you're not trying to finish in last place, you're not trying to lose hockey games. I think everybody has a hunger to get better."

Kane said his surgery to repair a torn labrum was a success and that his latest injury won't change how he plays once he returns to action.

"No concern," said Kane. "The surgery was a little bit more complicated in terms of what it was. There was a hole actually in my shoulder as well. But everything's fixed.

"I'm not concerned. It's not going to change my game. I'm not going to second-guess going into a corner, taking a hit."

Kane is familiar with a few of the Sabres, having played with Cody Hodgson and Tyler Ennis at the World Junior Hockey Championship in 2009.

With the Sabres at the bottom of the standings, there's a good chance that Kane could find himself playing on a line with either Connor McDavid or Jack Eichel.

"That's definitely an exciting possibility," said Kane. "Both those guys are really good players. We'll see what happens."

As for his new employer, Kane is looking forward to being part of the rebuild and liked what he heard after meeting with general manager Tim Murray and head coach Ted Nolan.

"Let's just put it this way, I think I'm definitely excited to have a fresh start, looking forward to moving on to bigger and better things here in Buffalo. The organization has been fantastic in how they've treated me so far, the way they've brought me in. (I'm) really happy. My parents are really happy. That's always a good thing as well. It's obviously a team that hasn't been doing great this season but I think is on the up. Meeting a lot of management and people in the organization, it's made me feel really warmly welcomed and I think really optimistic going forward.

"For myself individually, it's a unique situation. I'm already looking forward to next year but the team's still playing. It's kind of tough to balance that out."

Former hockey player Val James, raised in Hauppauge, writes about his experiences with racism

By Barbara Barker

Newsday

February 21, 2015

It should have been one of the happiest times of his life.

Val James was 25 years old in March 1982, and the Buffalo Sabres recently had called him up, making him the first American-born black player in the NHL.

James had just finished a game against the Bruins at Boston Garden and was settling into the team bus outside of the arena. The Sabres had lost but James, a left wing, played a couple of shifts. He remembers feeling pretty good about the way he had contributed, how he had exchanged punches with one of Boston's Crowder brothers.

Then a commotion outside the bus window jarred him out of his seat. A group of "fans" had surrounded the bus. James said they began to rock the vehicle, and then a beer bottle hit the windshield, causing the glass to spiderweb.

James said they began chanting for him to come out, but they weren't chanting his name.

"They were chanting, 'Send the [racial expletive] out,' " James said in an interview with Newsday. "It was scary. If they had had 10 more people, they would have flipped the bus."

James -- who grew up in Hauppauge -- played in 14 NHL games, including three in the playoffs, with the Sabres and Toronto Maple Leafs during a professional hockey career that spanned from 1978 to 1988.

It has taken him close to 30 years to come to terms with what he went through. But he finally has, and the result is a heart-wrenching and inspirational book.

"Black Ice: The Val James Story" was written with John Gallagher, a former fan of the Long Island Ducks hockey team. It includes graphic details of the daily indignities the 6-2, 205-pound James faced during his career, mostly as an enforcer, in the American Hockey League when players born in the United States were beginning to make inroads into a sport dominated by Canadians.

Though Willie O'Ree, a Canadian, broke the NHL color barrier with the Boston Bruins in 1958, James is believed to be only the seventh black player to follow in the next 24 years.

"When I started skating, I set out to be a hockey player, not a black hockey player," James writes in the book. "However, the two concepts quickly became intertwined. And not by choice. From early on, there were some people who were determined to prove that being black and being a hockey player were mutually exclusive."

The book details how some fans threw bananas on the ice, pelted James with racial slurs and taunted him with posters of himself dressed in a grass skirt with a bone in his nose.

It describes a minor-league game in Salem, Virginia, in 1981. A CBS News crew, on hand to do a story on James, filmed a teenager holding up a watermelon with his name on it.

The book also describes his mostly idyllic childhood on Long Island and how he said it left him totally unprepared for the racism he faced after leaving home at age 16 to play junior hockey.

Said James, now 58: "It is a hell of a thing wondering if you would be better off having been called the N-word more often when you were growing up."

Growing up on LI

Suffolk County was largely rural when James moved with his family from Ocala, Florida, to Stony Brook in the late 1950s. At first, James said, his father, Henry, worked as a migrant worker on a potato farm and the family lived in a one-room house without running water or electricity. James' father moved on to a job as a night watchman at the Long Island Arena in Commack, and shortly before James' 13th birthday, Henry gave him his first pair of skates.

While his father worked at night, James said he taught himself how to skate by pushing a wooden chair on the ice and chasing after the family's Doberman. He said as he stumbled around the ice, he dreamed of one day coming back as a member of the Ducks, the Eastern Hockey League team that played at the Arena.

Henry James soon was put in charge of all physical operations at the facility, everything from driving the Zamboni to changing over the ice for various concerts and shows. The family moved to Hauppauge and Val started playing for the Suffolk Ducks in the Metropolitan Junior Hockey League, which was co-founded by Rangers general manager Emile Francis to help develop local talent. When they weren't playing, James and his teammates were hired by his father to help out around the rink.

"Henry was a legend," said Chris Brinster, who grew up on the same street as James in Hauppauge and also played on several teams with him on Long Island and later in Canada. "We were all in the same boat. We were just a bunch of kids who didn't have much money and loved hockey. He had us doing all kinds of jobs."

James recalls one time when he and a bunch of other teenage "rink rats" were setting up a stage for an Alice Cooper show.

"Alice Cooper starts coming out and picking up boards to help us," James said. "All of a sudden, I see him lying on the ground. I was like, 'Oh, man, we just hurt Alice Cooper, we're all going to get fired.' But he just springs back up laughing and stuff. That was the kind of fun we used to have."

James and his five siblings almost always were the only black kids on the ice in Commack, but he said it was something he really didn't pay much attention to until he and his teammates went to a tournament in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

During warm-ups, a man standing next to the ice repeatedly called him a racial slur. He said his teammates began firing pucks at the man and rallied around him in the locker room. At the same time, James said he realized that they couldn't completely understand what he was going through.

"It was like someone dropped a 10-pound weight on me. It crushed me," James said. "I almost quit hockey and my mother was dead set against me continuing to play, but I talked with my father and he said this is what you're going to have to go through and it was my decision. I decided this was something I wanted to pursue."

And so he did. When James was 16, former Long Island Ducks player Buzz Deschamps helped him and three other Long Island players -- Tom Hasenzahl, Steve Amoruso and Richie Campisi -- get a tryout with a Junior B team in Midland, Ontario. They all made the roster. Big, black and American, James became an instant target for some fans who weren't all that happy to have non-Canadians playing in their junior hockey league.

Greg Martinelli, James' teammate in the Met League, recalled picking him up after he came home for Christmas in his first year in Ontario.

"You could tell something had happened. He was really different," said Martinelli, who lives in Smithtown. Still, Martinelli said he wasn't fully aware of the extent of what his friend had gone through until years later, when he read the first couple of chapters of his book.

"I don't think Val had been exposed to much racism on Long Island," said Martinelli, now a hockey teaching pro. "To go through what he had to go through to play hockey, it's really a story of persistence. Not too many people could have done that."

Abuse hurt deeply

Years of abuse began to take its toll, James said. After he injured his shoulder while playing for the AHL Baltimore Skipjacks 27 years ago, he decided he had enough. He went back to Long Island for a short period, then settled in Niagara Falls, Ontario, near where his wife, Ina, was from. He now works the overnight shift at an indoor water park, doing maintenance on the slides and motors.

"The only way I can explain how I felt is imagine the worst word you can call a woman. Now imagine having that word thrown at you every 30 seconds for 60 minutes," James said. "Now multiply that by 40 road games a year for 10 years. I think what happens is it eventually does some psychological damage to someone."

For the first 10 years after he retired, he refused to watch a hockey game on television. He and his wife don't own a computer, and they joke that they were happy to be "aging hippies" living off the grid.

James, however, began to think more and more about everything he had gone through. When Gallagher, who had followed James' career, contacted him three years ago about writing a book, he felt he was ready to tell his story.

The process was both painful and cathartic. Ina, who met James late in his career, was stunned after reading the first couple of chapters. "He had kept so much of it inside," Ina said. "I started reading the book and I couldn't stop crying. I was like, 'Why didn't you tell me?' It was just too much."

Since the book was published earlier this month, many of his former teammates have reached out to James, and he finds himself re-embracing the game.

Last week, one of his former teams, the AHL Rochester Americans, honored him with a Val James Night, and he received a standing ovation. The Sabres alumni association has reached out to him, and he is planning a trip to the New York area next week. He plans to attend an Islanders game on Tuesday and meet some of his old Long Island friends, many of whom he hasn't seen in nearly three decades.

Said James: "It's taken me a long time, but I'm finally ready to come back to hockey. I'm proud of what I did . . . treated people the way I wanted to be treated. It doesn't matter I went through all that and that people were calling me all kinds of names, because I never once diminished my belief. My belief was we all have to get along in order to take this next step as a human race."

Evander Kane on trade to Buffalo: 'I think I'm definitely excited to have a fresh start'

By Jordan Greer

Sporting News

February 21, 2015

Buffalo forward Evander Kane was acquired on Feb. 11 from Winnipeg amid controversy and conspiracy theories, and has said it's "nice to go somewhere where you feel wanted" about his move to the Sabres.

Kane expanded on his departure from the Jets and his excitement in joining the Sabres at his introductory news conference on Saturday. He admitted it was difficult playing under constant scrutiny in Winnipeg.

"Winnipeg is a very small town but it's a big hockey market," Kane said via The Buffalo News. "It's a little tougher than a Vancouver or Toronto where you can maybe get away a little bit. It's a fishbowl.

"Being a Winnipeg Jet is something that everybody knew who you were, and they always wanted to talk to you, which is great. That was one of the things that you definitely enjoy, but negative things can take a toll a little bit."

Kane did not go into full detail about all of the speculation surrounding the end of his time with the Jets, but said he did not violate team rules by wearing a track suit to a team meeting and things got blown out of proportion.

"There's been numerous things that have happened in the past that are completely false, and we'll leave it at that," Kane said.

The former first-round pick acknowledged a trade was long overdue, and he is "excited to have a fresh start."

"I'm looking forward to moving on to bigger and better things here in Buffalo," Kane said. "The organization has been fantastic in how they've treated me so far and the way they've brought me in. I'm really happy, my parents are happy, and that's a good thing as well."

Of course, Kane will not be available for the rest of this season due to shoulder surgery performed earlier this month. He expects to be ready for training camp in September. For now, the Sabres will continue to execute at peak tanking level in the hopes of drafting a top prospect like Connor McDavid or Jack Eichel.

Dawn of a new ice age

By James Fink

Buffalo Business First

February 20, 2015

Mark Poloncarz was glad to see the region open three more hockey rinks in recent months.

He welcomed them not only as Erie County executive but as a youth hockey coach.

Poloncarz, a coach in the Cazenovia Chiefs organization, said the rinks provide six new ice pads — two each at HarborCenter, Buffalo RiverWorks and Lockport's Cornerstone CFU Arena. And that means more time to book practices and games.

"It gives us more options," he said.

As county executive, however, he views the rinks from a different perspective.

HarborCenter has become a downtown Buffalo magnet, attracting out-of-town teams and visitors for events ranging from youth tournaments to last month's International Ice Hockey Federation's Women's U-18. The latter was an eight-country showcase that produced a \$3 million local economic impact in the form of new bed and sales taxes. Eight visiting teams accounted for more than 1,200 booked hotel rooms at a time of the year that is generally considered one of the softer seasons for area hotels.

"Buffalo has great infrastructure when it comes to amateur hockey venues," said John Percy, president and CEO of the Niagara Tourism & Convention Corp. "Now we can join into the equation with the Lockport rink, and that helps everyone."

HarborCenter, which opened in October, was set to host 20 tournaments through April. Those events will generate another \$3 million in economic impact, including bookings of more than 2,000 hotel rooms.

Tournaments and special events at HarborCenter will have a combined economic impact of more than \$11.6 million. And that number is projected to grow next season.

"The U-18s would not have come to Buffalo and we would not have seen a penny from that tournament were it not for the HarborCenter," Poloncarz said.

He and others see the new rinks bringing additional revenue to Western New York while resolving an ice-time crunch that hampered efforts to land more tournaments.

In some cases, such as the economic impact of first-time tournaments booked at HarborCenter, there is a tangible impact in terms of new tourism, recreational and discretionary dollars spent in the region.

The rinks will come into focus again this weekend as Buffalo RiverWorks hosts the eighth annual Labatt Blue Buffalo Pond Hockey Tournament.

More than 1,000 players and lots of spectators will be at the Ganson Street complex. Downtown is expected to feel the spin-off, with players and spectators patronizing local bars and staying at hotels in the central business district.

The Ice@Canalside outdoor skating rink, which opened in late December, has attracted more than 45,000 people so far. Intended for recreational skating, the ice pad also hosts curling and pond hockey leagues.

While some have voiced concern that new rinks are taking business away from older complexes, others say that's not the case.

"The way I look at it is last year at this time, we were six pads lighter," said Marty Dietrich, Hasek's Heroes director of hockey operations.

Hasek's Heroes operates the Bud Bakewell Arena in Buffalo's Riverside neighborhood and the Timothy J. Burvid Memorial Rink in South Buffalo's Cazenovia Park. Both are older, single-rink facilities.

Dietrich said Hasek's Heroes hasn't lost bookings to HarborCenter or Buffalo RiverWorks.

The Buffalo Sabres and Buffalo Jr. Sabres rented ice at both rinks and now use HarborCenter for practice sessions not only during the season but in the off-season.

The Bakewell rink's ice will be removed in early April and a new surface put down in August. The Burvid rink will keep its ice all summer.

Hasek's Heroes will use the summer months to make repairs to the Bakewell rink.

"Whenever we've had an opening, the ice time has filled up," Dietrich said. "Before, we were at the point where we couldn't sell any more ice because it was filled up. Now we are getting new bookings."

Eric Guzdek, general manager of the Northtown Center at Amherst, said the four-rink complex hasn't been hurt by the addition of area rinks.

"It's not an issue. It isn't a blip on our radar screens at all," Guzdek said. "We're booked solid."

The Northtown Center, which opened in 1998, hosts major youth and amateur tournaments.

At one point, the town considered building a fifth rink if the University at Buffalo decided to add an NCAA Division I men's hockey program. UB didn't, however.

"UB was the key to us," Amherst Supervisor Dr. Barry Weinstein said. "Without them, it doesn't make sense to add another rink."

Mark Grundtisch is general manager of Holiday Twin Rinks in Cheektowaga and Leisure Rinks in Orchard Park, privately owned facilities since the early 1970s. Grundtisch said new arenas should help more than hurt the existing ones.

"During the September-to-March period, ice time is very much in demand around the area," he said. "Where we may feel the impact is between April and September, but it is a little too early to know how we will be impacted. Right now, the requests we are getting for ice in the spring and early summer are still very good."

David Fischer, USA Hockey senior director of communications, said a region such as Western New York can always use more rinks.

Each year, USA Hockey brings several events here ranging from youth tournaments to those with top collegiate and professional prospects. Some are booked at the Northtown Center while others land in HarborCenter.

"The market drives the number of rinks you have," Fischer said. "Buffalo is a strong hockey market."

Hockey participation nationwide, tracked by USA Hockey membership, is up 2.9 percent this season.

New York state has one of the largest rosters of USA Hockey registered players: 46,255. Only Michigan, Minnesota and Massachusetts have more.

"We're one of the new guys and our ice time is filling up fast," said Sean Green, director of operations and sports development at Buffalo RiverWorks.

The Labatt pond hockey tournament is a coming-out party of sorts for the Ganson Street complex. RiverWorks not only hosts hockey leagues, it's home base for Buffalo's fast-growing league of curlers. Its indoor facility, meanwhile, is headquarters of the Queen City Roller Girls, a professional roller derby team.

"What we found works best is to create new events," Green said. "Give people new experiences instead of just shuffling the same old tournaments around."

Robert Filighera agreed. He is general manager of Cornerstone CFU Arena.

The twin-pad Lockport arena welcomed skaters this past fall and hosted its debut tournament in mid-January.

While this season is something of a shakeout period for Cornerstone, Filighera said he is working on booking and developing more youth tournaments that attract hockey teams from outside the area.

"Hockey people are willing to travel," he said. "Having our arena here helps people see the area in a different light."

Percy, of Niagara Tourism & Convention, said the Lockport arena opened the door for his agency to go after amateur sports bookings that previously weren't possible because of the lack of facilities. Niagara County hockey arenas include Niagara University's Dwyer Arena and Hyde Park Arena in Niagara Falls.

Eastern Niagara County didn't have a rink before Cornerstone CFU Arena. Now hotels, stores and restaurants will feel the arena's impact in terms of new customers coming through their doors.

"It gives us the option to pick up on some incremental business that we didn't have before," Percy said.

Sabres can't exploit rookie goalie, lose to Rangers

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 20, 2015

BUFFALO – It was a gift the Sabres couldn't exploit. Instead of starting backup goalie Cam Talbot, the New York Rangers used little-known rookie Mackenzie Skapski on Friday.

Who?

Skapski, 20, has been dressing for games as superstar goalie Henrik Lundqvist recovers from a neck injury. The 2013 sixth-round pick spent most of his first professional season playing in the AHL before getting recalled earlier this month. He even made one start in the ECHL.

Skapski's NHL debut started ominously.

Before Skapski could settle in, Matt Moulson beat him on the Sabres' first shot just 14 seconds into the game. But the Sabres rarely tested the neophyte again, sprinkling only 12 shots on him during the first 40 minutes – six in each period – of their 3-1 loss to the Rangers.

"Getting 12 shots in the first two periods on a young kid isn't good enough," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said. "We got to challenge him. We got to make him work for it."

Sabres winger Nick Deslauriers added: "Congratulations on his first win, but we didn't shoot the puck at all."

The Rangers roared back, tying the game at 5:51 on Carl Hagelin's breakaway goal. Rick Nash's slick one-timer 37 seconds into the second period, his 37th goal this season, held up as the winner.

Coach Ted Nolan wouldn't say the Sabres let Skapski off the hook.

"Letting him off the hook is if you have a chance to do it," Nolan said. "We didn't have a chance to do it. We couldn't generate. We couldn't get in."

The Sabres also couldn't contain the Rangers, who pumped 43 shots on goalie Michal Neuvirth. Mats Zuccarello sealed the game 8:05 into the second period.

"Certain nights the other team is going to be a little bit more highly skilled than us," Nolan said. "But ... we didn't quit. We battled back a little bit in the third. We just didn't have enough."

The Sabres crept back into the game, getting 13 shots on goal in the third period. By then, however, it was too late.

"We got to find a way to mentally prepare ourselves to be in that game early," Gionta said.

Both teams expended lots of energy on Thursday. The Sabres won a 3-2 shootout in Philadelphia, a game that started at 8 p.m. The Rangers, meanwhile, lost a 5-4 home shootout to Vancouver.

Still, the Sabres had some jump, scoring before many of the 19,070 fans inside the First Niagara Center settled into their seats.

Moulson's goal was his first in seven games, his second in 24 and just his ninth this season. It was also the 150th goal of his career and his 300th point.

"You go out, you score in the first shift, you hope to build off of that," Gionta said. "After that, (we) kind of got flat. We weren't sharp with our passes."

As Gionta lamented another lost opportunity, down the hallway Skapski was "super pumped."

"It's my dad's birthday today, I couldn't have scripted it better," he said.

Following the tough start, Skapski settled into the game.

"It's not the start I wanted, that's for sure," he said. "I think I rebounded well from that and ... in the second and third I was pretty calm, cool and collected."

Skapski's the third-youngest Rangers goalie to earn a win in his debut. The Rangers have won five of the last six games (5-0-1).

The Sabres have dropped 17 of the last 20 contests (3-16-1). The also lost defenseman Mike Weber to an upper-body injury Friday. The gritty veteran left after taking a "pretty good hit" and was being evaluated, Nolan said.

Nolan grouped Weber's injury with Josh Gorges, who could be lost for the season. With Weber out, Deslauriers moved back to defense, his natural position.

Sabres' Andre Benoit playing big minutes again

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 20, 2015

BUFFALO – In his first two NHL seasons, Sabres defenseman Andre Benoit enjoyed a regular role on strong playoff teams.

Benoit, 31, first earned notice two years ago as a late-bloomer in Ottawa. Last season in Colorado, he played more than 20 minutes a night, compiling 28 points.

This season, well, hasn't been easy for Benoit, who made only his 39th appearance in Friday's 3-1 loss to the New York Rangers inside the First Niagara Center. The rebuilding Sabres have scratched Benoit 20 times.

"Definitely not the year I envisioned," Benoit said Friday afternoon. "But at the same time, you can't look back, you got to keep looking forward. I get a chance to play a bigger role."

That bigger role has come in the last week beside new acquisition Zach Bogosian. Sabres coach Ted Nolan immediately moved Benoit from the press box to a prime spot beside the aggressive Bogosian.

Benoit, who endured a tough night Friday, played 20 minutes in consecutive games earlier this week for the first time since early November.

"I think Benoit's probably been playing the best hockey he's been playing for us all year," Nolan said. "Is there is a reason for it? Probably. He's playing with Zach. I think better players make (players better)."

Benoit didn't know Nolan would put him with Bogosian.

"But I was happy to get the opportunity," he said.

Why did the pair mesh so quickly?

"I just think we communicate out there," Bogosian said. "We both like to talk. If anything fails or goes down at all, I think we kind of talk it out out there and sort things out."

Nolan briefly broke up the duo after defenseman Mike Weber left the game with an upper-body injury.

Bogosian played a whopping 32 minutes, 23 seconds in Thursday's 3-2 shootout win in Philadelphia.

xxx

Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges' season could be over.

Gorges will decide his future in the next day or two, Nolan said. The veteran is "getting the final information" on the lower-body injury that has sidelined him four games, Nolan said. But the team is planning on playing without Gorges.

In other news, the Sabres made one lineup change Friday, inserting veteran defenseman Tyson Strachan for 19-year-old Nikita Zadorov.

"We found he's getting a little bit overwhelmed lately," Nolan said.

Nolan believes prospects must watch and learn to develop properly.

"You just can't keep putting them, putting them in," he said.

Zadorov recently compiled seven points in seven games. But he's still a mistake-prone youngster. Nolan has been cutting his ice time to about 15 or 16 minutes a game.

"He's going to be a heck of a player, he really is," Nolan said. "But you have to be patient. ... You got to be sure you put the kids in a position of success versus failure."

Zadorov will likely play Sunday against Nashville, Nolan said.

xxx

Sabres goalie Michal Neuvirth made his fourth straight start Friday. The Sabres want to find out if Neuvirth, who has looked sharp since the Sabres traded Jhonas Enroth, can be a No. 1 netminder.

"He's only played (23) games," Nolan said. "No. 1s usually play a lot of games, so he's relatively fresh. He should be able to handle that load."

New backup goalie Anders Lindback might have to wait a bit to make his Sabres debut.

"We'll just ride the horse as long as he's galloping down the road," Nolan said. "We'll ... tie him up here for a game and put the other one in. Right now, we're going to ride him."

xxx

Sabres prospect Mikhail Grigorenko, out since injuring his knee Jan. 30 with Rochester, wants to return Friday, according to WHTK. The 20-year-old center has 10 goals and 30 points in AHL 37 games this season.

Evander Kane happy to be with Sabres” ‘I’m definitely excited to have a fresh start’

**By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 21, 2015**

BUFFALO – For almost 13 minutes, Evander Kane smoothly answered questions about his turbulent past with the Winnipeg Jets and the future that could be special for the 23-year-old winger following his recent acquisition by the Sabres.

Wearing jeans, a Sabres hoody with his No. 9 and a sling around his surgically repaired left shoulder, an upbeat Kane sounded relieved to be out of Winnipeg, a city he calls a “fishbowl.”

“Let’s just put it this way, I think I’m definitely excited to have a fresh start, looking forward to moving on to bigger and better things here in Buffalo,” Kane said Saturday during his introductory news conference. “The organization has been fantastic in how they’ve treated me so far, the way they’ve brought me in. (I’m) really happy. My parents are really happy.”

The grass, of course, is usually greener elsewhere. Kane wasn’t happy in Winnipeg, where he had worn out his welcome.

“Sometimes things just don’t work,” he said inside the First Niagara Center.

Incidents have dogged Kane for years, creating questions about his character. He requested a trade well before the Feb. 11 blockbuster deal.

“There’s been numerous things that have happened in the past that are completely false,” he said. “So we’ll leave it at that.”

Earlier this month, it became clear Kane, the No. 4 pick in 2009, would never play for the Jets again.

His former teammates reportedly threw his tracksuit in the shower after he violated the team’s dress code. Kane responded by not showing up for a game that night and later having season-ending shoulder surgery.

“Was I wearing a tracksuit?” Kane asked. “No, but it’s something (that) tends to get blown out of proportion, especially playing in a Canadian market.”

Kane believes Winnipeg is a “big hockey market” in “a very small town.”

“Being a Winnipeg Jet was something that everybody knew who you were,” he said. “They always wanted to talk to you, which is great, and that was definitely one of the things you enjoy. But negative things can take a toll a little bit.”

Kane sees plenty of positives in the lowly Sabres. The team has welcomed him warmly. He met coach Ted Nolan, general manager Tim Murray and his new teammates Friday.

“I think they’re doing everything they can to turn it around,” Kane said. “Obviously, I think as players you’re not trying to finish in last place, you’re not trying to lose hockey games. I think everybody has a hunger to get better.”

He added: “They’re heading in the right direction. They have a lot of good young prospects. ... I don’t think they’re going to be sitting around trying to wait years and years and years to rebuild this thing.”

Kane's a huge piece of the rebuild. That's why the Sabres paid a hefty price – defenseman Tyler Myers, winger Drew Stafford, a 2015 first-round pick and prospects Joel Armia and Brendan Lemieux – to land him, defenseman Zach Bogosian and a goalie prospect. Kane already has 109 goals in 361 NHL games, including a 30-goal season in 2011-12. He will almost certainly be the team's No. 1 left wing when he returns next season.

"It's a unique situation," Kane said. "I'm already looking forward to next year but the team's still playing. It's kind of tough to balance that out."

Given the Sabres' sorry state, he could have Connor McDavid or Jack Eichel, the consensus top draft picks in June, centering him in 2015-16.

"That's definitely an exciting possibility," said Kane, who thinks he's ready to become a leader. "Both those guys are really good players. We'll see what happens."

Kane will leave Buffalo soon and continue his rehab at home in Vancouver. The surgery wasn't retribution to the Jets, he said.

"I was playing hurt with a majority of injuries throughout the season," he said. "(It) just took a toll and it was time for me to get my surgery done."

The surgery was more complicated than Kane originally thought because a hole in his shoulder was found.

"But everything's fixed," he said.

So Kane will keep playing his aggressive, heavy style.

"It's not going to change my game," he said about the injury. "I'm not going to second-guess going into a corner, taking a hit."

Kane won't change his personality, either. He doesn't worry about his past trailing him.

"I know the type of player, the type of guy I am," he said. "The people that are around me and manage me, they know that as well. That's what matters the most."

xxx

The Sabres, who had Saturday off, host the league-leading Nashville Predators tonight.

Skapski lifts Rangers to 3-1 win over Sabres

By Dan Cave

WGR 550

February 20, 2015

Making his NHL debut on Friday, Rangers netminder Mackenzie Skapski surrendered a goal only 14 seconds into the game, but was perfect for the final 59:46 in a 3-1 win over the Sabres.

Buffalo wasted little time in testing Skapski; Matt Moulson was left alone in front of the Rangers net following a faceoff to Skapski's left. Moulson took a feed from Torrey Mitchell and beat the rookie netminder for his ninth goal of the season, giving Buffalo a very early 1-0 lead.

Carl Hagelin tied it up later in the period, beating Michal Neuvirth on a clean breakaway. Hagelin got behind Rasmus Ristolainen and corralled a long flip pass from J.T. Miller to go in alone on net. Replays showed Hagelin appeared to be offsides when he gained possession, but the on-ice call stood, making it 1-1 at 5:51 of the opening period.

In the second period, it was the Rangers' turn to score in the opening minute. Rick Nash netted his 37th just 37 seconds in, one-timing a Derick Brassard slap pass from the right faceoff circle. Nash helped set up New York's third goal of the evening at 8:05 of the second, cutting in on Neuvirth and sending a chance off the post. Mats Zuccarello was right there, however, to gather the rebound and tap the puck into the wide open Buffalo net.

The two sides skated to a scoreless third period, but the Sabres tested Skapski with 13 shots in the final frame. The rookie goaltender made 24 saves in his first career victory. Neuvirth came up with 40 stops in the loss. Buffalo returns to action on Sunday, hosting Nashville at 6 p.m. Hear the call on WGR 550 and the Buffalo Sabres Radio Network.

1st Period

Goals

0:14 - BUF - Matt Moulson (9) (Torrey Mitchell, Brian Gionta)

5:51 - NYR - Carl Hagelin (14) (J.T. Miller, Dan Boyle)

Penalties

14:35 - BUF - Zach Bogosian (2 min., roughing)

14:50 - BUF - Tyson Strachan (2 min., delay of game - puck over the glass)

2nd Period

Goals

0:37 - NYR - Rick Nash (37) (Derick Brassard, Marc Staal)

8:05 - NYR - Mats Zuccarello (12) (Rick Nash, Derick Brassard)

Penalties

15:31 - NYR - Lee Stempniak (2 min., high sticking)

3rd Period

Goals

None

Penalties

3:11 - NYR - Rick Nash (2 min., hooking)

7:03 - BUF - Tyson Strachan (5 min., fighting)

7:03 - NYR - Tanner Glass (5 min., fighting)

13:43 - BUF - Chris Stewart (2 min., slashing)

15:36 - BUF - Zach Bogosian (10 min. misconduct)

15:36 - NYR - J.T. Miller (10 min. misconduct)

17:06 - BUF - Marcus Foligno (2 min., slashing)
18:21 - NYR - Derek Stepan (2 min., interference)

Goaltending

NYR - Mackenzie Skapski (24 saves, 25 shots)
BUF - Michal Neuvirth (40 saves, 42 shots)

Power Plays

NYR - 0 of 4
BUF - 0 of 3

Three Stars

- 1.) NYR - Rick Nash (1 G, 1 A)
- 2.) NYR - Carl Hagelin (1 G, 0 A)
- 3.) NYR - Mats Zuccarello (1 G, 0 A)

Hamilton: Sabres' Deslauriers trying to perfect the art of hitting

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 20, 2015

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Nic Deslauriers is 8th in the NHL when it comes to hits. Now we know stats kept around the league are not accurate, but it's all we have.

In 58 games the Sabres winger has 188 hits which puts him two behind Toronto's Roman Polak. Deslauriers said it's something he really enjoys, "I like it, my main goal is to finish every hit and sometimes it gives me some space. In the first period if I finish on one D two or three times, maybe in the third I can have a little more space and when I dump it I can have it, it's just part of my game."

One thing you often see out of young players is they take themselves out of position to make a big hit. It's something coaches are constantly showing Nikita Zadorov. Deslauriers said there is a method to it, "There's times to lay a big hit, there's times to bump the guy and there's times to just steer him down. When you have three in the O-zone, you don't want to get caught going for the big hit and giving an odd man rush, so it's just being smart, but never turn back a hit."

Just like Zadorov, Deslauriers had to learn by doing, "I just started being more patient and it limits the odd man rush. In my first couple games I was just going to almost take the head off and got scored on a couple of times because of it, so by watching clips and just talking with Trottier almost every single day after practice and he helps me a lot."

There is more emphasis on hits from behind, although you wouldn't know it by NHL suspensions. Deslauriers said you have to be under control as you're going to the hit, "I've gotten lucky, not injuring nobody with hitting from behind and no suspensions. I am not a dirty player, but sometimes some bad hits just happens, like somebody turning at the last second, but yes you've got to be careful, yes you want to win, but at the same time you don't want to injure somebody."

For tonight's game Deslauriers is playing right wing with Brian Flynn and Marcus Foligno.

He had six shifts for 4:09 in the first period. He was credited with two hits. The first came right off the bat when he trapped Ryan McDonagh on the wall and got the puck out.

Later in the period Deslauriers stole the puck and got it down in the offensive zone.

The team had no jump in the first period being outshot 16-6. Deslauriers is the type of player that can provide some energy.

If Deslauriers is going to provide energy he'll have to do it from defense. Mike Weber didn't come out for the second period and Deslauriers moved to defense with Rasmus Ristolainen. Don't forget he was always a defenseman until last year when the Kings told him to go down to Manchester and play wing.

"It was weird a little bit," Deslauriers said about playing defense. "But when somebody goes down, I'm always ready to help the boys."

There were a couple of shifts he got caught on the ice and Buffalo got hemmed in, but overall he was OK.

I can tell he's concentrating on his assignments and not looking for the big hit.

One of the few times Buffalo did get some pressure, Deslauriers made a nice pinch on the left wall to keep the puck in.

By the end of 40 minutes Deslauriers had 11 shifts for 10:26 he has been credited with three hits.

He played a regular shift on defense and had an anxious moment in the third as the puck was getting away and to a Ranger, but he dove and knocked it away. He finished with 13:44 of playing time over 15 shifts and racked up four hits.

As a team, Buffalo tried its best to get back on the the board in the third, but couldn't beat Skapski. The Sabres sent 13 shots toward the New York net in the final frame after getting just 12 total over the first few periods.

"We just didn't shoot the puck, we didn't test him," said Deslauriers of Skapski. "Congratulations on his first win, but we didn't shoot the puck at all."

Regarding Weber, Nolan said, "He took a pretty good hit, so he's getting evaluated now, as Josh Gorges is. Looks like we could lose a couple there for sure." Nolan also confirmed that Weber suffered an upper-body injury, but not to his head.

The sabres introduce their new player

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 21, 2015

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Evander Kane had his first press conference in Buffalo and attacked it head on. Kane didn't dodge anything and is happy for a new opportunity. "I'm definitely excited to have a fresh start, looking forward to moving on to bigger and better things here in Buffalo. The organization has been fantastic in how they've treated me so far."

I don't at all get the sense that Kane is being dishonest about coming to Buffalo. I really think he's embracing the trade and embracing what will be his new home. Kane said, "It's definitely exciting to be here, meet the guys and see the city a little bit and the facility that they have here is pretty phenomenal, so my excitement was definitely met coming here."

Kane will not play this season due to shoulder surgery. He joins Cody McCormick, likely Josh Gorges and Pat Kaleta and maybe Mike Weber has players on the shelf for the season. Kane said once they started his surgery, it became more, "The surgery was a little more complicated in terms of what they originally thought it was, there's a hole actually in my shoulder as well, but everything's fixed and good to go now and I'm looking forward to getting back healthy for sure."

Kane said he will rehab back home and check back with the Sabres team doctors every so often.

Kane wasn't shocked when it was Buffalo he was traded to. He said, "My agent had mentioned to me a couple of days before it happened as a possibility."

Kane saw firsthand what the Sabres have been like this season as it was on full display Friday against the Rangers. He said, "It's a team that hasn't been doing great this season, but I think it's on the up."

The Sabres already have Reinhart, Girgensons, Ristolainen, Zadorov and likely either McDavid or Eichel. Kane is around the same age as Tyler Ennis, Cody Hodgson and Zach Bogosian, so he sees a lot in the near future, "The organization's in a position to most likely be picking really high if not number one, so that's an exciting possibility, I think both those guys are really good players, so we'll see what happens at the draft and come training camp." He added, "They're headed in the right direction, they have a lot of good young prospects and getting a top pick will only speed that up, so I don't think they're going to be sitting around trying to wait years and years and years to rebuild this thing. I think they're trying to do it as soon as possible."

In Winnipeg whether it was true or not, Kane did not have a good image. He thinks things in Buffalo will be fine, "I'm not concerned about it at all, I know the type of player and type of guy I am, the people that are around me and manage me know that as well and that's what matters the most."

We've all heard the stories out of Winnipeg that players on his own team didn't like him. Kane said, "It was a situation that was unique, but sometimes you need a fresh start. I was playing hurt with a majority of injuries through the course of the season and it took a toll." Kane added, "It was just speculation I mean I'm not going to really get into the details of what happened. Was I wearing a track suit, no, but it's something that tends to get blown out of proportion, especially playing in a Canadian market and there have been numerous things that have happened in the past that are completely false."

Kane has felt for a while now that a trade would be best. He admitted, "I had asked for a trade in the past, so I guess maybe it was overdue."

I'm not sure Kane exactly knows what he's getting into in Buffalo. The way he describes Winnipeg, it's really what he'll get here too, "Winnipeg is a very small town, but it's a big hockey market, so it's a little tougher than a Vancouver or Toronto where maybe you can get away a little bit, but it's a fishbowl and being a Winnipeg Jet meant everybody knew who you were, they always wanted to talk to you, which is great and that was one of the things you definitely enjoy, but negative things can take a toll a little bit."

Evander Kane meets the media

By T.J. Luckman

WGR 550

February 21, 2015

Evander Kane met with the Buffalo media on Saturday afternoon to talk about his future with the Buffalo Sabres.

"I think I'm definitely excited to have a fresh start," said Kane. "I'm looking forward to moving on to bigger and better things here in Buffalo."

Kane spoke about his shoulder surgery that put him on ice for the remainder of the season.

"For myself individually, it's a unique situation. I'm already looking forward to next year, but the team is still playing. It's kind of tough to balance out a little bit, but it gives me an opportunity to get healthy, get my body back where it needs to be so I can play at my best."

Also plaguing Kane in Winnipeg were some "character issues" that seemed to follow him throughout his career with the Jets. Kane preferred not to worry about his past and made sure to let people know that he's ready for a fresh start in Buffalo moving forward.

"I'm not concerned about [my image] at all," said Kane. "I know the type of player, the type of guy I am. For the people that are around me and matter to me, they know that as well, and that's what matters the most."

The end for Kane's time in Winnipeg came when he reportedly wore a track suit to a team meeting in Winnipeg. Kane wouldn't get in to the details of what actually happened, but he denied wearing a track suit to the meeting.

"It's something that tends to get blown out of proportion, especially playing in a Canadian market. There's been numerous things that happened in the past that are completely false, so we'll leave it at that."

Evander Kane was the 4th overall pick by the Atlanta Thrashers. In 361 career NHL games, Kane's scored 109 goals to go with 222 points.

Keep it locked to WGR and wgr550.com for the latest Sabres news.

Thanks to the Sabres Twitter account for the photo.

Rangers pull out win against Sabres

By Mark Ludwiczak

The Sports Xchange

February 20, 2015

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- Goaltender Mackenzie Skapski's first career start didn't exactly begin as planned. After that, however, it was smooth sailing for the 20-year-old rookie.

After allowing a goal 14 seconds into his NHL debut, Skapski and the New York Rangers rebounded to defeat the Buffalo Sabres 3-1 Friday night. Skapski made 24 saves and was largely untested in an all-around dominant performance by the Rangers.

"You always want to remember your first NHL game. He's going to remember it," Rangers head coach Alain Vigneault said. "He's going to remember the first shot and the first goal, but after that he shut them down and that's the important thing."

Skapski got the call with Rangers starter Henrik Lundqvist (neck) injured and teammate Cam Talbot in need of a rest. With Lundqvist out, Talbot started each of the previous eight games for the Rangers.

"It's not the start I wanted, that's for sure," Skapski said. "I think I rebounded well from that."

The struggling Sabres (17-38-4) surprised New York (35-16-6) at the very start. Left winger Matt Moulson scored on a tap-in on Buffalo's first shot to put New York in an early hole.

From that point on, the Rangers took over. Left winger Rick Nash, left winger Carl Hagelin and right winger Mats Zuccarello scored as Buffalo was no match for the Rangers' speed and skill.

"We had a tough first 20 seconds, we didn't want to start that way with a goalie playing his first NHL game but after that we stuck to our simple style and it seemed to work," Nash said.

Boy, did it ever. The Rangers outshot Buffalo 31-12 through two periods and 43-24 overall. They spent large portions of time in the Sabres zone and frustrated Buffalo with their relentless pace and speed.

"That's the way we like to play and have control of the puck and we did a good job of that for most of the game," Rangers defenseman Marc Staal said. "We controlled the pace of play and were allowing them to defend for long periods of time, where they basically had to dump it in, change and start all over again. We did a good job of that."

Moulson scored the lone goal for the Sabres. Goalie Michal Neuvirth had 40 saves.

"That's a very good team," Sabres head coach Ted Nolan said. "They got to the Stanley Cup finals not by accident."

Added Sabres defenseman/forward Nicolas Deslauriers: "Congratulations on his first win, but we didn't shoot the puck at all."

Buffalo's best moment came at the very start. After quick passes from center Torrey Mitchell and right winger Brian Gionta, Moulson had a wide-open tap-in in front of the Rangers' net for his 300th career point.

The Rangers quickly bounced back. After an errant deflection by Gionta and poor coverage by young Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen, Hagelin was in on a breakaway minutes later and tucked the puck beneath Neuvirth's legs to even the score at 5:51.

New York's blistering team speed then took over.

Nash gave the Rangers a 2-1 lead 37 seconds into the second period on a hard one-timer. After a terrific shot

fake, center Derick Brassard sent Nash a cross-ice pass and Nash made no mistake with the finish. It was Nash's 37th goal of the season and Brassard extended his streak of games with an assist to six.

Nash set up New York's third goal a little over seven minutes later. The forward sped past Sabres defenseman Andre Benoit for a breakaway and his shot deflected off the left post. The rebound fell to Zuccarello, who had an open net for his 12th goal of the season.

NOTES: This game was rescheduled from Nov. 21 after a snowstorm in Western New York caused the NHL to postpone the game. ... D Josh Gorges, RW Patrick Kaleta and D Nikita Zadorov were scratched for the Sabres. Buffalo head coach Ted Nolan said last week that Gorges and Kaleta were receiving second opinions about their lower-body injuries. Zadorov was a healthy scratch. ... D John Moore and RW Jesper Fast were scratched for the Rangers. ... This was the second of three meetings between the Sabres and Rangers this season. Their third and final meeting takes place on March 14 in Buffalo.

Kane looking forward to a fresh start with the Sabres

WGRZ

February 21, 2015

BUFFALO, N.Y. - Evander Kane emphasized during his meeting with the Buffalo media early Saturday afternoon how much he is looking forward to a fresh start with the Sabres.

Kane said "I think I'm definitely excited to have a fresh start. I'm looking forward to moving on to bigger and better things here in Buffalo. The organization has been fantastic in how they've treated me so far and the way they've brought me in. I'm really happy, my parents are happy, and that's a good thing as well."

It's the first time the Buffalo media had a chance to speak with Kane since he was traded to the Sabres earlier this month. Kane said his shoulder surgery that has sidelined him for this season wasn't as simple as originally thought. "There's a hole actually in my shoulder as well, but everything's fixed and good to go now. I'm looking forward to getting back healthy."

Kane didn't get into specifics of his departure from Winnipeg. "It was just speculation. I'm not really going to get into the details of what happened. Was I wearing a track suit? No, but like I said, it's something that tends to get blown out of proportion, especially playing in a Canadian market. There's been numerous things that have happened in the past that are completely false, and we'll leave it at that."

Kane believes the Sabres rebuild can happen quickly knowing the team will most likely be in position to draft either Connor McDavid or Jack Eichel. He's also looking forward to the opportunity to lead a team. Before getting to the NHL Kane won at every level. Playing in Atlanta and Winnipeg, well that's been a different story. He's excited about the opportunity to lead the Sabres. "It's definitely been tough not winning at this level, so that's something I want to change for sure."

Kane will continue his rehabilitation at home in Vancouver and periodically check in with Sabres team doctors.

Kane officially introduced to Buffalo

WKBW

February 21, 2015

BUFFALO, NY (WKBW) - Evander Kane was on hand Friday night to watch the Sabres for the first time since being traded to Buffalo.

The winger was officially introduced to the Queen City on Saturday.

Kane was acquired along with teammate Zach Bogosian in a trade that sent Drew Stafford and Tyler Myers to the Jets on February 11.

The 23-year old will not play the remainder of the season as he recovers from shoulder surgery.

There was speculation Kane had worn out his welcome in Winnipeg, but he says some of the reports were false.

"I had asked for a trade in the past and maybe it was over due," Kane said during his introductory press conference on Saturday. "Let's just put it this way, I think I'm definitely excited to have a fresh start. I'm looking forward to moving on to bigger and better things here in Buffalo.

While his former team is still in the hunt for a spot in the postseason, his current team is in rebuild mode. Kane says he's looking forward to the opportunity to play alongside Connor McDavid or Jack Eichel if Buffalo drafts either of the top prospects.

"Obviously, getting a top pick will only speed (the rebuild process) up. I don't think they're going to be sitting around and waiting years and year and years to rebuild this thing," Kane said. "I think they're going to try and do it as soon as possible. No team wants to be in this position, no organization wants to be in this position. I think they're doing everything they can to turn it around. I think, as players, you're not trying to finish in last place and lose games."

Kane will return home to Vancouver to continue to rehab his shoulder.

The Sabres host Nashville on Sunday.

Sabres outpaced by Rangers in defeat

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 21, 2015

The Buffalo Sabres got out to an early lead, but the New York Rangers eventually caught up and then used their speed to blow by them.

Matt Moulson scored 14 seconds into Friday night's game on Buffalo's second shot to record the 150th goal and 300th point of his career.

However, it wasn't enough as Carl Hagelin responded at the 5:51 mark of the first to tie the game. Then Rick Nash and Mats Zuccarello added second-period markers to give the Rangers a 3-1 win at First Niagara Center.

Mackenzie Skapski made 24 saves to record his first NHL victory. Michal Neuvirth made his third start in four nights for the Sabres, stopping 40 shots.

"They're a team with a lot of speed, pretty good on the transition. If you look at the goals they had, they take advantage of that," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said. "Unfortunately for the better part of those first two periods, we weren't ready so we've got to be better. We started to generate something in the third, but it was just too late once you're down."

Buffalo got things going right away when they generated their goal off a faceoff. Torrey Mitchell lost the draw to Derick Brassard but the Sabres won the puck back and Gionta was able to get the puck back to Mitchell from the corner. Mitchell then threw it in front of the net where Moulson was there to put it in.

It marked the fastest Sabres goal to open a game since Tyler Ennis scored 10 seconds from the opening faceoff on Nov. 19, 2013 against St. Louis.

The lead would not last, though as all three Rangers goals were the results of fast breaks into the Buffalo zone starting with Hagelin's tally. Hagelin was sprung for a breakaway when a Rangers pass out of their own end was tipped by Gionta at the blue line. Hagelin tucked home a backhand to make it 1-1.

"You go out, you score in the first shift, you hope to build off of that," Gionta said. "After that, we kind of got flat and we weren't sharp with our passes. It showed."

Nash's goal 37 seconds into the second was the result of an odd-man rush up the ice for New York. Brassard sent Nash a cross-ice pass down left wing where he was able to one-time it in for his 37th goal of the season. Nash only trails Washington's Alexander Ovechkin for the League lead in goals by one.

Zuccarello was the beneficiary of a strong play by Nash. Nash broke in on the Sabres defense and cut in hard toward the front of the net. He ended up on the goal line to Neuvirth's right and put the puck in front of the net. Crashing in, Zuccarello tapped it in 8:05 into the second to make it 3-1.

Buffalo had only 12 total shots through the first periods, but came alive in the third to put 13 on Skapski.

"Getting 12 shots in the first two periods on a young kid isn't good enough," Gionta said. "We've got to challenge him. We've got to make him work for it. We started to do a little of it in the third but it was just too late."

DEFENSIVE CHANGES

The Sabres are already missing alternate captain Josh Gorges, who could be out for the rest of the year with a

lower-body injury. Then Mike Weber left Friday's game after the first period with an upper-body injury and did not return.

"He took a pretty good hit so he's getting evaluated now as Josh Gorges is," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. "So it looks like we could lose a couple there for sure."

To help fill in some of the holes on the back end, Nicolas Deslauriers moved from forward to defense. He had been a defenseman all of his professional career until last season when the Kings organization made him a wing.

He had filled in here and there on defense this season, but two periods on the blue line was more time he'd seen there in a long while.

"It was weird a little bit," Deslauriers said. "My second shift, I got caught in the D-zone for maybe two minutes. But when somebody goes down, I'm always ready to help the boys there."

He ended up taking nine shifts on defense in the second and third periods.

"...[I was] not totally comfortable, but they're a great team. They have a lot of speed," he said. "Adjusting was a little hard and in the third, we were trailing, so we needed our good D-men to jump in the rush so I played less minutes. But I felt better than my first shift in the second though."

SEEING A LOT OF RUBBER

Neuvirth has faced a lot of shots in his last four games. He's stopped 138 of the last 146 shots he's faced (.945 save percentage).

The coaching staff has put him out there to give him an opportunity to grab the reigns and be the team's No. 1 goaltender moving forward.

"No one asked me. Coaches told me to play and I prepared myself the best I could," he said. "I'm happy with the way I played the last three games. It's a great opportunity to get a start and show I can play."

RECOGNIZING A GREAT LOCAL COACH

Before the game, the Sabres honored Matt English, the 2015 recipient of the J. Michael Duffett Memorial Award, which is presented each year to the coach or administrator whose contributions to amateur hockey in Western New York "best exemplify the knowledge, teaching, love of the game and gentle humanity of Mike."

English has been heavily involved in various hockey programs throughout Western New York over the last 32 years, including 28 years as a coach in the West Seneca Hockey Association. He has also served as a coach for the Buffalo Regals, the Depew Saints, West Seneca High School and SUNY Buffalo State. English's teams have routinely reached the New York State Championships and the USA Hockey Nationals.

J. Michael Duffett was a student of the game and a coach with the Buffalo Bisons and the Amherst Hockey Association. A standout player at Nichols School and Clarkson University, Duffett was working in the Sabres hockey department under Scotty Bowman and Roger Neilson at the time of his death after a battle with cancer. In 1984, the Buffalo Sabres established the J. Michael Duffett Award in his memory.

SUNDAY FUNDAY

The Sabres next play Sunday when they host the League-leading Nashville Predators at 6 p.m. The Tops Game Night pregame show begins at 5 p.m. on MSG-B and Bell. The game can also be heard live on WGR 550.

Kane ready for fresh start next season

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 21, 2015

Evander Kane admitted that it is a little strange to be focused on next season when there are still 23 games remaining on the schedule.

The Buffalo Sabres' newest offensive threat met with local media for the first time Saturday afternoon at First Niagara Center with his left arm in a sling. The former 30-goal scorer had surgery this month on his shoulder and will miss the rest of the year while he rehabs at his home in Vancouver.

"For myself, individually, it's a unique situation," he said. "I'm already looking forward to next year, but the team's still playing. So it's kind of tough to balance that a little bit. But it gives me an opportunity to get healthy and finally get my body back to where it needs to be so I can perform at my best."

Kane, 23, had been battling multiple injuries this season, the biggest perhaps, being that torn labrum in his shoulder. The surgery was a little more complicated than doctors first thought it might be – they actually found a hole in the shoulder that had to be repaired – but he expects to be fully healthy by the time training camp rolls around in September.

Buffalo acquired Kane, defenseman Zach Bogosian and goaltending prospect Jason Kasdorf from the Winnipeg Jets on Feb. 11 for Tyler Myers, Drew Stafford, prospects Joel Armia and Brendan Lemieux and a first-round pick. The Sabres expect Kane, who has 222 points (109+113) in 361 career games, to play a very large role in their future plans.

"I'm definitely excited to have a fresh start. I'm looking forward to moving on to bigger and better things here in Buffalo," Kane said. "The organization has been fantastic in how they've treated me so far and the way they've brought me in. I'm really happy. My parents are happy and that's always a good thing as well."

He played his last game for the Jets on Feb. 2 in Calgary and was scratched from their next game in what was called a "coach's decision" by Jets bench boss Paul Maurice. Not long after that, Kane elected to have shoulder surgery, ending his season.

There were rumblings in media reports of disagreements with teammates that ultimately led to the trade, but Kane called all of that speculation.

"I'm not really going into the details of what happened," Kane said. "I wasn't wearing a track suit. No. But it's something that tends to get blown out of proportion, especially playing in a Canadian market. There have been numerous things that have happened in the past that are completely false so we'll leave it at that."

Buffalo currently sits in last place in the League and will likely have a very high pick in the upcoming NHL Draft. To help accelerate the rebuild and put the team back on the winning track sooner than later is extremely appealing to him.

He already knows a few players on the team as well from playing with them at various stages of his career. He played with Chris Stewart on Canada's IIHF World Championships team in 2011 and he won gold with Tyler Ennis and Cody Hodgson at the 2009 IIHF World Junior Championship.

"Before I got to the NHL, I won at all levels. I won a lot," Kane said. "So it's definitely been tough not winning at this level. That's something I want to change for sure."

With the Sabres, he'll be counted on as a leader on the team next season and that's a role he can't wait to fill as well.

"I've been ready to do that for a while now. That's one of the exciting things that I think the opportunity in Buffalo here brings," he said. "To be able to do that, that's something I look forward to as well."

Kane was at Buffalo's game on Saturday where he was able to meet his new teammates, coach Ted Nolan and his staff and general manager Tim Murray.

He will also attend Sunday evening's game against the Nashville Predators. The Tops Game Night pregame show begins at 5:30 p.m. on MSG-B and Bell with puck drop slated for just after 6 p.m. The game can also be heard live on WGR 550.