



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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NHL fines Sabres goalie Neuvirth for diving vs. Predators

Associated Press

February 25, 2015

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — The NHL has fined Buffalo Sabres goalie Michal Neuvirth \$2,000 for diving and embellishment after drawing a penalty in a game against the Nashville Predators last weekend.

The disciplinary action announced on Wednesday was a second offense for Neuvirth. The first offense merited a warning, and occurred during a game against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Nov. 15.

Fines increase with each instance up to \$5,000 following a fifth offense.

The punishment came after the league's Hockey Operations Department reviewed an interference penalty called against Nashville's Mike Santorelli early in the second period of the Predators' 2-1 shootout win.

In a separate move, Buffalo returned rookie defenseman Jake McCabe to AHL Rochester. The Sabres had the day off, and host Vancouver on Thursday.

Canucks-Sabres preview

Associated Press

February 25, 2015

Buffalo will have to wait until next season to welcome Ryan Miller back to town. It might also be that long before Sabres All-Star Zemgus Girgensons sees the ice again.

With both injured, Miller's surging Vancouver Canucks look to conclude an already successful five-game trip with a third straight victory Thursday night against Buffalo.

Miller made 20 saves in a 5-2 win over the Sabres (18-38-5) on Jan. 30, but won't be available in his first trip to Buffalo since the club traded him to St. Louis one year ago Sunday. Miller, in his 11th season with the Sabres at the time of trade, is out a reported four to six weeks after suffering a lower-body injury in Sunday's 4-0 win over New York Islanders.

Vancouver general manager Jim Benning has not officially discussed the extent of Miller's injury, but Jacob Markstrom was called up from the AHL to back up Eddie Lack, who made 40 saves in Tuesday's 2-1 victory over Boston.

Markstrom has gone 12-27-5 with a 3.19 GAA in four NHL seasons but is second in the AHL with a 1.95 GAA.

"We're happy that we have that depth in our organization," said Benning, who could look to further reinforce the goaltending situation prior to Monday's trade deadline.

The Canucks (35-22-3) remain confident in Lack, who has gone 4-1-0 with a 1.95 GAA in his last seven games - five starts. He stopped 67 of 68 shots in the last two contests.

"It's good to see," said coach Willie Desjardins, whose team has won six of eight and is 3-1-0 on this eastern trip. "You like to see a guy getting hot."

Teammate Zack Kassian has been sizzling with four goals in three contests and seven of his nine on the season in nine games this month.

He has a goal and six assists in four games against Buffalo, which has dropped three straight to Vancouver.

Though Buffalo has lost five straight and 11 of 12 at home, it's looking to build on a 4-2 win at Columbus on Tuesday. The NHL's lowest-scoring team with 107 non-shootout goals, the Sabres were held to one in five of the previous six before totaling more than three for the first time in 14 contests.

However, Girgensons and linemate Tyler Ennis - the team's top two point leaders who are also tied with a club-high 15 goals - suffered lower-body injuries Tuesday. It's believed Ennis could miss a few days to a week, but Girgensons' apparent foot injury is feared to be season-ending.

"Both will be evaluated but one doesn't look very good," coach Ted Nolan said in reference to Girgensons. "We're concerned for sure. We'll cross our fingers and hope things work out."

In his second season, the 21-year-old Girgensons is second to Ennis with 30 points. He recorded a goal and an assist Tuesday prior to the injury and had an assist against Vancouver last month.

"(Girgensons has) been a big part of our team all year. It was tough to see him go down," center Cody Hodgson said.

The ex-Canuck Hodgson snapped a seven-game point drought with his third goal against the Blue Jackets. He's failed to register a point in three games against his former team.

Patching up for the stretch

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 25, 2015

Stars are showing up on injury reports instead of score sheets. Sabres goalies are being fined for diving. Jack Eichel is toasting Buffalo with a beer.

It's a crazy time in the hockey world.

When Ryan Miller's teammates visit the Sabres on Thursday, the goalie will be sitting home in Vancouver with a lower-body injury that will sideline him for four to six weeks. Chicago's Patrick Kane is out until the third round of the playoffs. Boston could be without David Krejci until the end of the playoffs start.

With the NHL season at the quarter pole and the trade deadline coming Monday, those ailments and others could impact the playoff race and the annual swap meet. Injuries are always a big story, but their impact gets magnified at this time of year.

The Canucks are hoping backup goalie Eddie Lack can help them maintain their playoff spot. Vancouver entered Wednesday night's schedule just five points ahead of Calgary for ninth place in the Western Conference. Lack will enter First Niagara Center having stopped 67 of 68 shots since inheriting the crease from Miller.

"I always thought Eddie was good," Canucks coach Willie Desjardins told reporters after Tuesday's 2-1 win in Boston. "It's good to see. You like to see a guy getting hot."

The Canucks' second-hottest player is a familiar face who had been in Desjardins' doghouse. Former Sabres forward Zack Kassian, scratched in three straight games earlier this month, has four goals in the last three outings. He has nine goals and 15 points in 35 games.

"There's still definitely things I can improve on, but it's definitely nice to get rewarded with some goals," Kassian said in Boston.

While the Canucks aren't yet panicking with Miller out, the Blackhawks are certainly sweating after getting Kane's diagnosis. The Buffalo native, who was tied for the NHL points lead, underwent surgery Wednesday for a fractured left clavicle and is out for 12 weeks.

"People pay a lot of money to watch Patrick Kane play," Blackhawks forward Kris Versteeg told reporters after Kane was cross-checked hard into the boards Tuesday against Florida. "It's never good when he's out of the lineup - not only for us, but for the league."

For the Blackhawks to still be playing when Kane gets healthy, they'll need help at forward. Former first-round pick Teuvo Teravainen is the short-term answer, but the 20-year-old has just two goals and four points in 18 NHL games. Kane's injury could force the Blackhawks to look toward Buffalo forward Chris Stewart. Chicago, which is regularly near the salary cap, would prefer a pending unrestricted free agent like Stewart to avoid monetary problems next season.

Boston is likely still interested in Stewart. Though the Bruins wanted the forward to slide into a spot next to Krejci, they need someone to replace his offense. The center has seven goals and 26 points in 38 games for the Bruins, who are just two points ahead of the Panthers for the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

The Sabres need two forwards to join Stewart in the lineup Thursday. Zemgus Girgensons and Tyler Ennis are expected to be out after suffering lower-body injuries Tuesday. The Sabres took Wednesday off, so updates were unavailable.

The most likely callup from Rochester, Mikhail Grigorenko, is hurt. He hasn't played since suffering a knee injury Jan. 30. Tim Schaller, Phil Varone and Zac Dalpe head the Amerks' healthy forward list.

Buffalo goaltender Michal Neuvirth will enter the crease with \$2,000 less in his bank account. The NHL fined Neuvirth that amount Wednesday for repeated diving/embellishment. The league's hockey operations department nailed Neuvirth for drawing a goaltender interference call against Nashville's Mike Santorelli on Sunday.

The league began a crackdown against diving this season, and hockey ops issued a warning to Neuvirth following an incident Nov. 15 against Toronto. Sunday's second citation drew the fine.

Meanwhile, a possible future member of the Sabres has drawn attention to his off-ice activities. Eichel, an 18-year-old freshman at Boston University who is slated to be one of the top two picks in the NHL Draft, has been recorded drunkenly saying, "Buffalo, I'm coming for ya." He followed the proclamation by chugging a beer.

The video was first posted by the Sport Junkies. A Western New York native who represents the Sport Junkies told The Buffalo News in an email that the video was recorded during a Snapchat conversation and kept by a colleague. The Sport Junkies also have a video of Eichel drinking beer this week out of the Beanpot, a prestigious trophy awarded to the team that wins a college tournament featuring Boston's teams.

Eichel, who has 16 goals and 34 assists, leads the NCAA with 50 points in 30 games. Based on NHL Draft Lottery odds, the Sabres have an 80 percent chance of selecting Eichel if they retain their 30th-place standing.

Sabres send McCabe back to Rochester; two Amerks forwards expected in Buffalo on Thursday

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 25, 2015

With the Sabres off Wednesday and Rochester hosting Syracuse, Buffalo has sent defenseman Jake McCabe back to the Amerks.

McCabe played two games for Buffalo, recording four hits, two shots and a blocked shot while averaging 11:07 of ice time.

Whether McCabe returns will depend on the health of defenseman Tyson Strachan, who has missed two games with an infection. If Strachan is able to play Thursday when Vancouver visits First Niagara Center, the Sabres would have seven healthy blue-liners and no need for McCabe.

Buffalo is expected to recall two forwards Thursday because of injuries to Zemgus Girgensons and Tyler Ennis. Mikhail Grigorenko would have been the most likely candidate, but he hasn't played since Jan. 30 due to a knee injury. Phil Varone, Zac Dalpe and Tim Schaller are possibilities.

His scoring touch revived, Dalpe heading to Sabres

By Kevin Oklobzija

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

February 25, 2015

It's just like riding a bike, or so they say about so many things in life.

Once you learn the skill, you never lose it.

Zac Dalpe may, however, beg to differ, and his season with the Rochester Americans provides a pretty strong argument in his favor.

Well, he had been with the Amerks through Wednesday night. He's now headed to Buffalo. Dalpe and center Phil Varone are expected to join the parent Buffalo Sabres for Thursday's home game against the Vancouver Canucks.

For Dalpe, the promotion is his second of the season. He played in the Jan. 13 game against the Detroit Red Wings.

He very much earned this promotion. His goal in Wednesday's 4-3 victory over the Syracuse Crunch gave him a team-leading 16. Nine of those have come in his past 13 games.

"I think I'm kind of back to my old self," he said.

In other words, Dalpe is the player the organization expected him to be all along. He was signed as a free agent in July to spearhead the Amerks offense while at the same time providing depth for Sabres.

As an American Hockey League rookie in 2010-11, he was nearly a point-a-game player while scoring 23 goals for the Charlotte Checkers. In 2012-13, he found the net 21 times in only 54 games for Charlotte.

But for the first three months this season, Dalpe was a solid but not dominant player. Shots just missed the net. He wasn't always using his blazing speed to attack wide or to force defensemen into panic passes. Little things just didn't click often enough.

Which is why he produced only seven goals in his first 31 games.

Perhaps, however, scoring goals isn't like riding a bike. Maybe you can lose it, especially the feel and the timing. He spent last season playing 55 games for the Vancouver Canucks but averaged just over seven minutes of ice time per game.

Believe me, he's not complaining that he had the NHL gig. But playing in a fourth-line checking/energy role for coach John Tortorella isn't easy.

"You don't ever want to justify things," Dalpe said, "but sometimes you get programmed to do certain things in a role and you do it.

"You're in a fourth-line role sometimes and you get nervous to make plays and you're nervous to turn the puck over, and you kind of get away from it."

Thus, the next season, when your new team expects instant offense, and you're pressing to produce, you end up stuck in neutral.

"Sometimes we don't realize how hard it is when you only play six minutes a night and all you do is get it out of the zone and then go forecheck," Amerks coach Chadd Cassidy said.

"But we've really seen him develop into the player we wanted him to be from the start."

His goal was classic Dalpe speed. William Carrier fought through Tanner Richard on the left-wing to enter the Crunch zone and then passed to the goal mouth to connect with a sprinting Dalpe.

Brayden Irwin scored a pair of goals for the Amerks, giving him 13 in only 43 games and Jerome Leduc scored the other.

"It was nice," Dalpe said, "to get a team-effort win."

Sabres' GM Murray on plan for Amerks: 'I want to win'

By Kevin Oklobzija

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

February 25, 2015

Buffalo Sabres general manager Tim Murray said that the Rochester Americans' place in the standings is "disappointing" and maintained that winning at the American Hockey League level does matter.

"Winning's important to development," Murray said on Wednesday night at Blue Cross Arena at the War Memorial, when he and many of the team's scouts watched the Amerks 4-3 victory over the Syracuse Crunch.

"We're not in a playoff spot and it's disappointing, and there's multiple different reasons for that, and we'll sit down at the end of the year and discuss that and evaluate that."

The Amerks sit 13th in the AHL's Western Conference. They are eight points out of a playoff spot, but every team above them has played at least three fewer games and they have virtually no chance of leap-frogging five to earn a post-season bid.

That's especially true since right winger Zac Dalpe, their leading goal-scorer, and center Phil Varone, their top play-maker, are joining the Sabres for Thursday's game against the Vancouver Canucks.

What's most alarming about the Amerks: they haven't won a playoff series since 2004-05, an remarkable stretch of 10 years of ineptitude.

How remarkable: Just two other AHL teams are in the same no-series-wins boat over that span, the Bridgeport Sound Tigers and Lake Erie Monsters. (I eliminated from consideration three new franchises: Adirondack, Utica and Lehigh Valley but included the Iowa Wild based on the previous Iowa Stars franchise. Still, just three of 27 teams have failed to give their fans some springtime playoff thrills.)

Murray's reaction: "I just got here; I can't speak to the history. I want to win."

It's obviously true that only this season is really on Murray. He came on board with the Sabres in November of 2013, so he had little to do with the Amerks roster in 2013-14.

This team, however, is all his. They've been mediocre all season.

In today's AHL, there will always be prospects filling most roster spots. But next season, in order to find a way to win with the Amerks, Murray said he'll pursue better veteran depth players.

"We have to go out and find a couple top-end guys, spend a little more money," Murray said. "Whether that's a high (dollar) AHL deal or a two-way deal with a guarantee, that seems to be these days the only way to find good vets to stay here (in the AHL as opposed to bolting for Europe)."

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Goalie Matt Hackett started again and was sharp again, stopping 27 shots in the victory over Syracuse. He made 37 saves in a 5-1 win at Lake Erie on Tuesday.

It's the first time he started on back-to-back days this season, something neither he nor the organization wanted him to do in the early weeks of his comeback. He underwent knee reconstruction in May.

Since Tuesday was a 10:45 a.m. game, he did have a tad bit more recovery time before Wednesday night's game. He said he felt good.

He made a critical save in the first period, with the score 0-0, sliding across to rob Joel Vermin who was shooting at what had been an empty net.

"I went to poke-check and missed it so I had to do the two-pad stack," he said. "It was a bit of an old-school save. Like 'Bags' (injured defenseman Drew Bagnall) said, it was Billy Ranford."

Hackett will very likely start Friday's home game against the Toronto Marlies, and could keep right on playing if he's making saves. The Amerks play just twice next week (at Utica Wednesday, at Hamilton Friday) and once the following week (home against Hamilton on March 13). That's not enough action to keep one goalie sharp, let alone two.

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Defenseman Jake McCabe came back from the Sabres in the afternoon and played 25 minutes, 50 seconds. Partner Chad Ruhwedel played a game-high 30:02.

McCabe made a brave (but may not so wise) block of a Dylan Blujus slap shot just as the first period was nearing an end. He attacked the shooter by moving far out to the top of the circle. He was struck on the left knee and hobbled off the ice and right to the dressing room.

But when the second period started, McCabe was on the ice.

"We have enough padding but when it catches you in the wrong spot it hurts," McCabe said. "You have to sacrifice. A lot of guys were sacrificing."

McCabe played in games Sunday and Tuesday for the Sabres and finally tasted victory, the 4-2 win at Columbus Tuesday night. The Sabres were winless during his end-of-year seven-game stint last season.

"I got a win this year, that's the first difference I can think of," he said with a smile. "You have your first game in the NHL once so there were not as many jitters this time and that was probably the biggest difference."

Injury-riddled Canucks meet shorthanded Sabres

By Evan Sporer

NHL.com

February 25, 2015

CANUCKS (35-22-3) AT SABRES (18-38-5)

TV: SNP, MSG-B, BELL TV

Season series: Twelve Vancouver Canucks had a point in a 5-2 win against the Buffalo Sabres at Rogers Arena, sending the Sabres to their 14th straight regulation loss on Jan. 30. Dan Hamhuis and Henrik Sedin each had two assists for the Canucks. Chris Stewart scored the goals for the Sabres.

Canucks team scope: Since replacing injured Ryan Miller, goalie Eddie Lack has been nearly perfect. He's stopped 67 of 68 shots in four-plus periods, and the Canucks have gone 2-0-0 (Lack has gone 1-0-0). Forward Nick Bonino returned Monday after missing the past seven games because of a lower-body injury. The Canucks are without defensemen Alexander Edler, Kevin Bieksa, Christopher Tanev and Frank Corrado.

Sabres team scope: Forwards Tyler Ennis and Zemgus Girgensons each left the game Tuesday against the Columbus Blue Jackets with an injury. Though Ennis may miss a few days with a lower-body injury, Girgensons, who blocked a shot with his foot, could be lost for the season, according to the Buffalo News. "It doesn't look very good," coach Ted Nolan said after the game. The Sabres are already down two defensemen: Josh Gorges (out for the season) and Mike Weber (out for the next two weeks). "It's tough, no doubt," forward Cody Hodgson said, according to the Buffalo News. "Zemgus has been a big part of our team all year and it was tough to see him go down, both him and Tyler."

Former Sabres prospect Alex Biega living NHL dream with Canucks

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 25, 2015

BUFFALO – Alex Biega had finally cracked an NHL roster. For 10 days in December, the defenseman earned a fatter paycheck and practiced with the Vancouver Canucks.

But, oddly enough, the 26-year-old former Sabres prospect never played. He got tantalizingly close to game action once, dressing for the pregame warm-up.

"It wasn't frustrating, but I guess I was antsy just to get in," Biega said by phone Wednesday after the Canucks landed in Buffalo. "I wanted to get that opportunity to play. But at the same time, I had a positive frame of mind, and I knew that if you just kept doing the right things and kept keeping the eye on the prize, it would ultimately happen."

Biega earned another recall from Utica earlier this month, and he debuted Feb. 16, scoring the winning goal in the Canucks' 3-2 win against Minnesota.

"It was just one of those things where you put your whole life into something and to reach a level, I was just so focused and dialed in, when it actually did go in, I had maybe a three-second delay," Biega said.

Biega paid plenty of dues, playing 313 AHL contests in five seasons, including 198 under the Sabres, before dressing for an NHL game. The Harvard graduate, the 147th pick by the Sabres in 2006, will play his sixth NHL game tonight inside the First Niagara Center.

"You kind of have to stop and look up once in a while and realize that you're living your dream and you're making it happen," Biega said. "In that sense, it's been great, and it's definitely been something I've been enjoying every day."

Bigger defense prospects – both in prestige and physical size – blocked the 5-foot-10 Biega with the Sabres. Still, he enjoyed a regular role playing for AHL affiliates in Portland and Rochester.

"Buffalo had some great defensive prospects in T.J. Brennan, (Brayden) McNabb, (Mark) Pysyk, Joe Finley," he said. "All those guys got NHL games before me. Looking back at it, all those guys are my buddies and I really enjoyed playing with them. I thought I was definitely really close (to a recall)."

Biega got real close when the Sabres ran out of defensemen late in 2012-13. It appeared he would be summoned from the Americans. Instead, the Sabres signed Chad Ruhwedel out of the NCAA and played him the same day.

Biega signed with Vancouver on the first day of free agency in 2013.

"You definitely go through adversity," he said. "I've learned a lot in (that) league. To me, I look at my years in the AHL not as a waste whatsoever. ... The AHL is meant to be a development league. I really took that to heart, and I was blessed to have some great coaches throughout my career."

Biega just needed an opportunity to showcase his talents.

"It's a matter of getting your foot in the door," he said. "That's a hard part. But the hardest part is staying here and being a full-time NHLer. My first goal was accomplished getting the first game. Now it's moving on to ... making a career here."

The Sabres sent defenseman Jake McCabe back to Rochester on Wednesday, meaning Nikita Zadorov will likely return from a two-game benching tonight. McCabe played twice during his first recall this season.

Sabres coach Ted Nolan sat Zadorov because the 19-year-old was late to a team meeting Sunday morning.

The Sabres had Wednesday off, so they had no updates on center Zemgus Girgensons and winger Tyler Ennis, who both left Tuesday's 4-2 win in Columbus with lower-body injuries.

Girgensons could be done for the season after blocking a shot with his right ankle. Ennis seems to be day-to-day with wear and tear, Nolan said.

The Sabres need to recall two forwards.

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The NHL on Wednesday fined Sabres goalie Michal Neuvirth \$2,000 for diving/embellishment in Sunday's 2-1 shootout loss to Nashville.

The league warned Neuvirth following an incident in the Sabres' 6-2 win over Toronto on Nov. 15. A second citation was issued for an incident 2:23 into the second period Sunday. Mike Santorelli was penalized for goalie interference on the play.

Murray: Wednesday was busiest since Kane trade

By Matthew Collier

WGR 550

February 25, 2015

ROCHESTER, NY (WGR 550) -- Buffalo Sabres' General Manager Tim Murray was in attendance at Wednesday night's Rochester Americans game against the Syracuse Crunch.

Speaking with WGR and the Democrat and Chronicle in Rochester in between periods, Murray said he received "three or four" phone calls from teams regarding trades.

Murray said on Hockey Hotline on WGR Monday that the phones had been quiet. Trade action picked up around the NHL on Wednesday as Andrej Sekera and Jiri Tlustý were both moved by Carolina.

The Sabres' GM also noted that the team would "like to move forward with upcoming RFA Tim Schaller. The 24 year old made his debut this season and has 38 points in 53 games

Regarding the recent call up of Mark Pysyk, Murray said he has been impressed with the former first round pick's progress.

"We have high expectations," he said.

The trade deadline is next Monday. WGR will have all day coverage.

College hockey report

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 25, 2015

RIT TIGERS (13-14-5 overall, 12-9-5 Atlantic Hockey)

RIT went into the weekend against Robert Morris wanting to give the No. 19 team in the country "a little adversity." That's exactly what the Tigers did; falling seconds shy of a point in a 4-3 loss on Friday and then battling back for a 4-3 victory on Saturday at the Gene Polisseni Center.

The Tigers were sitting pretty midway through the game on Friday, leading the Colonials 3-1 thanks to goals from Josh Mitchell, Max Mikowski and Chase Norrish.

But what appeared to be a big win in the making turned quickly into a heartbreaker: Robert Morris scored towards the end of the second period and again early in the third. Then star player Cory Wydo delivered the finishing blow with only 10 seconds remaining in regulation.

"There's no question it was tough," Tigers head coach Wayne Wilson said. "We're looking for another shot on goal to possibly try and win it with 10, 12 seconds left and they pick it off and they send a guy on a breakaway and score. And it's over.

"That just made the next night that much more special when we responded because I didn't know how we were going to respond to that."

RIT found itself on the opposite side of the table on Saturday night. This time, they were the ones trailing 3-1 midway through the second period. However, the Tigers were saved by their top line – which has carried them all season – and Atlantic Hockey Player of the Week Brad McGowan in particular.

McGowan, who had already assisted on RIT's first goal, responded to the Colonials' third goal with one of his own. He tallied again on the power play later in the second period. He then secured the win – and the natural hat trick – with a third goal in the final period.

The Tigers enter their final weekend of the regular season with much to play for. A pair of wins will secure home ice in the Atlantic Hockey quarterfinals while a couple of losses could cost them a first-round bye.

They'll decide their fate at home against the team that sits directly in front of them in the standings, Mercyhurst.

Upcoming Games

- February 27 vs. Mercyhurst (7:05 p.m., Gene Polisseni Center)
- February 28 vs. Mercyhurst (7:05 p.m., Gene Polisseni Center)

CANISIUS COLLEGE GOLDEN GRIFFINS (15-10-7 overall, 14-6-6 Atlantic Hockey)

The Griffs came into their weekend series with Mercyhurst in danger of losing a first-round bye after having won only one of their past four games against Army and Robert Morris. Canisius responded in a big way, sweeping the Lakers 4-2 on Friday and 3-1 on Saturday.

In the process, they jumped to second in the Atlantic Hockey standings and clinched home ice in the quarterfinal round of the playoffs.

"They proved to me that 10 seniors that have been on this path before are in tune with what it takes to prepare for the weekend," Canisius head coach Dave Smith said. "And last week on Tuesday they came and said 'Hey,

Coach, we're ready, we're ready to go, let's just make sure we're not overtired or fatigued and let play,' And we did, and they took care of business."

Friday night's game at Mercyhurst began in familiar fashion, with sophomore Shane Conacher opening the scoring with his 10th goal of the season.

Mercyhurst evened the score later in the first, but the Griffs pulled away as the game went on thanks to goals from Chris Rumble, Mitch McCrank and Ralph Cuddemi. Mercyhurst outshot Canisius 37-27, but senior goaltender Keegan Asmundson was solid in net with 35 saves.

Canisius allowed Mercyhurst to score the first goal on Saturday, but Ralph Cuddemi responded with his 20th of the season just one minute later, capturing momentum that the Griffs would never relinquish.

McCrank added a goal and Cuddemi capped off the night with another of his own in the win. Senior captain Doug Jessey blocked two shots to build on a five-block performance on Friday, earning him Atlantic Hockey Defender of the Week honors.

"Doug Jessey is a physical beast," Smith said. "He will battle true to the end on any play and you get near him and there are arms and legs and you just get a battle and Doug's mentality has rubbed off on a lot of guys."

With the win, Canisius improved to 7-1-1 in its past nine games against Mercyhurst. The Griffs will finish their season this weekend with a pair of road games against Air Force. A sweep will clinch the second seed in the conference.

Upcoming Games

- February 27 @ Air Force (9:05 p.m.)
- February 28 @ Air Force (7:05 p.m.)

NIAGARA UNIVERSITY PURPLE EAGLES (4-24-4 overall, 4-18-4 Atlantic Hockey)

When the Purple Eagles finally won, they won big. Niagara snapped its 18-game winless streak with a convincing 6-1 win at home against Air Force and then stormed back the following night to earn a 4-4 tie. Senior Isaac Kohls led the way with four points on the weekend.

Kohls opened the scoring early on Friday and then the Purple Eagles followed with three more unanswered goals from Stanislav Dzakhov, Matt Chartrain and Dan Kolenda. By the time Air Force got on the board with a power play goal in the third period, it was too late. TJ Sarcona rounded out the scoring with a pair of goals shortly after.

"It wasn't pretty, but we just outworked Air Force, who is known for their work ethic," Niagara Head Coach Dave Burkholder said. "We scored five of our six goals right at the top of the crease, getting our rebounds and being tough in the dirty areas."

The Niagara players celebrated the win, but the next night it seemed like their fortunes may have reverted back to where they had found themselves so often before. With less than five minutes to play in the second period, Niagara found themselves behind 4-1 in a game that was all but over.

But Kohls ignited the team yet again, scoring late in the period to bring Niagara within two heading into the final frame.

Brock Edwards inched them closer with a goal to begin the third period and later, with less than three minutes to play in the third period, Keegan Harper found the back of the net to complete the comeback.

"When you look up at the scoreboard and you're down 4-1 and you've given up 12 shots, you would think you wouldn't have a chance," Burkholder said. "But to rally and comeback like we did Saturday night was a testament to our guys and I think saved our season.

"If we don't follow up Friday night with a gutsy performance like we did Saturday, it was for naught. So I think we can build off of what was a huge weekend for us."

The Purple Eagles are locked into one of the bottom two seeds for the Atlantic Hockey playoffs, but the win may have come at a perfect time – with only one week to play in the regular season, they have the opportunity to carry the momentum into the postseason.

Doing so, however, will not be easy. Niagara closes out its regular season this weekend with a home-and-home series against No. 19 Robert Morris.

Upcoming Games

- February 27 vs. Robert Morris (7 p.m., Dwyer Arena)
- February 28 @ Robert Morris (7 p.m.)

BUFFALO STATE BENGALS (11-11-3 overall, 7-6-3 SUNYAC)

Buffalo State closed out its regular season with a 4-1 win over Brockport and a 4-4 tie against Geneseo, but fell short of their ultimate goal of securing home ice for the first round of the SUNYAC playoffs.

Instead, the Bengals will open their postseason at Potsdam on Wednesday night.

Sophomore goaltender Mike DeLaVergne was excellent in net on Friday for a Bengals team that won despite being outshot 41-18. DeLaVergne made 40 saves and his offense capitalized heavily in a third period in a game that was scoreless through two periods.

Jason Zaleski finally opened the scoring early in that third period, but Brockport responded quickly to tie it again. The Bengals eventually closed out the game when Zach Nieminen and Ryan Salkeld scored within one minute of each other later in the period.

On Saturday, all the scoring came sooner rather than later. Each team scored three times in the first period. Taylor Price scored shorthanded and again on the power play while Marcus Michalski added another for Buff State.

Geneseo scored again on the power play early in the second period – their third power play goal of the game – but the Bengals responded again, this time with a goal from Nieminen.

The offense stopped there with the two teams playing scoreless hockey beyond the second period's halfway point.

The Bengals will face a postseason opponent in Potsdam that they've had recent success against – they beat the Bears 5-3 at Buffalo State Ice Arena on Feb. 7 after falling to Potsdam early in the season. Should they win, their next game will be on Feb. 28 at the home ice of the higher-seeded opponent.

Upcoming Games

- February 25 @ Potsdam (7 p.m.)