



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*February 5, 2015*

## **Blues-Sabres Preview**

**By Staff Report**

**Associated Press**

**February 4, 2015**

With Brian Elliott playing well in goal and Jaden Schwartz leading the attack, the St. Louis Blues are close to breaking a team record as they continue to rise in the standings.

There's little reason to believe they can't keep it going against the Buffalo Sabres, who haven't won at home since late December.

Elliott can extend his dominance of the league-worst Sabres on Thursday night and help the Blues set a franchise mark by earning at least a point in a 13th consecutive game.

St. Louis (33-13-4) sat nine points back of the league's top mark after losing six of seven Dec. 18-Jan. 2. Since then, the Blues have been the NHL's hottest team with an 11-0-1 record that's moved them within two points of Nashville and Anaheim.

It's the third time they've earned points in 12 straight contests but first since 2000.

The Blues have gone 16-0-1 in their last 17 games when Schwartz has been on the ice - a surge that began prior to the left wing's seven-game stretch on injured reserve due to a foot injury. He has nine goals and nine assists in his last 15 games after scoring in overtime of Tuesday's 2-1 home victory over Tampa Bay.

Vladimir Tarasenko, who has team highs with 26 goals and 51 points, scored for the second straight game.

"If we can keep it close, we usually find a way to do something at the end of the game," said Elliott, who stopped 30 shots in his fifth straight win and had an assist on Schwartz's winner.

St. Louis has also defeated Toronto, Colorado, Nashville and Washington during its longest win streak since a seven-game run Oct. 25-Nov. 6. Since Jan. 3, the club has scored an NHL-high 4.0 goals per game after it averaged 2.84 entering that stretch.

It's certainly been enough support for Elliott, who has taken hold of the No. 1 goaltender spot by going 11-2-1 with a 1.88 goals-against average in his last 16.

Elliott has gone 10-0-2 with a 1.56 GAA in 12 career starts against the Sabres dating to his time with Ottawa. He had 28 saves in a 6-1 home win Nov. 11 and is also 4-0-0 with a 1.75 GAA in four outings at Buffalo.

The Blues have won five in a row and 15 of 17 against a Sabres club trying to avoid a sixth consecutive home defeat.

Buffalo (15-33-3), however, will try to build on Tuesday's 3-2 win in Montreal that snapped a franchise-record, 14-game losing streak that followed a 4-3 shootout win at home over the New York Islanders on Dec. 27.

"I hope it allows us to relax a bit," defenseman Josh Gorges said. "Just go out and play. Not think about all the bad things that could happen. Just go out there and play the game, have some fun doing it and, hopefully, get some confidence back."

Drew Stafford, Matt Moulson and Brian Gionta provided first-period goals after the Sabres had scored three or more times only twice over the course of a slide that fell three losses short of the NHL record.

Jonas Enroth made 32 saves while ending a personal eight-game skid. He could face the Blues for the first time in the opener of a five-game homestand after Michal Neuvirth allowed six goals on 29 shots in St. Louis.

The Blues will be without Kevin Shattenkirk (abdominal), while Jori Lehtera (concussion) and Patrik Berglund (shoulder) are also injured as they look to improve on a Western Conference-best 14-3-2 record versus Eastern opponents.

"We're missing three significant parts and it has to be absorbed throughout the lineup," coach Ken Hitchcock said. "Our whole team dynamic has changed. What was a fourth line is now a third line. Shatty played both ends of special teams and played five-on-five against top players. It's going to have to be absorbed throughout the group."

## **For Sabres, fresh start or return to losing ways?**

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

February 4, 2015

Winning streak or new losing streak?

With the prospect of an NHL record for futility now off the table, that's the scenario as the Buffalo Sabres return to First Niagara Center for an extended stretch of games.

If they can somehow beat the red-hot St. Louis Blues downtown Thursday night, it would give them their first back-to-back victories since they won four straight from Dec. 9-15. Since then, however, the Sabres have gone 2-17-1.

There was palpable relief in the dressing room of the Bell Centre following Buffalo's 3-2 win over the Montreal Canadiens on Tuesday night. It snapped the Sabres' losing streak at 14 games and left them three away from tying the all-time NHL record of 17.

"To be truthful the last 3-4 games we've been slowly starting to get better," coach Ted Nolan said afterward. "These guys for the vast majority of the time, they've been giving us what they have to give. Sometimes we're getting outskilled on certain nights, and getting 'out-experienced' on certain nights. But the effort the vast majority of the time has been there. To see them win tonight was great."

The Sabres took a CBA-mandated off day on Wednesday, staying off the ice for the first time since the All-Star break ended. They'll be back at it during their pregame skate Thursday morning.

"It's been a frustrating couple of weeks, no doubt," defenseman Josh Gorges said after Tuesday's win. "We've had games where we've played well in spurts but always seem to find a way to beat ourselves. We had mental lapses that had cost us.

"You get in those situations, you become a little bit of a fragile team, especially with how young a team we are. Any time any kind of adversity hit us in the course of the game, we seemed to crumble. To get this win takes a little bit of weight off. It's big for our confidence."

Thursday's game opens a five-game homestand. Lindy Ruff and the Dallas Stars are here Saturday night, followed by a late-afternoon meeting Sunday with the New York Islanders. Ottawa comes to town Tuesday and the stretch ends with a nationally televised game Feb. 15 against Philadelphia.

Thursday's game figures to be a huge challenge as the Blues are 11-0-1 in their last 12, tying the franchise mark for points in consecutive games. They're coming off Tuesday's 2-1 overtime victory over Tampa Bay, their sixth straight win. St. Louis is without All-Star defenseman Kevin Shattenkirk, who is facing abdominal surgery from an injury suffered Sunday in Washington.

At the time of his injury, Shattenkirk was leading NHL blueliners with 32 assists and was second in overall points (40) and power-play points (24).

...

Thursday's game will also mark the return of former Sabres captain Steve Ott to Buffalo. He was traded to St. Louis along with Ryan Miller on Feb. 28, 2014, and has played against his old team twice in Scottrade Center but has yet to return to the FNC.

Ott has scored just two goals for the Blues in 72 games since the trade and did not score in his first 54 games with the team. He went the first 31 games this season before tallying Dec. 20 at San Jose and then scored his other goal Friday at Nashville.

Ott, who had his No. 14 retired last month by the Ontario Hockey League's Windsor Spitfires, is playing on the fourth line with newly acquired center Marcel Goc and fellow winger Ryan Reaves. Miller met the Sabres for the first time last week in Vancouver and will play his return game here with the Canucks on Feb. 26.

...

The Sabres returned goaltender Matt Hackett to Rochester on Wednesday, meaning Michal Neuvirth should be ready to go for the upcoming stretch. Hackett stopped 33 of 37 shots Friday at Vancouver in his first NHL game in nearly 10 months following major knee surgery. He's 1-2 with a 3.10 goals-against average in three games for the Amerks.

...

The Sabres have teamed with the non-profit Cell Phones for Soldiers organization on a collection drive of gently used mobile phones. It will start at Thursday's game and continue through Tuesday's visit by Ottawa. Donations can also be made at the FNC box office during business hours.

Fans that donate phones will receive a coupon for 25 Fan Advantage points, redeemable for prizes from the store in the team's smartphone application. For every donated phone, Cell Phones for Soldiers is able to provide 2½ hours of free talk time for deployed troops.

## **Do right by Ted Nolan – fire him**

By Jerry Sullivan

Buffalo News

February 4, 2015

Sufferin' succotash! On Tuesday, the Sabres actually won a game for the first time in the New Year. In regulation, no less. Boy, it must have sent a chill up the spines of the tanking crowd, who are probably terrified that the miracle in Montreal will propel their antiheroes on a hot streak like the one last fall.

Well, I wouldn't worry. They won, sure. That's hockey, where goalies get hot and the far superior team sometimes goes unrewarded. But watching the Sabres protect a one-goal lead in the third period, you realized just how overmatched they are, and how they could challenge the NHL record for consecutive regulation losses.

That third period would have been an astonishing sight, except it has become commonplace this season. They looked like a panicked pee wee team. They had a minus-37 Corsi rating in the third period. I'm no expert in Corsi, which calculates the differential in respective shots directed toward the net.

But minus-37 in one period? That's about as likely as the temperature being minus-37 in Phoenix in July.

But again, a win is a win. You have to treasure these rare, uplifting moments. Tonight, they have a chance for their first regulation home win since Dec. 11. But there's no telling how long this bunch might go between victories.

So they should do the honorable thing and fire coach Ted Nolan right now. Send him out on a high note, after a signature road victory. Put the poor soul out of his misery and bring in some other sap to stand behind the bench and pretend the organization wants to finish above 30th place.

This is not a malicious cry, but a merciful one. I like Nolan. I know what he can do with a team that's genuinely motivated. It was on display for the world a year ago in Sochi, where Nolan led Latvia to its first-ever Olympic quarterfinal berth and came within five minutes of a stunning upset of Canada in the quarters.

"We're going to turn this thing around in Buffalo also, under the leadership of Pat LaFontaine," Nolan told me after the Latvians beat the Swiss in Russia. "We just got there. It's going to be a good ride."

LaFontaine resigned 10 days later. So much for his good ride. Nolan's boss and champion, the man who brought him back to town, was gone. You figured that it would only be a matter of time before Ted joined him, before General Manager Tim Murray brought in his own guy to coach.

There's no crime in that. New GMs almost always choose their own coaches. When Murray came to Buffalo, I asked if there was someone out there, some rising young coach he had identified for the job. Naturally, Murray issued the proper diplomatic response. He said Nolan was "his guy" for now.

Hiring Nolan was a shrewd PR move by Terry Pegula. He served as a happy pill for a disaffected fan base, a distraction from the carnage of the Darcy Regier regime. But the Ted Nolan standing behind the Sabres bench today has the look of a beaten man, a forlorn figure who must know that his time here is short.

Murray will bring in his own coach at some point, perhaps as soon as this offseason. He has every right. Nolan has not gotten much out of this team. In most NHL cities, a coach would not survive a 14-game losing streak, or a goal differential that is on pace to be the second-worst in league history.

Of course, it's not as if Murray has done a lot to help his coach. His free-agent acquisitions have performed like overpriced veterans coasting into retirement. What do you expect from players who know that the real objective of the season is losing enough games to ensure getting one of the top two picks in the draft?

It's sad to watch a man of Nolan's character go through this, coaching for an organization that is packaging historic failure as a strategic plan. Nolan often talks with pride about his native culture. I doubt the Native American culture finds any nobility in losing on purpose.

Most fans were outraged when Nolan was shoved out after the Sabres won their division in 1997. The firing touched the community's conscience. But where's the sense of conscience about the way Nolan is being treated now, serving as a placeholder for the next coach while Murray presides over a tank job?

Bringing Nolan back after all these years was seen as an atonement for past deeds. But this is like compounding the insult. They took Nolan's team away 17 years ago when it was becoming a Cup contender. They gave it back so he could have the dubious privilege of coaching the worst team in franchise history.

It's some way to show your admiration. The Sabres say they're not tanking. But Murray has done nothing to show he wants to succeed on the ice. He didn't make any trades or roster moves of consequence. And he didn't fire his head coach, which would be understandable if he wanted to get a rise out of his team.

They're laughing at the Sabres around the NHL. I agree with Mike Harrington. It's an open disgrace. There's nothing smart or noble about becoming one of the worst teams in NHL history. Terry Pegula should be embarrassed. But the tanking advocates make it out to be some master plan, even a daily entertainment.

Far from me to tell people how to spend their hard-earned money, but the idea that people cling to season tickets because they're afraid to get shut out when the good times roll is pathetic. That's what happens when you accept a lower standard of your sports teams, when you're grateful simply to have them.

Maybe it will all work out. The Sabres have some promising young players. Presumably, if they get Jack Eichel or Connor McDavid in the draft they'll have a superstar to build around. But Murray has to do a lot of work to make them a playoff team before 2018. Anyone who thinks otherwise is delusional.

Whatever the case, Nolan won't be around to see it. That's fine, because I feel the same way as I did in 1997, that he deserves better than this.

## **Roth: Sabres find light at end of long, dark tunnel**

By Leo Roth

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

February 4, 2015

When a team upends the storied Montreal Canadiens to snap a 14-game losing streak, the euphoria can feel like winning Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Finals.

The Buffalo Sabres, slogging through a second consecutive season of epic losing with only the hope of a better tomorrow to carry them through until morning, took a 3-1 lead over Montreal Tuesday night, then held on for a 3-2 victory.

And I do mean held on.

The third period felt like one extended Canadiens power play with the puck in Buffalo's end nearly the entire time. With Montreal holding a 15-3 edge in shots, the ice in the Canadiens' end looked freshly resurfaced by game's end.

The pleasure in watching the Sabres is the same one gets when running five miles in the dead of winter: You're going to appreciate the results when the pain ends. And while standards are lowered during a rebuilding process, that doesn't mean it's not fun to watch, especially on a night when goalie Jhonas Enroth is making saves from the seat of his pants — literally — or without his stick.

With 5:28 left and Buffalo protecting its one-goal lead like a family escaping a burning house, the puck got knocked into the air and fluttered just above Enroth's shoulders, from one post to the other, coming to rest smack on the goal line before the net was knocked off.

If the hockey gods wanted Buffalo's losing streak to hit 15 games, that puck would've landed inside the net.

But not on this night.

On this night, Montreal goalie Carey Price, one of the best in the game who hadn't allowed more than two goals in his previous 16 starts, allowed three in the first period. He went 3-0-0 last week with a 0.66 goals against average and .980 save percentage. In other words, the Sabres' Drew Stafford, Matt Moulson and Brian Gionta (off a skate unassisted for his 47th career game-winning goal) got three pucks through a key hole.

In the frantic last minute, ex-Canadiens Gionta and Josh Gorges, as solid a pair of professionals as you can find, were on the ice for Buffalo, a nice piece of message sending by coach Ted Nolan.

"It's always great and struggling as we are, you want to have your best game and compete," Gionta, the Greece native, said of facing his old team on the post-game TV broadcast.

The Sabres needed this win, just to show there is light at the end of every long tunnel. Buffalo was flirting with NHL history: Their losing streak ended three games shy of the NHL record of 17 games by the expansion 1974-75 Washington Capitals and tied by the second-year 1992-93 San Jose Sharks.

The Sabres (15-33-3) went 3-0-1 against Montreal (32-15-3) this season, which like Stonehenge and the Seattle Seahawks deciding to pass at the 1-yard line, can't be explained.

And the really good news?

Buffalo is still solidly in last place in the NHL standings by four points over Edmonton, meaning Connor McDavid or Jack Eichel is one game closer to wearing a Sabres uniform.

## **Dreadful Sabres season summed up in 5 stats**

By John Matisz

Toronto Sun

February 4, 2015

The Buffalo Sabres stink.

With a 15-33-3 record and not an ounce of optimism in sight, noting they "stink" might actually be understating the situation.

On Tuesday, Ted Nolan and crew snapped a 14-game losing streak by beating the Montreal Canadiens, 3-2, despite being outshot 34-18.

If the skid had continued through Sunday, the Sabres would have set a new benchmark for losses in a row by an NHL team with 18.

Even without said record in tow, the Sabres -- who have become the butt of countless jokes since the puck dropped on this season -- have positioned themselves to finish dead last.

If Buffalo keeps up its current pace (a win every 3.5 games), they'll have a 20% chance of drafting Connor McDavid first overall in June.

Don't believe me? Play the odds yourself by using this handy-dandy 2015 NHL draft simulator.

Anyway, in the spirit of reassurance, we present the following five numbers to help explain just how much the Sabres stink.

### **\$4.25M**

Centre Cody Hodgson, the fourth-highest salary cap hit among Sabres forwards at \$4.25 million this season, has managed to record only eight points in 49 games. The 24-year-old, who is supposed to be a top-six producer, was made a healthy scratch Saturday against his old team, the Vancouver Canucks.

### **.192%**

Buffalo's winning percentage through 26 road games is below the Mendoza Line (5-20-1). Before their aforementioned victory over the Canadiens at the Bell Centre, they hadn't claimed a 'W' away from home since Nov. 29. The opponent then? Oddly enough, Montreal.

### **11.4%**

The Sabres power play percentage, which ranks 30th in the league, is gross. Only two other teams, Colorado at 13% and Edmonton at 13.2%, capitalize on less than 15% of their man advantage opportunities. They're also tied with Toronto for most short-handed goals against (eight).

### **37.1%**

Even if you're a member of the anti-numbers community, it's hard to ignore Buffalo's cringe-worthy Corsi stats. They have taken the term "negative puck possession team" to new heights by allowing the opposition to attempt 63% more shots than they themselves have attempted (hence the 37.1% Corsi For %).

Minus-84 is not the combined Celsius temperatures from a few wintery days in the Arctic, it's actually the Sabres goal differential. In other words, Buffalo's team plus-minus is laughable. It turns out 14 losses by four or more goals, including a 7-0 whooping courtesy the Wild, adds up quickly.

## **Will Toronto Maple Leafs or Buffalo Sabres get the No. 1 pick? Mock NHL draft lottery website gives hope to suffering fans**

By Michael Traikos

National Post

February 4, 2015

Rob Zaenglein does not remember who won the first mock draft.

It might have been Dallas, he said. Or Philadelphia. "I know it wasn't Buffalo," Zaenglein said. "And it wasn't Toronto, because I would hate that."

As the playoffs get further out of reach for the NHL's basement dwellers — Buffalo had lost 14 straight games before beating Montreal on Tuesday and Toronto has now lost 10 straight — the NHL draft and the lottery to choose the order becomes more interesting to the fans of those teams

Zaenglein has created a site to let fans dream, at least for a few minutes, about having Connor McDavid or Jack Eichel in their team's uniform.

The NHL Lottery Simulator allows fans a real look at whether their dead-end team actually has a shot at winning the No. 1 pick. The no-frills site keeps track of the overall standings and the percentages of winning. With one click, it randomly generates one possible scenario based on the current odds.

It can be addictive. And based on how some teams are playing these days, more enjoyable than watching an actual game.

A long-time sufferer of Buffalo sports — "I'm a Bills fan too," he said — the 23-year-old web developer at the University of Buffalo created the simulator in December right after the Sabres had gone 10-3-0 and moved into 25th place in the league standings.

"I was starting to panic," he said.

According to Zaenglein, the site has received more than 100,000 unique visitors in the 20 days it has been operational. Canadians represent 66 per cent of the traffic, with Toronto leading the way with 28 per cent.

As Zaenglein tweeted, "Well I think the lottery simulator has finally gone viral on hockey Twitter and all it took was the leafs losing 10 in a row!"

The real NHL Entry Draft Lottery works by having the 14 teams that do not qualify for the Stanley Cup playoffs entered into a lottery for the chance to win the No. 1 pick. Odds are weighted based on where teams finish in the standings. In each of the last three years, the second-worst team has won the lottery and picked first.

Based on the current standings, the last-place Sabres have a 20 per cent chance of winning this year's lottery. The 29th-place Edmonton Oilers have a 13.5 per cent chance, while the 25th-place Leafs have a 7.5 per cent chance — although that number keeps improving with every loss.

The NHL Lottery Simulator puts those numbers into perspective, by allowing fans to click a mock lottery to determine the draft order.

The results may surprise you. The first time we ran the simulator, Los Angeles (3.5 per cent) won. Can you imagine the Kings adding McDavid to a team that has won the Stanley Cup twice in the last three years?

The site allows you to run the lottery as many times as you want, so fans can keep trying until their favourite team comes out on top. After running the mock lottery 20 times, the Flyers (5 per cent chance of winning) and Sabres had each won four times, which provides a sliver of a hope for fans in Philadelphia.

"It definitely is fun for them," Zaenglein said. "I don't know if it's hope, because a Toronto fan is probably seeing them lose it more times than they win it. The NHL is not going to pick a ball 10 times. They're going to pick it once and it's over. But for fans, they get to click and click until their team wins.

"It's something to get over the misery of losing all the time."

## Regrading 2014's trade deadline deals

By Craig Custance

ESPN.com

February 4, 2015

In a time of instant analysis, trades aren't given the luxury to breathe before being evaluated. The trigger is pulled and the opinions roll in -- especially at the NHL's trade deadline. Time and hindsight add perspective to deals made at the deadline that wasn't there in the moment. There are also lessons to be learned for this year when last year's deals are re-examined.

With that in mind, here are new grades for last year's biggest trades and what we can learn for this trade deadline:

### The Ryan Miller trade

**The deal:** The Buffalo Sabres received Jaroslav Halak, Chris Stewart, William Carrier, a 2015 first-round pick, 2016 third-round pick for Miller and Steve Ott.

**What we thought at the time:** The Sabres got an A for this one: "This is a huge return for new Sabres general manager Tim Murray considering the challenge he faced in dealing Miller in a limited market." That was the right call. The questionable grade? The St. Louis Blues got a B. In retrospect that was generous, but at the time, this deal gave the Blues the goaltender needed to stack up with the West's elite and additional depth at forward. As it turns out, Miller wasn't the answer.

### Updating the grade:

**Sabres: A+.** After making this deal, Tim Murray spun Halak into Michal Neuvirth, who could end up being the Sabres' starting goalie in the short term. Chris Stewart will likely net the Sabres another B-prospect for the system or a second-round draft pick. So even the throw-ins for salary-cap reasons got Murray value. The Blues are a powerhouse this year, so the 2015 first-rounder won't be high, but that's OK -- the Sabres will already have a high pick.

**Blues: C.** You never want to fault a GM too much for making a Stanley Cup push, which Doug Armstrong was clearly doing here. He also did this deal without giving up any of the Blues' top prospects. Carrier was a second-round pick, but down the depth chart a bit in St. Louis. In 43 games with Rochester this season, he has 11 points. Miller wasn't great against the Blackhawks, but the Blues' loss had more to do with health and a lack of scoring. Bringing in Paul Stastny and Vladimir Tarasenko's development this year help address that.

**What we learned:** Trading for your starting goalie at the deadline is risky business. That's a move you want done in the offseason in order to give him time to settle in. In the end, the Blues lost a lot of assets when Halak may have provided just as much value as Miller. At the time, Armstrong said it was an incremental improvement. Giving up that much for an incremental return may not be wise at the deadline. Also, sellers this year should note that Murray did well in taking on additional salary in Halak and Stewart since they immediately became assets he could deal later. That's a strategy a team with cap room like the Coyotes, Sabres or Devils should utilize this year.

### The Marian Gaborik trade

**The deal:** Gaborik to the Los Angeles Kings for Matt Frattin, a second-round pick and a conditional third-round pick (that kicked in because the Kings won in the first round)

**What we thought at the time:** The Columbus Blue Jackets got a B+ for getting three assets in return for a player they weren't going to re-sign. The Kings got a C- mostly because Gaborik hadn't done anything of note in nearly two years, couldn't stay healthy and didn't appear to fit in to the Kings' culture of a heavy, physical team.

Dean Lombardi still reminds us about this bad grade.

### Updating the grade:

**Blue Jackets: B.** Frattin is gone and was clearly just a throw-in. Getting two draft picks for Gaborik wasn't bad work by GM Jarmo Kekalainen, especially considering it wasn't all that different from what the New York Islanders got for Thomas Vanek. The only criticism would be that Gaborik sure could have helped the Blue Jackets against the Penguins in the playoffs. If the Blue Jackets had to deal him, maybe it would have been better finding a hockey deal that would have netted a player more immediately useful than Frattin.

**Kings: A+.** We were unnecessarily hard on Kings GM Lombardi for this deal, even though we later found out that the Kings had the same internal concerns we expressed about how Gaborik would fit with the culture in Los Angeles. As it turns out, those concerns were unwarranted. Gaborik was a great fit and the Kings don't win the Stanley Cup without him. This was a great deal for Lombardi, which is why he's one of the best in the league.

**What we learned:** If you can get a potential 40-goal scorer without giving up a first-round pick, go ahead and do it.

### The Roberto Luongo trade

**The deal:** The Florida Panthers got Luongo and forward Steven Anthony while sending goalie Jacob Markstrom and forward Shawn Matthias to the Vancouver Canucks.

**What we thought at the time:** From a Panthers perspective, this deal made sense, saying this at the time: "The Panthers have a nice collection of young defensemen and forwards in the NHL and on the way, and this gives them a steady presence in goal to help hide the mistakes those young players will inevitably make." Luongo's contract term kept this from being a higher grade, so the Panthers got a B. The Canucks got a C- in part because the total return they received for two No. 1 goalies in Luongo and Cory Schneider wasn't strong. Plus, in dealing Luongo, the Canucks opened up the possibility of a major cap recapture hit down the road if Luongo retires early.

### Updating the grade:

**Panthers: B.** Luongo has been everything Florida GM Dale Tallon would have hoped for. He's been the stabilizing presence in net, returned to the All-Star Game this season and is one of the big reasons the Panthers are in the playoff race at all (even if just barely). He's also signed through 2022, so it's possible this deal doesn't look as good down the road, preventing it from being an A.

**Canucks: C.** We'll ease up a little on this grade because Markstrom has been really good in the AHL this season, even if he cleared waivers to get there and the Canucks risked losing him for nothing. Still, the threat of a cap recapture penalty remains. The best thing this deal did was give new GM Jim Benning a clean slate in goal and allowed the Canucks to move forward.

**What we learned:** Waiting too long to make a trade comes with consequences. There were reports of conversations between the Canucks and Maple Leafs of a Luongo deal that included pieces like Tyler Bozak and Jake Gardiner. Getting either of those players in return would have been better for the Canucks. But this wasn't Mike Gillis' biggest sin on deadline day last year. That was not trading Ryan Kesler.

The return for Kesler at the deadline would have been much bigger for him than what the Canucks got from the Anaheim Ducks in the summer because the trading team would have gotten two postseasons out of Kesler. That's something Arizona GM Don Maloney should keep in mind with Keith Yandle this year. The best offer he receives for Yandle may be coming in the next month, since acquiring teams will get two playoff runs out of the talented defenseman.

## **The Martin St. Louis trade**

**The trade:** The New York Rangers got St. Louis, Tampa Bay's second-round pick in 2015 (for Tampa's re-signing Ryan Callahan). The Tampa Bay Lightning received Callahan, 2014 first-round pick (because the Rangers made the Eastern Conference finals), 2015 first-round pick, 2015 seventh-round pick.

**What we thought at the time:** This was a trade that had the potential to pay off for both teams. The Rangers got a B+ while the Lightning got an A-, with this added caveat: "If the Rangers advance to the conference finals and this becomes two first-rounders along with Callahan, Tampa wins that exchange." That's still fair.

### **Updating the grade:**

**Rangers: B+ (same).** Callahan negotiations broke down and it was possible the Rangers were going to lose him for nothing. Trading two first-round picks is a steep price, but this is a Rangers team fighting to win a Stanley Cup now, it's not like we're talking lottery picks. St. Louis' leadership and production helped carry the Rangers to the Stanley Cup finals. Like the Kings with the Gaborik deal, the Rangers don't advance as far last spring without making this trade. This deal looks even better if he does it again this postseason.

**Lightning: A+.** GM Steve Yzerman had a limited market in which to deal St. Louis and still got a huge haul for him. The Lightning are loaded with young talent but Callahan has added an element of grit, experience and leadership this team didn't have in its system. Working in that conditional first-round pick puts this trade over the top for the Lightning and Yzerman.

**What we learned:** This was smart asset management by Rangers GM Glen Sather. Too often contending teams are willing to hang on to their potential unrestricted free agents, only to let them walk for nothing in the name of trying to win now. In dealing Callahan, the Rangers got a player in St. Louis who can help them on multiple postseason appearances.

Washington GM Brian MacLellan should keep this in mind when he's weighing a decision for potential UFA Mike Green. A Green deal doesn't have to be for prospects and draft picks; perhaps there's a similar hockey deal involving Green to be made now that helps the Capitals make a playoff run this season.

## **Sabres know trades will be coming soon**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
February 4, 2015

BUFFALO – Ted Nolan's response raised some eyebrows. Coaches, after all, rarely acknowledge they have players who are ready to leave town.

But Tuesday in Montreal, hours before the Sabres' 3-2 win ended their 14-game losing streak, Nolan, whose rebuilding club will likely be selling off assets soon, went a step further.

"We got some guys who could be very beneficial to some playoff teams," Nolan replied when asked if coaching could be tougher because some players know they might be moved. "I'm quite sure they're anxious and think about it on a daily basis. I mentioned to a couple of them, the only way you'll see that is not hoping, but to make it happen and to play well and maybe someone wants you. If not, make us want you. It's a catch-22."

So Nolan has basically told some players, "Hey, if you want out of this, get it together." Sure, it's a bit odd for a coach to admit that publicly. But this season has been anything but normal for the Sabres, who host the scorching St. Louis Blues tonight, the start of a five-game home stand.

Despite their NHL-worst 15-33-3 record, the Sabres have talent other teams will try to pry before the March 2 trade deadline. Their roster could look dramatically different in 25 days.

While players won't say it, some clearly have one foot out the door. Here are some upcoming unrestricted free agents who could be skating somewhere else soon.

**Winger Chris Stewart:** After slumping for months, the 27-year-old has finally starting producing, scoring four goals and six points in the last six contests. Even as he struggled early in the season, rumors swirled teams coveted the power forward. Why? With two 28-goal seasons, he's a proven scorer. Stewart scores all sorts of goals, using his 6-foot-2, 231-pound frame to bull his way to the net or slickly split defenders.

Stewart's enjoying his best stretch in more than a year and is back on the top line. His value will likely never be higher for the Sabres.

**Center Torrey Mitchell:** The 30-year-old has quietly become one of the Sabres' top forwards, playing both center and wing. On another team Mitchell would likely be a third- or fourth-liner. On the Sabres, however, the versatile checker has been a second-line pivot much of the season.

Mitchell fits in well with the Sabres and has become one of Nolan's favorites. It wouldn't be surprising if general manager Tim Murray traded Mitchell and re-signed him later, something he did with winger Matt Moulson last year.

For a contender, Mitchell could be a valuable depth forward.

**Goalie Jhonas Enroth:** The 26-year-old's value was never more evident than late in Tuesday's win, when he made 14 of his 32 saves during a wild third period. On the surface, Enroth's number's – 12-19-2, 3.38 goals-against average and .900 save percentage – look bad. But he's played like a strong No. 1 goalie most of the season under an incredible amount of work.

The Swede has value. But the Sabres don't have any potential replacements in the pipeline to replace him. They would be wise to lock him up soon instead of trading him. Enroth would be arguably the best goalie on a weak market this summer.

**Winger Drew Stafford:** The 29-year-old, the longest-tenured Sabre, could be nearing the end after nine seasons. He played well after Nolan took over last season, performing like a 25- or 30-goal power forward for months. But Stafford has been inconsistent this season, compiling only eight goals and 23 points in 46 games.

Stafford probably has some value for a contender looking for a rental to add scoring depth.

**Goalie Michal Neuvirth:** Injuries are ruining the 26-year-old's career. He often looks like a No. 1 netminder, yet hasn't stayed healthy enough throughout his career to keep the job long.

The Czech suffered a season-ending hip injury shortly after the Sabres acquired him from Washington late last season, then he got hurt in November (allowing Enroth to steal the job back) and again late last month working out during the NHL All-Star break.

Neuvirth could still be an intriguing option for a team with goaltending needs.

The Sabres, who had Wednesday off, have sent goalie Matt Hackett back to the Rochester Americans, meaning Neuvirth has likely healed from his lower-body injury.

**Defenseman Tyson Strachan:** Blue line depth is always at a premium down the stretch and in the playoffs, so the 30-year-old, who has been solid for the Sabres at times, could have some value.

**Defenseman Andre Benoit:** The 31-year-old has been a colossal disappointment for the Sabres, becoming a regular healthy scratch. Still, he enjoyed a strong season last year in Colorado, scoring 28 points while skating more than 20 minutes a game. In the right situation, perhaps he might thrive again.

xxx

The Blues enter tonight's game having won six straight games and 11 of 12 (11-0-1). They haven't lost in regulation since Jan. 2.

Former Sabres captain Steve Ott, who was traded Feb. 28, will play his first game back in Buffalo. Former Sabres goalie coach Jim Corsi will also return for the first time.

xxx

Sabres prospect Mikhail Grigorenko suffered a lower-body injury and isn't on Rochester's current road trip, according to the Democrat and Chronicle. The center will likely be out two weeks.

Grigorenko hurt his knee Friday in Syracuse, according to WHTK's Rob Sanderson.

xxx

Hackett played one game, Friday's 5-2 loss in Vancouver, making 33 saves. He recently returned to game action in the AHL after tearing up his right knee late last season.

## **College hockey report**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 4, 2015

### **CANISIUS COLLEGE GOLDEN GRIFFINS (12-8-6 overall; 11-4-5 Atlantic Hockey)**

For the first time in over a month, the Griffins went a weekend without winning a game. That's okay, considering they didn't play in any games either, taking their first week off since their holiday break ended on Jan. 2. While the opportunity for physical rest was welcomed, head coach Dave Smith said that the break allowed his team a chance to focus on fundamentals rather than their next opponent.

"It was helpful," he said. "It was helpful because one of the biggest challenges in a long season is staying mentally sharp, and the physical part is one thing -- we were able to rest our bodies -- but to have a full weekend off from action really recharges the mind and that's where I think we're going to see the biggest gain."

Now, Canisius returns to play against the only team ahead of them in the Atlantic Hockey standings, Robert Morris, in a rematch of last year's conference Championship Game. The Colonels won that game and have ridden their success into this season: they're positioned at No. 19 nationally in the latest USCHO rankings and are currently in the midst of a six-game winning streak. They're second in the country, to Michigan, with 3.82 goals per game and have the reigning Atlantic Hockey Player of the Week in junior Zac Lynch.

But the longest unbeaten streak in the nation belongs to Canisius, winners of their last three games and without a loss in their last seven. Last time the Griffins were in action, it was they who were racking up the awards: Ralph Cuddemi and Ryan Schmelzer were named Atlantic Hockey Player and Co-Rookie of the Week, respectively, for their performances in a pair of wins against Niagara.

Despite the game being not only a championship rematch but also a battle between the best teams in the conference, Smith hopes his players stay grounded as they head into Pittsburgh.

"What's important for our guys is, it's a big game, it's the first place team vs the second place team, but to make sure we recognize that this is one game, its two points, it's the most important two points of the year because that's all we can get," he said. "We've got to make sure we keep the fight realistic and close, and that we don't get too far ahead of ourselves. We've got to believe in our routine, believe in our preparation, and believe in the things that got us to this point."

### **Upcoming Games**

- February 6 @ Robert Morris (7:05 p.m.)
- February 7 @ Robert Morris (7:05 p.m.)

---

### **RIT TIGERS (10-12-4 overall; 9-7-4 Atlantic Hockey)**

The Tigers had a win streak of their own snapped over the weekend, losing to Army for the first time in 15 games in a 4-2 contest Friday night. Led by their veterans, they rebounded the next night with a convincing 4-1 win that saw senior Matt Garbowsky tally three points, including a pair of goals. Mike Rotolo was named Atlantic Hockey Goaltender of the Week for his efforts, stopping 33 of the 34 shot he faced on the weekend.

Head Coach Wayne Wilson came out of Friday's loss more upset than in many of the team's previous defeats. That night, the Tigers allowed Army to jump to a 3-0 lead, all on even strength goals. Rotolo gave them a chance to come back, stopping all of the 11 shots he faced after replacing Jordan Ruby in net, and Ale Perron-Fontaine made the game close with a pair of goals within one minute of each other in the latter half of the second period. Army stifled the comeback attempt with an empty-net goal with 26 seconds to play.

"I thought that was our first stinker in a while and I said before, we lost a couple other games where I thought we played very well," Wilson said. "As long as we're playing well and with good effort and we're focused, then I can handle the losses. But I thought Friday night we didn't check any boxes, we just weren't ready to play and we didn't play very hard and we didn't play very smart."

Wilson's senior leadership received his message. The Tigers' top line of seniors Garbowsky and Brad McGowan and junior Josh Mitchell combined for eight points in the team's victory on Saturday. Garbowsky opened the scoring with a power play goal in the first period, and then added another in the second. Army got on the board later in the period, but a pair of Tigers goals – from Todd Skirving on the power play and McGowan at even strength – buried the Black Knights.

Rotolo stopped 22 shots in the win for his fourth-straight victory; he's stopped 176 of 187 shots faced in his last seven games – a product, Wilson says, partially of the great play from the defenders in front of him. Danny Smith was named the conference's Defensive Player of the Week, blocking 10 shots and helping lead the way as RIT's success on the penalty kill shined again, allowing only one power play goal to Army on 12 opportunities.

### **Upcoming Games**

- February 6 @ Niagara (7:05 p.m., Gallagher Center)
  - February 7 vs. Niagara (7:05 p.m., Gene Polisseni Center)
- 

### **NIAGARA UNIVERSITY PURPLE EAGLES (3-21-2 overall; 3-15-2 Atlantic Hockey)**

Niagara's two-month long winless streak extended to 14 games over the weekend with a pair of losses on the road against Holy Cross. The Purple Eagles fought late in a 6-3 loss on Friday night and were outshot heavily in a 5-1 loss on Saturday.

All three of Niagara's goals came via special teams on Friday night, and all three also came while trailing. After a scoreless – and fairly even – first period, Niagara trailed 2-0 early in the third when Lawrence Smith put them on the board with a power play goal. Holy Cross responded with a pair of goals – both on the power play as well -- but Niagara didn't quit: Kevin Patterson scored shorthanded and freshman Derian Plouffe scored on a power play with just over two minutes remaining. Holy Cross ended the game on an empty-netter 20 seconds later; they outshot Niagara 44-27 on the night.

The Purple Eagles got on the board first on Saturday as Dan Kolenda scored his fifth goal of the season early in the first period, but the positives ended there. Five unanswered goals followed for Holy Cross, one in the first period and two each in the second and third. Niagara was outshot 47-24; goaltender Adrian Ignani made 42 saves.

The schedule doesn't get any easier for the Purple Eagles in the remainder of the regular season. After a home-and-home this weekend with RIT, their remaining opponents are Mercyhurst, Air Force and Robert Morris.

### **Upcoming Games**

- February 6 vs. RIT (7:05 p.m., Gallagher Center)
  - February 7 @ RIT (7:05 p.m., Gene Polisseni Center)
- 

### **BUFFALO STATE BENGALS (7-10-2 overall; 3-5-2 SUNYAC)**

Buffalo State was also given a weekend off from their grueling schedule, which head coach Nick Carriere said was a time for the players to re-focus and recuperate. Now, the Bengals return to SUNYAC play with the chance to do something they haven't done since Dec. 13: play at home.

"Absolutely, we're excited about it," Carriere said of playing in Buffalo. "It's very exciting for our guys to get back into the environment here and then get excited about playing in front of hopefully a good home crowd."

The Bengals will welcome two opponents into Buffalo State Ice Arena that they struggled against earlier in the season. When Buffalo State faced Plattsburgh and Potsdam in back-to-back road games in November, the results were 6-1 and 5-2 losses, respectively. They face them again starting on Friday with Plattsburgh, currently ranked nationally at No. 10 and atop the SUNYAC standings with 20 points.

While the team's sights are set on that game, Carriere acknowledged they will be looking to right some wrongs against Potsdam on Saturday. The two teams are tied with eight points apiece in the SUNYAC standings, and the Bengals see their first contest as one that got away.

"We've had a bad taste in our mouth since the last time we've played Potsdam," Carriere said. "I thought we had a lot of scoring chances in that game and I remember hitting crossbars and posts and just not being able to get the puck past their netminder."

Meanwhile, Buffalo State comes into Friday having lost one-sidedly the last time they faced a ranked opponent, dropping a 6-0 contest at Oswego on Jan. 23. But Carriere's message isn't one of redemption – he says that if the Bengals do what they need to do, the rest will take care of itself.

"I think anytime we have an opportunity to play against one of our conference opponents, we get excited about it," he said. "Especially when it's a team like Plattsburgh, that comes in and brings in the national rankings and they've had a pretty successful run this year. But then you look and see that a team like Geneseo beat them last weekend and we beat Geneseo, so there's a lot of parity in our league and we just look at it as another SUNYAC contest. And we've got to be ready to play our game."

### **Upcoming Games**

- February 6 vs. Plattsburgh (7 p.m., Buffalo State Ice Arena)
- February 7 vs. Potsdam (7 p.m., Buffalo State Ice Arena)