



Buffalo Sabres

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Kuznetsov caps Capitals' 4-3 shootout win over Sabres

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

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BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Evgeny Kuznetsov said the NHL shootout is a bit like playing poker.

And the Washington Capitals rookie forward had an ace up his sleeve.

"A couple," he said, with a wide smile.

After scoring in regulation, Kuznetsov took a winding, patient route to the net to score the only goal in the shootout to secure a 4-3 win over the Buffalo Sabres on Monday night.

"I'd make a joke, but I don't know how to say it in English," said the Russian-born Kuznetsov. "This shootout is like poker. If you don't have a card, you never win."

Kuznetsov put the Capitals ahead 3-2 early in the third period. In the shootout, he slowly made his way toward the net, where he faked to his right before snapping the puck just inside the left post.

The Capitals escaped with a victory by overcoming a sluggish start and a pair of one-goal deficits to beat the league's worst team.

Curtis Glencross and Mike Green also scored for Washington (38-23-10), which matched last season's win total and opened a four-point edge over eighth-place Boston in the Eastern Conference standings.

Matt Niskanen had two assists and Braden Holtby made 30 saves, a day after a 2-0 shutout over the Bruins on Sunday.

"It wasn't pretty by any means for any of us," said Holtby, who made his 14th consecutive start. "I think it may have been an emotional letdown after last game."

The Sabres showed plenty of jump in building a 2-1 lead in the first period. And then they showed resolve after falling behind in the third, when Johan Larsson deflected in Chad Ruhwedel's shot from the right point to tie the game at 3 with 6:10 remaining.

Tyler Ennis and Cody Hodgson also scored for the Sabres, who dropped to 0-5-2 in their past seven games.

For Buffalo, this was a far better showing than the team's listless performance in a 6-1 loss at Washington on March 7.

"These guys for the last little while have been giving everything," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. "They punch the clock."

The trouble is, the injury-depleted Sabres — featuring seven players, who began the season in the minors — couldn't match the Capitals' skill.

Buffalo managed just one shot on net during the shootout. Matt Moulson shot wide on his attempt. And the game ended when Phil Varone had the puck dribble off his stick while attempting to make a move in close.

The Capitals' power-play unit continued its hot pace by scoring on both opportunities, including Kuznetsov's goal

With Buffalo's Nikita Zadorov in the penalty box for delay of game, Niskanen set up the play from inside his own zone with a long pass to Kuznetsov at the Sabres blue line. Driving in on a 3-on-2 break, Kuznetsov patiently waited for the play to develop. Using Glencross as a screen, Kuznetsov snapped a shot into the open left side.

"I thought he was our best player by a wide margin," Capitals coach Barry Trotz said of Kuznetsov. "He's got a really good release and we want him to shoot more."

The message is starting to sink in, said Kuznetsov, who was a member of the Russian team that won the 2011 World Junior Championships in Buffalo.

"That's what Ovi yells at me every day," Kuznetsov said, referring to Capitals captain Alex Ovechkin. "I like when teachers teach me good stuff."

NOTES: Ovechkin failed to score in his third straight game. That's the NHL's leading scorer's longest drought since a three-game stretch from Dec. 11-18. ... The Capitals improved to 6-1-2 in their past nine against Buffalo. ... Ovechkin entered the day with an NHL-leading 21 power-play goals. The Sabres got their 21st on Ennis' goal. Buffalo recalled Ruhwedel from AHL Rochester earlier in the day to fill in for a banged-up blue line playing without Zach Bogosian (lower body) and Andrej Meszaros (hand).

Sabres-Bruins preview

By Jeff Bartl

Associated Press

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The Boston Bruins are in control of their playoff fate, an advantage that especially is beneficial considering their condensed schedule down the stretch.

After having their winning streak snapped, the Bruins look to bounce back by earning a fifth straight victory over the visiting Buffalo Sabres on Tuesday night.

Boston (36-23-10) holds the Eastern Conference's final wild-card spot, five points ahead of red-hot Ottawa, which has a game in hand. The Bruins had won five straight to cap a 7-0-1 stretch before falling 2-0 at Washington on Sunday.

It marked the sixth game in nine days for Boston, which has one day off after this contest before a three-games-in-four-nights road trip that ends with the first of three remaining back-to-back sets.

"I thought we had a decent game for (having played the previous night, a 2-0 win at Pittsburgh) and the amount of games we've played lately," forward Brad Marchand said. "But, you know, it was disappointing to give up those two points and we'll just have to regroup for Tuesday."

The Bruins were shut out for the first time since losing 2-0 at Los Angeles on Dec. 2 as Milan Lucic had a four-game point streak snapped. They failed to score the first goal for the first time in 12 games.

"When you play with the lead, it's a lot easier, and we missed some opportunities," coach Claude Julien said. "We just tried our best to get ourselves back in the game, but couldn't get that goal.

"We've got an opportunity to bounce back here (against Buffalo), but I think our guys put up a good effort and unfortunately you come up short."

Tuukka Rask made 36 saves and is 6-2-1 with a 1.64 goals-against average over his last nine starts. He's started only one of the three meetings with Buffalo this season, stopping 25 shots before Loui Eriksson scored in overtime for a 4-3 victory in the most recent matchup Dec. 21.

Niklas Svedberg won the other two, making 32 saves in a 4-0 win Oct. 18 before Marchand's OT goal Oct. 30 gave him a 3-2 victory. It's unclear who will be in net for this matchup with the Sabres (19-43-7), who are coming off a 4-3 shootout loss to the Capitals on Monday.

Johan Larsson has three goals and two assists in his last four after scoring for Buffalo, which has dropped seven straight (0-5-2). Coach Ted Nolan saw improvement, though.

"I'm quite pleased with the way we played," Nolan said. "These guys for the last little while, they've been giving everything."

Anders Lindback lost in the shootout for the second time in a stretch of three straight starts, falling to 0-3-2 with a 2.70 GAA in five starts and one relief effort since being acquired from Dallas for Jhonas Enroth on Feb. 11.

Lindback has a 2.80 GAA while dropping all four of his career starts against the Bruins, and he may start both games of the back-to-back. Former Bruin Chad Johnson has a lower-body injury and has yet to play since being acquired from the New York Islanders for Michal Neuvirth on March 2.

Matt Hackett has made just two starts this season, most recently allowing four goals to Washington on March 7 before Lindback relieved him in the second period of a 6-1 loss.

Sabres make a capital point

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

March 16, 2015

The Sabres desperately wanted a do-over with Washington. They felt a 6-1 loss 10 days ago wasn't representative of what they could do against the Capitals. They were tired and sluggish after arriving in the capital during the wee hours of the morning for the second game of a back-to-back, and they say Washington's leaders rubbed the loss in their faces.

Buffalo got its chance for revenge Monday. It will have to wait until next season for full payback, but the Sabres earned back some respect.

Washington, the team playing for the second straight night this time, used its potent power play and a shootout goal by Evgeny Kuznetsov to down the Sabres, 4-3. The crowd in First Niagara Center saw the Sabres' winless streak reach seven games (0-5-2).

"That was a stinker last time we were in Washington," Sabres right wing Tyler Ennis said. "They had their No. 1 unit out when it was 5-1 and they scored to make it 6-1, and they celebrated pretty hard. We were a little bitter about that. It would have been nice to beat them."

Instead of a five-goal blowout, the teams went to overtime for the fourth straight time in Buffalo. The Sabres obviously played a much more competitive game in front of an announced sellout of 19,070, but trips to the penalty box hurt.

"They had two power-play chances, got two goals," defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen said. "We played better than last time against these guys, but still losses are always losses. It's tough right now. It would be nice to win games."

Buffalo had a shot at victory as the teams entered the third period tied, 2-2. The officials whistled Nikita Zadorov for delay of game after he flipped the puck over the glass. Fellow defensemen Andre Benoit and Tyson Strachan followed by backing off Kuznetsov, allowing the forward to skate to the top of the circles and rip a screen shot home with 14:05 to play.

The Sabres answered with 6:10 left. Defenseman Chad Ruhwedel, called up from Rochester earlier in the day with Zach Bogosian and Andrej Meszaros absent due to injury, sent a shot toward the net that Johan Larsson tipped for his third goal in four games.

"He put it in my wheelhouse," Larsson said.

The Sabres, who came in averaging 1.8 goals per game, scored twice in the opening 10:08 to take a 2-1 lead. The first goal was a beauty, the second was luck.

Ennis, who has a history of excelling against the Capitals, worked a sweet give-and-go with Ristolainen to start the scoring with 5:02 gone. With extra room during a power play, Ennis started the play with shifty moves from his newly created point spot before feeding Ristolainen. The defenseman, playing his 100th game, saw Ennis get open and found him for an easy goal.

"That power-play goal they scored was one of the prettier goals we scored all year," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. "Tyler's just so creative, and we needed a guy back there who can play the whole two minutes. He did a pretty good job."

Buffalo got the power play after Alex Ovechkin showed his feisty side. After Sabres defenseman Mike Weber rode Nicklas Backstrom into the boards, Ovechkin jumped Weber. The scuffle between the two resulted in an extra two-minute roughing call to the Great Eight.

Washington answered during its own power play as Curtis Glencross cleaned up a carom in front. Acquired from Calgary at the deadline, Glencross has four goals in seven games with the Caps.

Just 45 seconds later, Cody Hodgson put Buffalo in the lead with help from goalie Braden Holtby. Hodgson floated a soft backhand to the net, and Holtby's save sent the puck high into the air. As the players looked around for it to come down, it struck Holtby in the back and bounced into the net.

The Sabres, who were averaging 23.1 shots per game, took 15 during the first period and finished with 33. Goalie Anders Lindback, beaten by Mike Green during the second period after being overly aggressive, made 35 saves in his sixth straight appearance in the Buffalo crease.

"I was happy with our effort. We competed from Lindy all the way out," said Ennis, who turned his attention to Tuesday's game in Boston. "It's a quick turnaround. We've got to carry the strong, competitive play over."

Sabres' Hackett returns to scene of personal injury

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

March 16, 2015

Just over 11 months after a serious knee injury derailed his career, Matt Hackett returns to TD Garden in Boston to exorcise some personal demons.

Hackett is expected to get the start in goal for the Sabres for Tuesday night's game against the Boston Bruins (7:30 p.m., NBCSN, Radio 550 AM). It was in the same building on April 12, 2014 that Hackett suffered a torn anterior cruciate ligament in a goalmouth collision that included former Buffalo defenseman Jamie McBain.

"It would be fun," Hackett said prior to Monday's game against Washington, before coach Ted Nolan confirmed the assignment. "I would treat it like another game. Obviously it wasn't a whole lot of fun the last game there but I like to play. I'd like to get that call."

"When you get bucked off that certain horse, it's nice to jump right back on where the horse bucked you off," Nolan said. "It was just one of those freaky things that happened. We know Boston is a tough place to play no matter what. Hopefully he'll have a good result this time."

Hackett was out nearly eight months and has spent most of the season in Rochester (7-4-3, 2.72 goals-against average, .907 save percentage). He has played two up-and-down games for the Sabres.

Hackett was strong while giving up four goals in a 5-2 loss to Vancouver on Jan. 30 that was capped by an empty-netter but was pulled after giving up four goals in 33 minutes in a 6-1 loss March 7 at Washington. That leaves him with a 5.22 goals-against average and .867 save percentage in Buffalo thus far.

Still, this is about far more than numbers. Hackett admitted Monday the injury frightened him when he began to ponder his long-term future.

"It's almost a year and I'm feeling almost back to normal now," he said. "Sometimes you get a little bit sore but I'm really happy to be back in the league. An injury like that, you're never sure what's going to happen, you're never sure what way your career is going to go. As a goalie, you're up and down so much on your knees. That's a pretty tough injury to go through but I'm happy with the work I've done and I've worked hard to compete."

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According to French-language TVA Sports, Sabres General Manager Tim Murray has told his counterparts at the league's spring GM meetings in Boca Raton, Fla., that he's willing to trade his second first-round pick this year in the right deal.

That's consistent to what Murray told Buffalo reporters on trade deadline day: One first-round pick was sent to Winnipeg for Evander Kane, and the other could be in play as well, perhaps for a goaltender Murray sees as a potential starter next season.

Murray was on hand for a dinner Monday night to honor his uncle, Ottawa Senators GM Bryan Murray. The elder Murray, now 72, is battling Stage 4 colon cancer. A different GM is honored each year but rarely is the honoree a sitting executive.

An exception is being made for Bryan Murray. Tim Murray told the Canadian Press he did not plan on speaking at the dinner.

"No, I would not be able to do it," he said. "Frankly, one Murray crying in there will be enough."

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Defenseman Zach Bogosian and Andrej Meszaros both sat out and Nolan said they were going to need further re-evaluation of their injuries. He expected they will both miss a few more games. Bogosian has a lower-body injury and Meszaros has a nagging hand problem.

Chad Ruhwedel came up from Rochester to make his season debut in a Buffalo uniform after playing 28 games for Buffalo over the last two seasons. He has eight goals, 23 assists and a plus-1 rating in 59 games for Rochester this year.

Ruhwedel, who played Monday with Nikita Zadorov, admitted it was frustrating to spend the entire season in the AHL but understood the Sabres had him on a development path along with fellow bluelines Mark Pysyk and Jake McCabe.

"There's a lot of things going on in the organization and you just try to play the best you can every time you're there," Ruhwedel said before the game. "But it's really more important for the team to have success because everyone gets noticed and that's been disappointing that we haven't."

Ruhwedel gave plenty of plaudits to Amerks captain Drew Bagnall, who has played only two NHL games in his career with Minnesota in 2011 but has played nearly 500 games in the AHL.

"I learned a lot. I've been with him two years now and he's one of the better captains I've had," Ruhwedel said of Bagnall, 31. "He's vocal. He'll tell you when you can be better but he'll also blow your tires when you're playing well. He's definitely helped a lot of guys grow down there and it's really starting to show."

Ruhwedel, who grew up in San Diego, was signed as a college free agent out of Mass.-Lowell following his school's run to the 2013 NCAA Frozen Four. He played in the memorable Sabres game in Boston two days following the Marathon bombings that spring and will get another chance there Tuesday.

"It's weird how Boston comes around," Ruhwedel said of his callups. "I tend to get to play there which is always cool for me."

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Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen played his 100th career game. ... Cody Hodgson had two goals in his first 56 games -- and now has three goals in his last nine. .. The Sabres led after one period for just the 15th time in 69 games ... Buffalo is 3-11-1 in the second half of back-to-backs, the scenario it will face in Boston.

Kuznetsov lifts Capitals past Sabres in shootout

By Joe Yerdon

NHL.com

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BUFFALO – Washington Capitals forward Evgeny Kuznetsov has a knack for coming up big in Buffalo.

Kuznetsov scored a goal in regulation and in the shootout, and Braden Holtby stopped all three shooters to help give the Capitals a 4-3 win against the Buffalo Sabres at First Niagara Center on Monday.

Kuznetsov was the only player to score in the shootout. He skated in slowly against Sabres goalie Anders Lindback and took a low wrist shot to beat him and give the Capitals their second consecutive win.

"This shootout is like poker," Kuznetsov said. "If you don't have a card, you'll never win. If you have a lucky win, it's all about luck."

Kuznetsov had eight shots on goal, one fewer than Alexander Ovechkin's game-high nine, and gave the Capitals a 3-2 lead 5:55 into the third period with his eighth goal.

"That's what [Ovechkin] yells at me every day, they tell me if I want to score I have to shoot and I don't know, maybe I feel something in this building," Kuznetsov said. "It's a lucky building for me. A few years ago, yeah, and I wanted to score here... [Ovechkin]'s not yelling at me, he's teaching me and I accept this one, I like this one. I like when teachers teach me good stuff."

Kuznetsov won the gold medal for Russia at the 2011 World Junior Championships in Buffalo and had three assists in the gold medal game against Canada, a 5-3 come from behind victory.

"He's got a really good release and we want him to shoot more," Capitals coach Barry Trotz said. "The odd time that he holds on too long, goaltenders are too good ... but he's learning. He's had a great tournament in this building, this is his building. When he was in the world juniors here, he was fantastic in the world juniors, so he's got a lot of good mojo in this building."

Shooting more is something Kuznetsov has done recently. In his past four games he has 17 shots on goal and has two goals and two assists.

"He's putting himself in the areas to shoot the puck too as opposed to the perimeter and wheeling around he's maybe cutting to the middle or putting it in a d-man's skates and trying to shoot it through, kind of like [Ovechkin] does," Capitals defenseman Mike Green said. "It's worked out for him well the last few games."

Matt Niskanen had the lone assist on Kuznetsov's power-play goal. Niskanen led all scorers with two points.

Washington (38-23-10) is four points ahead of the Boston Bruins for the first wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Eastern Conference.

Buffalo (19-43-7) has lost seven straight games.

Holtby made 30 saves for the Capitals and made his second start in two nights. He had a 32-save shutout in a 2-0 win against the Bruins on Sunday.

"It wasn't pretty by any means for any of us," Holtby said. "It was one of those games I think it may have been an emotional letdown after last game with Boston. It's our fault for not getting up enough. But you have to give that team credit. They earned everything they got tonight. You look at that team how they played tonight; you would never believe their record. You've got to give them a lot of credit to earn that point."

Sabres forward Johan Larsson tied the game 3-3 with his fourth goal. Larsson tipped a shot from the faceoff circle by defenseman Chad Ruhwedel past Holtby. Ruhwedel was recalled from Rochester of the American Hockey League on Monday because of injuries to defensemen Zach Bogosian and Andrej Meszaros. Larsson has five points in the past four games.

"I think we've known what [Larsson] can do for a long time," Sabres defenseman Mike Weber said. "He's really just showing everyone what he can do. He's a bulldog out there. He's hard to play against, he's strong on the puck."

The Capitals won the game, but it was the Sabres who got out ahead in the first period. Buffalo outshot Washington 15-11 and held a 2-1 lead after Tyler Ennis and Cody Hodgson scored.

Ennis' goal 5:02 into the first came on a give-and-go with defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen on the power play. It's the 10th time in the past 12 games the Sabres have scored the first goal.

"It was a really good effort," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. "Tyler has a little luck on that power play, he made a heck of a move. Skills competition at the end. So I'm quite pleased with the way we played."

Curtis Glencross tied the game 1-1 with his 13th goal at 9:23 of the first. Glencross' fourth goal with the Capitals came on the power play when he put a rebound of Niskanen's shot from the point past Lindback.

"He's one of those guys that has a knack around the net and he does the right things at the right time," Green said. "Every time he's on the ice he has a good stick, he's picking passes off. He goes to the right spots in front of the net. It's sort of difficult to do at times, especially with how defensemen box out, but he seems to get there."

Hodgson made it 2-1 with his fifth goal 45 seconds later after his backhand shot bounced off Holtby's upper arm into the air over his head and into the goal.

Green tied the game 2-2 with his sixth goal 6:09 into the second period. He received a pass from Marcus Johansson and took a slap shot from the faceoff circle that got past Lindback who was out of position.

"There was no panic in the dressing room here," Green said. "We knew that if we stuck to our game and our structure, we'd come out with a point at least. I thought that we managed the game well and that's something that we take pride in and want to do each night. I thought it was a great job by everybody, especially Holtby."

Lindback finished with 35 saves.

"A lot of people might think we're playing for nothing, but you're playing for pride out there, you're playing for the crest on the sweater, and again, you're playing for jobs," Weber said. "I thought it was a heck of an effort out of our team tonight."

Sabres' Larsson, Varone shining in expanded roles

By Joe Yerdon

NHL.com

March 16, 2015

BUFFALO -- Following the NHL Trade Deadline on March 2, the Buffalo Sabres' lineup took on a drastically different look. It also provided a big opportunity to a pair of young centers.

Johan Larsson and Philip Varone have seen playing time in Buffalo before this season, but after two trades at the deadline that saw forwards Brian Flynn and Torrey Mitchell sent to the Montreal Canadiens, as well as a lower-body injury sustained by All-Star center Zemgus Girgensons, Larsson and Varone were recalled from the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League to fill those holes. Now they're the Sabres' top two centers heading into their game Monday against the Washington Capitals (7 p.m. ET, NBCSN, SN1).

Larsson hasn't been a stranger to the Sabres lineup this season. He's been in Buffalo since he was recalled Feb. 15, but he was playing on the third and fourth lines. Now he's between Matt Moulson and Tyler Ennis on the first line.

"It's a great opportunity. I can't ask for anything more," Larsson said. "I've just got to show it every day and work hard. If you play with those guys you have to work your [butt] off and show them you want to play with them."

Coach Ted Nolan moved Larsson to the first line March 7 against the Capitals. The Sabres lost that game 6-1 at Verizon Center, but Larsson scored Buffalo's goal. Larsson said that game made him feel like his time had come to prove what he could do.

"I actually [felt like a first-line player] when I lined up against [Nicklas] Backstrom," Larsson said. "I have to focus every shift if you play against top players in this League."

In his second game as the No. 1 center, Larsson had a goal and two assists in a 4-3 shootout loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs on March 11. The offensive output is enough to get attention, but there's always more to it than what the numbers say.

"You've got to try to do something to separate yourself and give yourself an opportunity to stay in the NHL," Nolan said Friday. "One thing I liked about [Larsson] is he separated a lot of defensemen from the puck with his body positioning. He moved his legs offensively as well as defensively. He was gritty, he got [Maple Leafs defenseman Dion] Phaneuf a couple times, rattled him, by being a pain in the rear out there. Those are all the things you do to separate yourself."

Larsson's ice time has gone up each of the three games he's played on Buffalo's top line, topping out at a season-high 18:19 in a 2-0 loss to the New York Rangers on Saturday.

"He's been playing great," Ennis said. "He's been electric. He's been hard-working. He's been fun to play with. He's been our best player, I think, the last couple games. This is a great opportunity for him and he knows he's trying to seize the opportunity right now. You don't get these opportunities very often and he's playing amazing and we need him to continue playing that way."

Varone's spot on the second line has him playing with Marcus Foligno and Sabres captain Brian Gionta. Varone initially was on the first line and had a goal and an assist in a 3-2 loss to the Ottawa Senators on March 6. After that game Varone swapped with Larsson and has found chemistry as well as a reunion.

"Me and Marcus played together in Rochester almost for a year and a half straight and I like playing with him," Varone said. "He's a big body, smart, can skate. [Gionta], you can learn from him in every aspect of the game. He's a smaller-statured guy, so he's someone I can look up to and take stuff from. It seems like he's always in

the right place at the right time. He's never really getting hit and always moving his feet and I'm just taking little things from him throughout the game, asking him little questions, so it's just been awesome."

Like Larsson, Varone has had a few opportunities in the past to play in Buffalo. He played nine games last season and seven games this season in January before being sent back to Rochester. Since the trade deadline he has been a full-time player counted on to produce.

"He has a lot of poise out there," Gionta said. "He knows the game; he's in the right position. But when he gets it he can make plays. We've seen some of the games he's had; he's made some great plays. He's gotten to those scoring areas away from the puck. Getting to those open areas is always a thing you've got to learn and he's done a good job of that."

The points haven't come in big numbers yet for Varone, but that's not what he's focused on to prove himself in the NHL.

"[It's about] just being more aware on the defensive side of the puck," Varone said. "In the AHL I could kind of get away with that a little bit. I think I've been really working on that. In the AHL I probably take about 25 to 30 faceoffs a game, whereas here I take 16 or 17 so I've been bearing down more on that."

"It's just the little things. And once that starts ironing itself out and becomes second nature the offense will become second nature after that, which is kind of more what I'm going to try and bring. But at the same time you have to be responsible defensively."

Bruins host Sabres eyeing season sweep

NHL.com

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SABRES (19-43-7) at BRUINS (36-23-10)

TV: NBCSN

Season series: The Boston Bruins are going for a four-game sweep of the Buffalo Sabres. They haven't played against each other since Dec. 21, when Bruins forward Loui Eriksson scored at 2:14 of overtime to lift Boston to a 4-3 victory.

Sabres team scope: Buffalo will play the second game of a back-to-back set after a 4-3 shootout loss against the Washington Capitals at First Niagara Center on Monday. Left wing Johan Larsson extended the game when he erased a 3-2 deficit at 13:50 of the third period, but the Sabres couldn't avoid a seventh straight loss (0-5-2). "These guys for the last little while, they've been giving everything. They punch the clock," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said.

Bruins team scope: Boston returns home after seeing its five-game win streak end with a 2-0 loss at Washington on Sunday. It was the Bruins' third game in four days. "Our guys put up a good effort (Sunday) and unfortunately you come up short, but it wasn't for lack of trying," Boston coach Claude Julien said. The Bruins enter Tuesday four points behind Washington for the first wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Eastern Conference, but they have two games in hand on the Capitals.

Buffalo Sabres: Why penalties have been the least of their problems

By Matt Clouden

Bleacher Report

March 16, 2015

"All year we've been taking penalties at the wrong time, and tonight it killed us." That was the quote from Tyler Ennis during his postgame scrum after the Buffalo Sabres' 4-3 shootout loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs last Wednesday.

The loss gave the Sabres five in a row and kept them (at that point) three points ahead of the Edmonton Oilers in the race for 30th place.

But the Ennis quote deserves some further discussion.

The notion that penalties have killed the Sabres this season on its face seems logical. The Sabres are 11th in the league in penalties taken and are a particularly undisciplined game away from being in the top five. In other words, they have taken a lot of penalties this year.

Couple that with their 30th-ranked penalty kill, and the narrative almost writes itself: "Man, if they could only stay out of the box they would give themselves a better chance."

And that, of course, is 100 percent true. If you're giving up a power-play goal over a quarter of the time, the best way to fix that is to not take penalties.

Ted Nolan was also asked about his team's penalties in the first question of his postgame scrum after the Toronto game. The interviewer alluded to the penalties hurting the Sabres' rhythm during the game, and Nolan eventually acknowledged that they may have made a difference.

But looking at the penalties and the penalties alone is extremely flawed.

Avoiding penalties is not a new discovery. Youth hockey players have had those words in their vocabulary since they were five and with good reason. Penalties put your team at a disadvantage, and you never want to be at a disadvantage.

But to look at penalties alone is ignoring the ultimate causation of the Sabres' woes: their even-strength play.

For the sake of the ensuing argument, it will be assumed that the majority of penalties occur while both sides are at even strength, be it five-on-five or four-on-four, and that most penalties result in a power play for the opposing team and not a four-on-four situation resulting from coinciding penalties.

With those assumptions in mind, also consider when most penalties are called.

It's not much of a jump to say that most penalties are taken due to various breakdowns by the offending team. Whether a defenseman doesn't rotate back quickly enough and has to hook a free player on an odd-man rush or a forward gets beat on the wall in the defensive zone and trips up an opponent, these are the common penalty-taking situations.

Yes, it has now boiled down to a percentage of a percentage of a percentage. But without the tracking of these sorts of stats in the NHL yet, this is unfortunately the best that can be done for this sort of argument. Also, many would likely agree that the combination of assumptions made above still make up a good majority of penalties called in the NHL.

So how do these assumptions help shine a (negative) light on the Sabres' even-strength play exactly?

The Sabres have obviously struggled in all facets this year, and their special teams ineptitude has gotten a ton of attention given that both their power play and penalty kill are ranked 30th in the NHL. But the special teams have overshadowed the special kind of awful they have also been at even strength.

In the 68 games the Sabres have played this year, they have won the even-strength Corsi percentage battle just four times. Of those four, three came in a four-game stretch in December in which they won in a shootout twice against the Florida Panthers and Ottawa Senators and lost 5-1 against the Colorado Avalanche. The fourth was last week against the Leafs.

The following table outlines the Sabres' performance in these four games, of which three were at home:

Opponent	Date of Game	5v5 Corsi Percentage	Result
Florida	12/13/2014	50.5	4-3 W (SO)
Ottawa	12/15/2014	52.7	5-4 W (SO)
Colorado	12/20/2014	51.4	5-1 L
at Toronto	03/11/2015	57.3	4-3 OTL (SO)

While the Sabres needed the skills competition to earn their five points, they fared pretty well in their four games winning the even-strength possession battle. But on the flip side, the Sabres have generated a Corsi percentage of less than 30 percent four times *in the last 15 games*.

That's right—the Sabres have had an even-strength Corsi percentage in the 20s as many times in the last 15 games as they have won the Corsi battle at even strength for the entire season. To stress this point even more, the Sabres went 33 games between even-strength Corsi wins. They have more games under 20 percent than over 50 percent in that stretch, which is extremely hard to do.

Logically enough, that has not boded well for the Sabres' overall even-strength Corsi percentage this season, which currently sits at an embarrassing 37 percent. That is over 6 percent less than last year's train wreck and also over 6 percent less than the 29th-ranked team.

Simply put, the Sabres on average allow about two shot attempts for every one they have. Needless to say, it's hard to win games like that.

And this all plays into the overarching discussion on penalties.

If you are getting thumped at even strength and you're hemmed into your defensive zone for long stretches, the likelihood of a penalty being called increases. It's common hockey knowledge that a good forecheck is a team's best weapon—just ask the Los Angeles Kings how it's worked for them the past four years.

So with the Sabres conceding almost two-thirds of the possession battle on a nightly basis, that means the team will inherently take a lot of penalties.

Yes, as discussed earlier, the penalties themselves do hurt, especially when you kill them at less than a 75 percent clip, but it's all about causation.

The penalties are caused by the poor even-strength play, plain and simple. Penalties just don't materialize from the ether; they are "earned." And it's much easier to "earn" a penalty when your play at five-on-five is equatable to a chicken with its head cut off most nights.

So when Tyler Ennis says that penalties have killed the Sabres all year, that is an extremely shortsighted thought.

Realistically there have been four games the Sabres can say they lost because of penalties this year, and those are the four they won the even-strength possession battle. Of those four games, they won two, so penalties

ultimately did not hurt them. That means there have been two games the Sabres can say penalties hurt their chances at two points.

That likely was the case last Wednesday against the Leafs. The Sabres had their best game at five-on-five all season—albeit against a weak, disinterested team. A few late penalties definitely helped shift some momentum to Toronto, and it tied the game late while Mike Weber sat for delay of game.

But to be completely fair, the Sabres lost the third period even-strength Corsi battle 15-10, which is not awful, but it's enough to create some havoc in the defensive zone and in turn a rich penalty-taking environment.

So the Sabres can say they need to take less penalties all they want, but their penalties are mainly a byproduct of their bad even-strength play. Beyond that, penalties happen, and sometimes you can't control them. Referees are subjective, and as a potential infraction ranges closer to the fringe, different refs will call it different ways. You cannot control something that is not—at least entirely—within your control.

What the Sabres can control is their even-strength play.

And yes, it goes without saying that the roster isn't made up of dominant possession players, but at some point you have to look behind the bench at the head coach and wonder.

By no means should the Sabres be winning the possession battle night in and night out, but they should be winning it more. Colorado has an overall Corsi percentage of 43.6 at even strength right now, and it's won the five-on-five possession battle four times in the past 15 games and 14 times all season.

Now, 14 games out of 69 is not a great ratio, but it's 10 more games than the Sabres have managed. To be competitive the Sabres need to look long and hard at their even-strength play and not at the time they spend in the box.

That's because the odds are if the team rights the five-on-five ship, the penalties will take care of themselves. No team can or will avoid penalties altogether, but it can help itself by having the puck more.

For Sabres fans' sakes, one can only hope Buffalo has the puck a whole lot more next season.

Sabres play Capitals tough, fall in shootout

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 16, 2015

BUFFALO – After getting throttled nine days earlier in Washington, the Sabres wanted another crack at the Capitals oh-so badly. The blowout loss left the rebuilding club bitter.

"It was a stinker last time we were in Washington," winger Tyler Ennis said Monday following the Sabres' entertaining and spirited 4-3 shootout loss. "They had their No. 1 unit out when it was 5-1, and they scored to make it 6-1 and celebrated pretty hard."

The Sabres matched the Capitals for 65 minutes Monday, grabbing two leads before Johan Larsson tied it late.

"A lot of people might think we're playing for nothing, but you're playing for pride out there, you're playing for the crest on the sweater, and again, you're playing for jobs," Sabres defenseman Mike Weber said. "... I thought it was a heck of an effort out of our team tonight."

Ennis nearly won it late in regulation, misfiring on the power play. Evgeny Kuznetsov then scored the shootout's only goal.

"It was a really good effort," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. "Tyler has a little luck on that power play, he made a heck of a move. Skills competition at the end. So I'm quite pleased with the way we played."

The Sabres, who play tonight in Boston, have lost seven straight games (0-6-1).

But they believe that elusive win will come sooner than later. Despite the owning the NHL's worst record, they haven't quit.

"These guys, for the last little while, they've been giving everything," Nolan said. "They punch the clock."

The Sabres also hung with the New York Rangers on Saturday before falling 2-0.

"We've played two of the top teams in the East," Weber said. "We've kept it extremely close and pushed the pace at times."

The Sabres pushed the pace early Monday. Ennis' team-leading 18th goal opened the scoring at 5:02, the Sabres' first power-play score in 15 tries and eight games. It was also the 10th time in the last 12 games the Sabres scored first.

Here's how bad the Sabres' power play is: Capitals star Alex Ovechkin has 21 power-play goals this season, the same number Buffalo has as a *team*.

With nothing to lose, Nolan moved Ennis, his most talented offensive threat, to the point, a position he said he had only played briefly in junior. Ennis completed a nifty give-and-go with Rasmus Ristolainen.

"It seemed to work," Nolan said. "That power-play goal they scored, it was one of the prettier goals we scored all year. Tyler's just so creative. We needed a guy back there to play the whole two minutes."

Curtis Glencross' power-play goal tied it at 10:03. Cody Hodgson's third goal in nine games put the Sabres back up at 10:05. The struggling winger only has five goals all season.

Mike Green tied it in the second period before Kuznetsov's power-play goal put the Capitals up 5:55 into the third period.

Then Larsson tied it at 13:50, redirecting Chad Ruhwedel's shot past goalie Braden Holtby before the capacity crowd of 19,070 fans inside the First Niagara Center. The Sabres' new No. 1 center has three goals in four games and four goals in 26 appearances all season.

Clearly, Larsson is seizing his chance.

"I think we've known what Larry can do for a long time," Weber said. "He's really just showing everyone what he can do. He's a bulldog out there. He's hard to play against, he's strong on the puck."

Larsson added: "I'm not chasing the game now, I try to get the game going to me."

After Kuznetsov's shootout goal, Phil Varone lost control of the puck as he zoomed in on Holtby.

Sabres goalie Anders Lindback made 35 saves, including nine on Ovechkin, in his third straight start. Lindback has looked sharp in his six appearances. Still, the Swede hasn't won a game with the Sabres.

"Lindy keeps us propped us as a group," Weber said.

Sabres think 3-on-3 overtime format would work

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 16, 2015

BUFFALO – To Sabres center Matt Ellis, the AHL's experiment with three-on-three overtime this season has created "a really exciting brand" of hockey.

The extra space allows players to freewheel all over the ice and have fun. Systems become an afterthought.

"The speed and the skill really shines through, the amount of open ice," Ellis, who played 38 games in Rochester this season, said Monday prior to the Sabres' 4-3 shootout loss to the Washington Capitals. "It's incredible to see it, and it's non-stop action.

"The puck misses the net wide and takes a bounce, the other team's coming back two-on-one or even a breakaway. So it definitely adds an incredible excitement factor and it still has that competitive nature to go along with it."

The NHL Board of Governors will address three-on-three overtime today at its meetings in Boca Raton, Fla. The AHL has been starting overtime four-on-four before switching to three-on-three after the first whistle three minutes in. The overtime last seven minutes, two minutes longer than the NHL.

More goals have been scored in the AHL, meaning fewer shootouts.

Through Sunday, a whopping 76.3 percent of overtime games have been decided in overtime, according to the AHL. There have been 171 overtime goals (73 three-on-three) and 53 shootouts (23.7 percent of overtime games).

All of last season, 35.3 percent of AHL games were decided in overtime (only 97 goals). There were 178 shootouts (64.7 percent of overtime games).

Overall, just 5.7 percent of all games this AHL season have been decided in the shootout. That figure was 15.6 percent last season. Through March 2 this season, 13.8 percent of all NHL games have been decided in the shootout, according to the Canadian Press.

Of course, the shootout, now in its 10th season, will likely stay in the NHL. But purists who want games decided by team play instead of a "gimmick" breakaway competition would see more action and real game-winning goals.

"Any time you can decide it with a bigger group of guys it makes it more that team sport that it is rather than the individual skills comp," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said inside the First Niagara Center.

With six total skaters, "There's not really a rhyme or a reason to anything," Ellis said.

"You try not to get caught in a vulnerable position, try not to give up the possession of the puck if you don't have to," he said.

What's three-on-three like for goalies?

"You got to be ready to throw the puck up to your forwards so you catch them on a two-on-one kind of," said Sabres goalie Matt Hackett, who played 14 games in Rochester. "It's pretty wild. It's definitely fun. It's fast-paced, there's a lot of back-door plays – and that's fun as a goalie."

While neither are very goalie-friendly, Hackett prefers overtime to a shootout.

"Some guys can make some stupid moves in the shootout," he said.

NHL coaches would have some interesting personnel decisions. Should they use two forwards and a defenseman or just a single forward? Ellis said the Americans even skated three forwards this year.

Sabres coach Ted Nolan has said over the last two seasons he prefers games decided by team play.

"Three-on-three would be nice," he said Monday. "Four-on-four until somebody scores would be nice. (But) the shootout is part of the game right now."

It's a part of the game some players like.

"I don't mind it," Gionta said. "I've gone a lot (in the shootout) in my career, so I'm fortunate that way."

Sabres winger Tyler Ennis added: "I think the shootout's exciting."

Still, Ennis is open to three-on-three overtime. As the Sabres' speediest and shiftest player, he would certainly benefit.

"As long as it's a lot of chances and good for the fans, it's good for us," he said.

If the governors recommend a new overtime, the competition committee would consider it.

xxx

Tonight's game in Boston against the Bruins could be an emotional experience for Hackett, who will likely start his third game this season. The 25-year-old tore up his right knee at TD Garden on April 12.

Hackett endured a long road back, rehabbing until January, when he started playing again in Rochester.

"It's like any other game," Hackett said. "Obviously, I had a bad injury there. That can happen anywhere. It would be fun to play there and get back at them and try to get a win almost a year later. So I'm happy with where I'm at."

xxx

With defensemen Zach Bogosian and Andrej Meszaros injured, the Sabres recalled Chad Ruhwedel from Rochester prior to the game.

The 24-year-old Ruhwedel became the 11th defenseman to dress for the Sabres this year.

Bogosian's lower-body injury hasn't improved, Nolan said. Meanwhile, Meszaros, who hurt his hand blocking a shot March 7, banged another part of his hand. Both could miss a few games, Nolan said. Bogosian has already missed two games.

Ruhwedel hadn't played with the Sabres since suffering a concussion April 6 in Philadelphia. The Sabres summoned defensemen Jake McCabe and Mark Pysyk before Ruhwedel earlier this year.

"Everybody's goal is to be up, no question," Ruhwedel said. "But you just keep your head down and keep working."

Ruhwedel has eight goals and 31 points in 59 AHL games this season, both highs for Amerks defensemen.

"He can skate," Nolan said. "He can get by quick and make that first pass. I think sometimes when you get here last time like he did, you want to do too much."

Ruhwedel added: "It's definitely something I'm going to focus on, keeping it simple."

Caps outlast Sabres in shootout 4-3

By Dan Cave

WGR 550

March 16, 2015

Evgeny Kuznetsov found the net in the third period and scored the only goal in a shootout, giving the Capitals a 4-3 win over the Sabres on Monday. Buffalo is now winless in seven straight games. Kuznetsov's eighth goal of the season put Washington ahead in the third period before Johan Larsson tied it, but the 22-year-old Caps forward was the only skater to find the net in the shootout.

The Sabres scored twice in an action-packed first period on goals by Tyler Ennis and Cody Hodgson. Ennis opened the scoring on the power play just a little over five minutes into the game, scoring from the slot off a beautiful give-and-go with Rasmus Ristolainen.

The Capitals answered with a power play goal of their own off the stick of Curtis Glencross. The trade deadline acquisition tapped a Joel Ward rebound past Lindback, tying the score 1-1. Buffalo struck right back on Hodgson's fifth, a backhand toss that deflected off Braden Holtby, straight into the air and into the net for the 2-1 Sabres lead.

Mike Green tied it up at 6:09 of the second period, beating an out-of-position Lindback with his sixth goal of the season. Marcus Johansson swung the puck around the Buffalo net and lost control of the puck. Green, however, pounced on it from the faceoff circle, sending a shot into the top corner while Lindback lay on his side.

Washington went ahead in the third on another power play goal. Kuznetsov's neat wrist shot from the slot found the back of the Buffalo net for the 3-2 Capitals lead, but Buffalo tied it up later in the period on Larsson's fourth. The Sabres forward tipped Chad Ruhwedel's shot by Holtby at 13:50 of the final period for his third goal in four games.

After a scoreless overtime period, Kuznetsov snapped a shot past Lindback in the first round of the shootout. Holtby was perfect, denying Ennis, Matt Moulson and Phil Varone, giving Washington the 4-3 win.

The Sabres are right back on the ice on Tuesday at TD Garden in Boston. Hear the call on WGR 550 and the Buffalo Sabres Radio Network at 7:30 p.m.

1st Period

Goals

5:02 - BUF - Tyler Ennis (18) (PPG) (Rasmus Ristolainen, Brian Gionta)

9:23 - WSH - Curtis Glencross (13) (PPG) (Joel Ward, Matt Niskanen)

10:08 - BUF - Cody Hodgson (5) (Tim Schaller)

Penalties

3:28 - BUF - Mike Weber (2 min., roughing)

3:28 - WSH - Alex Ovechkin (2 min., roughing)

3:28 - WSH - Alex Ovechkin (2 min., roughing, served by Evgeny Kuznetsov)

7:36 - BUF - Jerry D'Amigo (2 min., hooking)

2nd Period

Goals

6:09 - WSH - Mike Green (6) (Marcus Johansson, Brooks Laich)

Penalties

1:50 - WSH - Eric Fehr (2 min., holding)

3rd Period

Goals

5:55 - WSH - Evgeny Kuznetsov (8) (PPG) (Matt Niskanen)

13:50 - BUF - Johan Larsson (4) (Chad Ruhwedel, Matt Moulson)

Penalties

4:10 - BUF - Nikita Zadorov (2 min., delay of game)

9:49 - WSH - Troy Brouwer (2 min., tripping)

Overtime**Goals**

None

Penalties

None

Shootout

BUF - Tyler Ennis - MISS

WSH - Evgeny Kuznetsov - GOAL

BUF - Matt Moulson - MISS

WSH - Nicklas Backstrom - MISS

BUF - Phil Varone - MISS

Goaltending

WSH - Braden Holtby (30 saves, 33 shots)

BUF - Anders Lindback (35 saves, 38 shots)

Power Plays

WSH - 2 of 2

BUF - 1 of 3

Hamilton: Sabres can't take advantage of a tired team

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 16, 2015

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Caps played Sunday night while the Sabres had the day off and at least in the first period, you could tell.

Mike Weber clobbered Nicklas Backstrom into the back wall and Alex Ovechkin came to his aid. Weber dropped the gloves, but Ovechkin got the extra penalty. After seven games without a power play goal, Ramus Ristolainen and Tyler Ennis worked a gorgeous give-and-go with Ennis having half of an open net to score his 18th.

With Jerry D'Amigo in the box later in the period, the Caps tied it when Curtis Glencross scored on a Matt Niskanen rebound.

Buffalo got a gift just 45 seconds later when Cody Hodgson shot a backhand. The puck went straight up in the air, came down and rolled down Braden Holtby's back and into the net.

Holtby, who shut out Boston on Sunday made 13 saves while Anders Lindback stopped 10 pucks.

Tom Wilson wasn't happy with Weber dropping the gloves with Ovechkin and tried to go after him, but Weber just laughed at him and skated away. Unfortunately in the second period the Caps seemed to hit their stride. The fortunate thing for the Sabres was Washington only scored one goal on 15 shots.

Lindback was down and out and Jerry D'Amigo collapsed near the crease leaving Mike Green open. Green ripped the pick far side just inside to post to tie it.

Buffalo didn't get too much at Holtby with the best chance being Brian Gionta's breakaway as time ran out.

The Sabres did hit a power play post on a Marcus Foligno deflection. Holtby also made a nice save on Foligno as he came down the slot on the backhand.

Chad Ruhwedel appeared in his first game in the NHL this season. He was used sparingly through two periods getting 12 shifts for 8:51 with three hits and a blocked shot.

Washington took its first lead of the game on the power play when Evgeny Kuznetsov was allowed to walk down the slot and beat Lindback for his eighth. Buffalo got a power play of its own and Ennis missed a wide open net as he pulled Holtby out of position, but shot wide.

The Sabres tied the game when Chad Ruhwedel put a shot right on net and Johan Larsson was there to tip in his fourth. The goal was made by Matt Moulson who protected the puck and got it back to Ruhwedel. The goal marked Larsson's third in four games.

"I'm not chasing the game now," Larsson said. "I have to get the game going to me. Before I tried to chase the game and tried to do something every shift, but now I'm more calm."

Tied 3-3 in the shootout, Kuznetsov was the only skater to find the net, giving the Capitals a 4-3 win. Buffalo sent Ennis, Moulson and Phil Varone out for the shootout, however all three were stopped by Holtby.

"I think we played well," said Ennis. "I was happy with our effort. We competed...everyone, from [Lindback] all the way out, all four lines. I was happy with the way we played. It would have been nice to have two points, but we'll still try to get it tomorrow in Boston."

"These guys, for the last little while, have been giving everything," Nolan said. "They punch a clock. You have to be very pleased with the effort."

Kuznetsov leads Capitals to shootout win

By Mark Ludwiczak
The Sports Xchange
March 16, 2015

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- Memories of his greatest moment as a hockey player came flooding back to Washington Capitals center Evgeny Kuznetsov before Monday's game.

He created another moment to remember Monday night, leading the Capitals to a 4-3 shootout victory over the Buffalo Sabres. The rookie scored in regulation and had the lone goal in the shootout.

Kuznetsov was part of Russia's 2011 under-20 World Junior team, which won the gold medal in Buffalo.

"Maybe I feel something in this building," Kuznetsov said. "It's a lucky building for me a few years ago, and I wanted to score here."

Kuznetsov, left winger Curtis Glencross and defenseman Mike Green scored in regulation for the Capitals (38-23-10). Goalie Braden Holtby made 30 saves.

Kuznetsov displayed terrific patience on his winning goal. Skating slowly up the ice, Kuznetsov waited until he found an opening to the blocker side and beat Lindback with a wrist shot.

"This is his building," Washington head coach Barry Trotz said. "When he was in the World Juniors here, he was fantastic. So he's got a lot of good mojo in this building."

One day after a critical 2-0 win over Boston, the Capitals got off to a slow start against the worst team in the league and fell behind on two separate occasions. But they hung in there and found a way to get two points.

Washington moved four points ahead of Boston for the top wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference and moved nine points ahead of the ninth place Ottawa Senators, though the Senators have played three fewer games.

"It wasn't pretty by any means," Holtby said. "It may have been an emotional letdown after the last game with Boston. ... It was one of those games where you have to find a way, and we did thankfully."

Left winger Johan Larsson, center Cody Hodgson and center Tyler Ennis scored for the Sabres (19-43-7), who lost for the seventh game in a row. Goalie Anders Lindback made 34 saves.

"These guys for the last little while have been giving everything," Sabres head coach Ted Nolan said. "They punch the clock, they come. ... You have to be very pleased with the effort."

The struggling Sabres got off to a strong start.

Ennis opened the scoring on the power play five minutes into the game. With Capitals left winger Alex Ovechkin serving an extra two-minute minor for roughing following a scrum, Ennis finished a give-and-go sequence with defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen. Ennis' finish from the slot resulted in his team-best 18th goal of the year.

Glencross evened the score four minutes later with a power-play goal of his own. After Lindback initially stopped defenseman Matt Niskanen's shot from the point, Glencross pounced on the rebound for his 13th goal of the season.

Buffalo regained its lead less than a minute later on Hodgson's fifth goal of the year. The slumping Buffalo forward received a lucky bounce to make it 2-1. His initial backhand attempt was stopped by Holtby, but the puck bounced high in the air, off the goaltender's back and into the net.

The Capitals again evened the score 6:09 into the second. Following a face-off win in the Buffalo zone, left winger Marcus Johansson found Green while falling to the ice, and Green made it 2-2.

Kuznetsov gave the Capitals a 3-2 lead 5:55 into the third with a power-play goal. The center skated into the Buffalo zone with ease and ripped a wrist shot past Lindback from behind the right circle. Kuznetsov's goal came after Sabres defenseman Nikita Zadorov was called for a delay of game penalty.

Larsson tied the game at 3-3 with 6:10 remaining. The left winger redirected defenseman Chad Ruhwedel's shot near the Washington net.

NOTES: D Brooks Orpik, C Michael Latta, C Jay Beagle and G Justin Peters were scratched for the Capitals. ... D Andrej Meszaros, D Zach Bogosian and G Chad Johnson were scratched for the Sabres. ... Before the game, the Sabres recalled D Chad Ruhwedel from the AHL's Rochester Americans. It was his first NHL call-up of the season. Ruhwedel, a third-year pro, leads all American defensemen with 31 points through 59 games. ... This was the third and final meeting between the Sabres and Capitals this season. Washington won 6-1 in Washington on March 6.

Sabres will be without Bogosian, Meszaros against Capitals

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

March 16, 2015

**** UPDATE (4 p.m.): Chad Ruhwedel has been officially recalled from Rochester. ****

The Buffalo Sabres will be shorthanded on the blue line Monday night when the Washington Capitals come to town.

Sabres coach Ted Nolan said after the team's morning skate at First Niagara Center that Zach Bogosian (lower body) and Andrej Meszaros (hand) will miss the game. Neither players took part in the skate.

Bogosian did not play Saturday night either and since his condition did not improve with a day off on Sunday, he's been ruled out for Monday.

Meszaros gloved down a puck in the first period of the team's game on March 7 and was forced out of that game due to injury. He was able to play in the next two games, but Nolan said he sustained a setback Monday morning and will also not play against Washington.

Both will be further evaluated by team doctors and Nolan said there's a chance they could each miss a few games.

The team will have to make a call-up from the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League and Nolan said Chad Ruhwedel will likely play in his first NHL game this season.

"One thing about Ruhdy is, he can skate. He can get by quick and make that first pass," Nolan said. "Sometimes when you get here last time like he did, he wanted to try to do too much. If he just does the basics, get by quick, move the puck quick and jump when he can, he'll be effective for us."

With the Amerks this season, Ruhwedel has eight goals and 31 points in 59 games. He played 21 games for the Sabres last season, averaging 17:52 of ice time per game.

A roster move has yet to be made official.

Faceoff is scheduled for 7 p.m. at First Niagara Center. The game can be seen on NBCSN and Sportsnet 1 and can be heard live on WGR 550.

Anders Linback will start in goal for Buffalo. Washington is coming off a 2-0 win over Boston on Sunday in which Braden Holtby made 32 saves to earn the shutout.

LEARNING LESSONS

Buffalo will look to build on some of the positives from their 2-0 loss to the League-leading New York Rangers on Saturday. One thing they'll look to keep working on is forcing the opposition to the outside and trying to limit the scoring chances of not only top scorers Alex Ovechkin and Nicklas Backstrom, but from their other lines as well.

"The Rangers had a lot of depth too and I thought we – I don't want to say matched – but we matched their speed," Zac Dalpe said. "So if we can keep our speed going, that kind of erases the whole mismatches as far as depth's concerned."

The last time the Sabres and Capitals met, back on March 7 at Verizon Center, Buffalo got out to quick lead. However, Washington stormed back to pick up a 6-1 victory.

"We have to work harder. They are a tough team to play against," defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen, who will play in his 100th career game, said. "They are a team that's going to make it to the playoffs so we just have to work for the whole 60 minutes."

PROJECTED LINEUP

26 Matt Moulson – 22 Johan Larsson – 63 Tyler Ennis
82 Marcus Foligno – 84 Philip Varone – 12 Brian Gionta
44 Nicolas Deslauriers – 59 Tim Schaller – 19 Cody Hodgson
49 Jerry D'Amigo – 37 Matt Ellis – 20 Zac Dalpe

6 Mike Weber – 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
61 Andre Benoit – 24 Tyson Strachan
51 Nikita Zadorov – 5 Chad Ruhwedel

35 Anders Lindback
31 Matt Hackett

Sabres prospects report

By Kris Baker

Sabres.com

March 16, 2015

University of Minnesota winger **Hudson Fasching** made a bold statement over the weekend, using his combination of size, reach and power skating skills to collect six points as the Golden Gophers earned a conference sweep of Penn State to capture their second consecutive Big Ten regular season championship.

The fun began on Friday as Fasching buried a goal from the doorstep and added one assist as Minnesota spanked Penn State 5-0 to keep their title hopes alive. Fasching did his part again on Saturday, striking for two goals and a career-high four points as the Gophers cruised past the Nittany Lions 6-2 to earn the top seed for the conference tournament, which begins on Thursday.

Fasching heads into the postseason with goals in each of his last two games while notching points in eight of his last 11. The budding power forward has 12 goals, 25 points and a plus-18 rating through 35 contests.

Minnesota will face either Penn State or Ohio State on Friday in the tournament semifinals.

NCAA

Cal Petersen (2013, fifth round) saw his excellent freshman season come to an end as Notre Dame was defeated by Massachusetts-Lowell 2-1 in their best-of-three Hockey East quarterfinal.

Petersen allowed five goals on 17 shots before being replaced for the final frame as the Fighting Irish were blanked 5-0 in Friday's opener. Petersen hit the reboot button on Saturday, bouncing back with a solid 25-save effort as Notre Dame pulled even with a 4-2 win. The rookie backstop ran out of gas on Sunday, allowing six goals on 13 shots in two periods worth of work in a 6-4 loss to the Riverhawks. Petersen wrapped his freshman campaign with a 13-16-3 record, 2.51 GAA and .919 save%.

After going without a point in Friday's shutout loss to Massachusetts-Lowell, **Connor Hurley** (2013, second round) recorded one assist Saturday as the Fighting Irish earned the 4-2 win. Hurley, who was again blanked in Sunday's season-ending loss, concludes his first collegiate season with four goals and 14 points in 41 games.

Sean Malone (2013, sixth round) broke in from center ice to score his seventh goal of the year as Harvard opened the ECAC quarterfinal round with a 3-2 win at Yale. The following night, Malone saw his six-game point streak snapped in a 2-0 loss to the Bulldogs. Malone would again go without a point Sunday while supplying key work on the penalty kill as the Crimson earned a 3-2 double-OT triumph to advance to Friday's semifinal matchup with Quinnipiac in Lake Placid, NY.

Anthony Florentino (2013, fifth round) picked up one assist Friday to snap an eight-game point drought as Providence opened the quarterfinal round with a 2-1 overtime loss to New Hampshire. Florentino recorded two shots on goal Saturday in a 2-1 victory, and produced another two shots Sunday as the Friars were eliminated with another 2-1 overtime loss. With much still left to be decided in the national picture, the Friars eagerly await the draw for the 2015 NCAA Tournament on Sunday, March 22 to learn if they'll extend their season.

Providence defenseman **Mark Adams** (2009, fifth round) made his only appearance of the quarterfinal round on Saturday, posting one shot on goal and a minus-one rating as the Friars claimed victory. In 28 appearances, the fifth-year senior has three points (1+2) and a plus-eight rating.

Jason Kasdorf saw his ECAC season come to an end Saturday following a 22-save performance as RPI was rolled by St. Lawrence 5-1. The redshirt sophomore, who stopped 33 shots on Friday in a 1-0 loss to the Saints, completes the year with an 11-19-2 record, 2.97 GAA and .902 save%. He started 33 of the Engineers' 41 games.

Freshman winger **Judd Peterson** (2012, seventh round) registered two shots on goal Friday as St. Cloud State earned a 2-1 double-OT triumph at Nebraska-Omaha. Peterson contributed one shot on Saturday as the Huskies advanced to the NCHC semifinals with a 3-1 win over the Mavericks. Peterson and the Huskies return to work Friday in Minneapolis, MN against top-ranked North Dakota.

JT Compher (2013, second round) recorded one assist Friday before leaving the game late in the first period as Michigan defeated in-state rival Michigan State 5-3. Compher, who remained out on Saturday as the Wolverines closed regular season play with a 2-1 loss to the Spartans, has 11 goals and 23 points in 31 games heading into Thursday's Big Ten tournament opener versus Wisconsin.

Brad Navin scored a pair of goals Friday as Wisconsin and Ohio State played to a 2-2 tie, and then finished with two shots on goal Saturday in 2-0 loss to the Buckeyes. The Friday goals, Navin's first since Oct. 18, give the senior captain eight points (3+5) in 34 games this season. The Badgers closed the regular season by being shut out in five of their final seven games.

Christian Isackson (2010, seventh round) notched one shot on goal Friday and added an assist on Saturday as Minnesota earned the weekend sweep of Penn State. The senior forward has captured three goals and seven points in 36 games.

WHL

Sam Reinhart (2014, first round) scored his 18th goal of the season Friday as Kootenay blew past Medicine Hat 7-1. The ICE captain, who bookended the week with scoreless nights on Tuesday and Sunday in wins over Lethbridge and Red Deer, has failed to gain a point in three of four regular season games for the first time since December of 2012. Reinhart enters the final week of the season with 59 points in 44 games for the ICE, who own the seventh position for the Eastern Conference playoffs with three dates remaining.

Brycen Martin (2014, third round) was unable to produce any offense in the week's three games as the Blades ran their losing streak to seven games. After posting points in 12 straight games in January and February, the defender has gotten on the sheet in just two of his next 14. The Blades close the season this weekend with a home-and-home set against Medicine Hat.

OHL

Nicholas Baptiste (2013, third round) notched one assist Wednesday as Erie blanked Niagara 3-0. Baptiste, who was kept off the scoresheet in weekend wins over Windsor and Kitchener, enters the final week of the regular season with 61 points (29+32), including an even 50 (23+27) in 39 tilts with the Otters.

Eric Cornel (2014, second round) was shutout of the week's three games as Peterborough's winless streak hit four. The Petes leading scorer with 52 points (14+38), Cornel has just two goals in his last 20. Peterborough holds a five-point lead on Mississauga for the final Eastern Conference playoff spot with three games left to play.

Jean Dupuy scored his 17th goal of the year Wednesday as Sault Ste. Marie saw their 12-game winning streak snapped with a 4-2 loss at North Bay. Dupuy, who did not register in the Hounds' Friday win over Plymouth, notched one assist Saturday in a 6-3 doubling of Sarnia to up his season take to 44 points in 53 games.

Sault Ste. Marie forward **Justin Bailey** (2013, second round) remained sidelined with an ankle injury but could return for the final weekend of the regular season. Bailey, who piled up 34 goals and 67 points prior to sustaining the injury, is slated to play a key role for what is expected to be a deep playoff run for the Western Conference leaders.

QMJHL

After sitting out of Friday's win over Rimouski, **Vaclav Karabacek** (2014, second round) recorded one shot on goal Saturday as Baie-Comeau dropped a 4-3 decision to the Oceanic. Karabacek has no goals in his last eight games and just one in his last 10.

USHL

Christopher Brown (2014, sixth round) picked up one assist Tuesday as Tri-City smoked Lincoln 6-1. Brown was held off the scoresheet in Friday's 4-1 loss to the Lancers, but secured another helper on Saturday as the Storm earned a 5-3 victory at Omaha to slide into first place in the Western Conference standings. The Boston College-commit has five assists in seven games since being acquired by the Storm, and a total of 37 points (13+24) in 50 games between Tri-City and Green Bay.