



Buffalo Sabres

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Last-place-rooting Sabres fans have a message to team: 'Lose!'

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

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BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — The Buffalo Sabres are in last place. And many of their fans are openly rooting for the standings to stay that way.

"Lose!" yelled Doug Borsuk, a 10-year season-ticket holder from the upper level during a recent Sabres' home game. "Of course it's weird. But it's ultimately for them to succeed. If they're not going to make the playoffs, they might as well finish last."

Though the Sabres don't ascribe to the sentiment, the down-is-up mentality has taken hold. The prime objective among fans has become for the Sabres to bottom out to get the best chance to land one of two highly touted draft prospects: OHL Erie Otters center Connor McDavid and American-born Boston University center Jack Eichel.

Both are described as having once-in-a-generation potential. And under NHL rules, only the last-place team is guaranteed to draft first or second.

The compound name "McEichel" has become a popular hashtag reference among Sabres fans on Twitter. Some have written letters to the editor imploring the Sabres to lose. And several hosts on the team's flagship radio station are on board by providing daily updates on the bottom end of the standings.

"You really can't hide from it," said forward Patrick Kaleta, who grew up in nearby Angola rooting for the Sabres. "I don't like it."

With two-and-a-half weeks left, the chances of Buffalo (20-46-7) finishing last hinge heavily on a two-game set against the 29th-place Arizona Coyotes (22-44-8).

The teams, who have gone a combined 6-28-5 since Feb. 10, are separated by five points entering their game at Buffalo on Thursday. They'll meet again at Arizona on Monday.

"Lose the games, please," were the words of discouragement Borsuk had for the Sabres. "The players should want to win. I'm rooting for them to lose. And I'm willing to take on any fan who thinks otherwise."

Coach Ted Nolan isn't listening.

"I can't control what other people think," Nolan said, Wednesday. "Who wants to finish last? Nobody wants to finish last. I never went into anything my entire life wanting to finish last. You go into it with the right intentions, and it's the integrity of the game that's on the line."

Through the purging of high-priced veteran contracts, the Sabres have become a shell of the team they were as recently as two seasons ago.

Goalie Ryan Miller, captain Steve Ott and leading scorer Thomas Vanek were among those traded away last season in moves that led to Buffalo finishing last with a franchise-worst 21 wins. This season, the Sabres haven't been much better with a lineup that has featured as many as nine players who opened the season in the American Hockey League.

General manager Tim Murray had low expectations to begin this season. And yet, he didn't envision the Sabres to be this bad after adding captain Brian Gionta and veteran defenseman Josh Gorges last summer.

"We had no stars in our eyes thinking that we were going to be a contender for the Cup by any means," Murray told The Associated Press. "Has it gone completely as I would've envisioned? Maybe not."

Murray further diluted the lineup last month, when he traded defenseman Tyler Myers and forward Drew Stafford in a seven-player deal with Winnipeg to acquire forward Evander Kane and defenseman Zach Bogosian.

Kane was the key acquisition, but he won't be ready until September after having season-ending shoulder surgery.

The Coyotes, coming off a 5-4 overtime win at Detroit on Tuesday, aren't sure what reception they'll get in Buffalo, knowing some Sabres fans might be rooting for them.

Coyotes coach Dave Tippett joked it might feel similar to playing in Arizona, where it's not uncommon for out-of-town Canadian fans to root for the visitor.

"But that's inconsequential," Tippett said. "That has nothing to do with the bearing of the game, nothing at all. Players don't think that way. Coaches don't think that way. You go into a game, and you're going to play to win."

Sabres center Tyler Ennis is taking the same approach, no matter what fans think.

"I can understand what people are thinking," Ennis said. "But I know if they were in our shoes, they wouldn't want to lose."

Coyotes-Sabres preview

Associated Press

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The teams with the worst records in the NHL teams meet twice in the next five days, and it's hard to ignore the likelihood that these matchups will determine the fates of Connor McDavid and Jack Eichel.

Those prospects are expected to be taken at the top of the draft and could end up playing for the Buffalo Sabres and Arizona Coyotes, who meet at the First Niagara Center on Thursday night.

Buffalo (20-46-7) has a league-low 47 points and Arizona (22-44-8) has 52, with the only thing on the line this season being draft position. That's pretty important with McDavid and Eichel - players seen by many as potential franchise cornerstones - being the consensus top picks.

"You don't need to be on Twitter to know that there's lots of excitement for McDavid or Eichel or that type of thing," Sabres center Cody Hodgson said. "But from the players' perspective, we just go out and play like we've been doing."

These teams also meet Monday in Arizona, and there has been discussion in Buffalo about whether Sabres fans will even be rooting for their team Thursday. Coach Ted Nolan has addressed the situation with his club.

"These guys are all professional guys and nobody would want to go in and approach this game as like no other game," Nolan said. "You want to go in and do your best but the outside distractions are always going to be there."

Buffalo fans were no doubt happy that Arizona ended a seven-game road slide and 0-7-1 overall losing streak with Tuesday's 5-4 overtime win over Detroit. Coach Dave Tippett insists his team has good reason to play hard.

"You got a lot of guys that are competing, they want jobs next year, they want to get noticed," Tippett said. "There's a lot of try in our group."

Arizona will start the beleaguered Mike Smith or rookie Louis Domingue, who has never faced the Sabres. Smith's 37 regulation defeats are the most in the NHL since Marc Denis had 41 for Columbus in 2002-03.

Smith made 33 saves Tuesday for his second victory in 17 starts. Mark Arcobello scored the winner.

"Smith had a real strong game in goal," Tippett said. "For the most part, we competed hard and we hung around."

Nolan plans to start winless Matt Hackett, who has posted a 4.33 goals-against average in three starts this season and is 2-16-1 with a 3.38 GAA in 19 career starts. Hackett has never started against the Coyotes.

Buffalo may see two injured players return in winger Patrick Kaleta, who has sat out the last 18 games following knee surgery, and defenseman Zach Bogosian, who has missed the past six with a lower-body injury.

The Sabres are 1-8-2 in their last 11 after dropping their third straight Monday, 4-3 at Dallas despite two goals from Brian Gionta.

Buffalo has taken seven of its last eight against Arizona.

Coyotes assistant general manager Darcy Regier, the Sabres' GM from 1997-2013, is expected to return to Buffalo for the first time since his dismissal.

Winning's the only thing, say Sabres, Coyotes players

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

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The motivation in the Buffalo Sabres locker room is clear and simple: Avoid finishing last.

That may ruffle the feathers of some in the team's fan base who actively want the Sabres to finish 30th, thereby guaranteeing them at least the No. 2 overall draft pick. But athletes and coaches are wired to compete and at this point in the Sabres' season, the most attainable goal they can compete for is 29th place.

"For sure you want to finish as high as you can," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said Wednesday afternoon after practice in First Niagara Center. "In a season like this you gotta find little things to set your sights on and that's definitely one of them."

The stakes for 30th place are high Thursday night as the Sabres host the Arizona Coyotes.

The Coyotes are coming off an overtime win at Detroit, putting them five points ahead of the Sabres. Buffalo has nine games remaining, Arizona eight. They will meet again on Monday night in Arizona.

"Nobody wants to be in the position our two teams are in. Not one player," Coyotes forward Shane Doan said. "You're embarrassed. You have to be. Nobody ever wants to be considered the worst. Obviously, both teams are considered the two worst teams in the league. That's not a good feeling."

"You don't accept losing," Gionta said. "You're not content with game in and game out coming up short. No matter how close it is or what you're doing, you gotta find ways to win. That's what this league is about. That's our main focus game in and game out is to try and get a win. It's not good enough to be close."

But winning through losing has been a popular topic among Sabres fans and forced players and the coaching staff to mitigate tank talk since last year's draft.

Ted Nolan reiterated Wednesday his philosophy about changing the culture of the locker room by putting a premium on work ethic and accountability. Winning through losing is just not part of his approach.

"I can't control what other people think and what other people do," Nolan said. "I know what I feel. I'm not speaking for anybody else. I'm speaking for myself. Who wants to finish last? I never went into anything my entire life wanting to finish last. You go into it with the right intentions, and it's the integrity of the game. That's the line for me. You just go out and do what you have to do and feel the way you feel, and if some people want to finish last, well then good for them."

Sabres defenseman Zach Bogosian has been immersed in tank nation only since the Sabres acquired him at the trade deadline earlier this month. He noted that it's a "good thing I don't listen to the radio" when asked about keeping the negativity out of the locker room. He added that he's seen a lot of positives in his short time with the organization.

"We're not worried what anyone else thinks," Bogosian said. "There's a lot that goes on in here that people don't know about and how we're here for each other. We want to win for each other. That's the way we go about things. No one wants to finish last. I don't care who you are. As a competitive person, this is our job, this is our livelihood."

Arizona's fall toward the basement was orchestrated at the trade deadline and the Coyotes have gone 2-17-1 in their last 20 games to battle Buffalo for that coveted possibility of a top draft pick.

Coyotes coach Dave Tippett glossed over tank talk after his team had an optional skate at First Niagara Center Wednesday.

"I think that's your guys' hype not our hype," Tippett said to a media scrum. "That's outside. We deal with what's inside our room not what's outside our room. ... That's inconsequential. When a coach or a player gets in a game, really that's just outside noise. That has nothing to do with the bearing of the game. Nothing at all. Players don't think that way. Coaches don't think that way."

Kaleta, set to return, deserves better than this

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

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Everybody and nobody.

Everybody growing up playing hockey in these parts wants to play for the Sabres. Pretty much nobody does.

Patrick Kaleta is the exception. He's given up his body over and over since 2007 in the name of playing for his hometown team. In fact, after another knee surgery, he says he's skating better than he has all year just as he's heading into potentially his final nine games for the Sabres.

The kid from Angola turns 29 in June. He's getting married in July. This has been his dream to wear this jersey. And this is what he could be facing when he returns from the injured list Thursday night in First Niagara Center: His own fans rooting for him to lose. And rooting hard.

The tap dance between the Sabres and Arizona Coyotes could reach new levels of absurdity when the teams meet Thursday in the first half of their TankFest home-and-home set.

"You can't really hide from it. You just focus on what you have to do," Kaleta said after practice Wednesday. "I'm a guy that takes pride in how he plays. I don't know what's going to happen. You just feed off the crowd regardless.

"I've had people boo me in other buildings so I feed off that. Hopefully that's not the case. I think the people of Buffalo have pride in the Sabres and deep down they want to win. Who knows what to expect? For myself coming back, you focus on doing the best I can to help my team."

This game figures to be one of the most bizarre, twisted sporting events ever held in Buffalo.

With obsession for Connor McDavid and Jack Eichel out of control, it seems most of the fan base is determined to see the Sabres out and watch them fall seven points behind Arizona in the "race" for last place overall.

This season at least, losing is winning in too many eyes. An organizational mandate. That feeling is probably never going to be more prevalent than Thursday night.

"I don't like it. I was never taught that. Ever," Kaleta said. "You can't change it now and I realize that but I'm a fan too. I would like us to win. You guys are in here doing your job interviewing me, but if you're going to finish off the last nine games and maybe be replaced, how would you guys feel? It's a possibility.

"And for me personally, I would love to play a few more years here. It's the way I feel about the team and the city. I'm going out there to do my best, be professional and get some energy going for my team."

Tonight will be Kaleta's 340th game with the Sabres. Only 56 men in franchise history have played more. No other Buffalo-area kid has played more than 80. He freely talks about representing his city, about wearing the Blue & Gold.

"That means a lot," Kaleta said. "Growing up, you hear little kids say, 'I want to play for the Sabres.' Well, I've been in their shoes. People would be like, 'That's funny. That's not going to work.' When you actually do it and to have been here as long as I have, you take tremendous pride in everything. Your teammates, your former teammates, working with you guys, the coaches and trainers and equipment guys you meet. The whole atmosphere. It's a special feeling."

Kaleta had major ACL surgery last year and had more surgery last month to remove bone chips on his knee. He had a major setback in training camp when he suffered what he somewhat proudly calls a "broken face" when struck by a puck during an exhibition game in Toronto. He can joke now but that was a tough thing to deal with and overcome at the time.

A lot of players would be packing in these nine games. On both of these teams, no one would argue. They're both terrible, but neither group of players is tanking. Their organizations are tanking. That's a big difference.

The Sabres recently had a stretch where they scored the first goal in 10 of 12 games. The Coyotes have lost 17 of their last 20 games, but 10 of the defeats are by one or two goals. Arizona goaltender Mike Smith has a .936 save percentage in March – .936! – and has a 2-7 record. The Sabres led Monday's game in Dallas three different times. And still lost.

Both teams have been set up to fail with eyes on the draft and the cause has been helped because of injuries. The fans, however, will be in full tank mode. There's chatter of folks wearing Coyotes jerseys and T-shirts. Maybe howling in the seats like they do in suburban Phoenix. Can't even imagine how brutal this could get if the game goes to a shootout.

Coyotes coach Dave Tippett said here Wednesday this is a media story with no impact on the game. Yeah, right. Captain Shane Doan was skeptical about the pro-Coyotes potential, too.

"I'm sure it's not going to be near as bad as anyone thinks it is," Doan said. "And it's going to be one of those things that as a player you're not going to really notice," he said.

Wrong. Sadly, this is going to get plainly obvious. You want to root for the Coyotes, that's your choice. Stay home on your couch. Go to a bar. Show a little respect for these players and this coaching staff. Or, at the very least, maybe a little more than ownership or the front office has.

If the Sabres win tonight, I've got a thought for them: Forget skating to center ice and saluting the fans like you normally do. The people don't want to win anymore this season. Especially not tonight. Just head to the dressing room.

If the Coyotes win tonight, maybe they're the ones that should go raise their sticks to the Buffalo fans. The cheers would be louder than the ones they probably get most nights out in the desert anyway.

Sick and twisted all the way around. A hometown kid deserves better. Frankly, they all do.

Sabres notebook: Hackett hurting but could go Thursday

By Amy Mortiz

Buffalo News

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Matt Hackett kept his pads on and sat at his locker stall as he answered questions Wednesday afternoon.

Usually goalies take off their gear before meeting with the media. But Hackett needed anything to help ease pain in his knee.

"It's OK. Like I said before I have to put up with the pain right now and it's going to be sore for a while so I just have to get used to it," he said.

Hackett is still recovering from reconstructive knee surgery last May after he tore both his ACL and MCL in an April game in Boston.

"I always want to play but with the knee and where it's at, I have to take my rest when I can and it's just too difficult in this league to play back-to-back," Hackett said. "I just keep icing it."

There's a chance he will start for the Sabres Thursday when they host the Arizona Coyotes in First Niagara Center, but the recovery process is slow and coach Ted Nolan doesn't want to risk further injury.

"He fought through a long recovery period," Nolan said. "To throw him in when he's a little bit sore would be jeopardizing that situation again. We want to make sure he's 100 percent before we put him in."

Nolan said the decision on the team's starting goaltender would be made Thursday morning.

Hackett was impressive in a loss in Nashville on Saturday, making 40 saves in just his third start with the Sabres this season. But he spent the postgame in the training room tending to swelling in his knee.

"I was focused. I felt like I was seeing the puck very well," Hackett said of his last performance. "When I'm set and seeing the puck well, I feel like that's when I'm on top of my game."

...

There's a strong chance forward Patrick Kaleta and defenseman Zach Bogosian will be back in the Sabres lineup. Both still needed final medical clearance but practiced fully with the team on Wednesday.

"They're real close," Nolan said. "Both looked good. Both felt good."

Bogosian has missed five games with a lower body injury while Kaleta has been on the injured reserve list since Feb. 15 after having knee surgery.

The odds of Kaleta being back in the lineup are high after the team assigned Tim Schaller to Rochester. The 24-year-old forward has played in 14 games for the Sabres this season with one goal and one assist.

...

Arizona coach Dave Tippett said that Mike Smith would get the start for the Coyotes. Smith's numbers offer a good look at the Coyotes' slide. In March, he has a .936 save percentage and a 2.33 goals against average but is just 2-7.

Goal scoring has been the Coyotes' trouble. That is until Tuesday night in Detroit, when they broke out with a 5-4 overtime win over the Red Wings.

Consider they had five goals in the previous five games combined and just 23 in their previous 19.

"It loosens it up a little bit in the locker room," Oliver Ekman-Larsson said. "We've been struggling all season to score goals, and it's nice to get five."

The defenseman had two assists in the win over Detroit and is the current goal-scoring leader for the Coyotes with a career-high 20 after scoring 15 last season.

"I've been feeling good lately here. I've been able to score some goals," Larsson said.

The ethics of losing

By Tim Graham

Buffalo News

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These are confusing times for Buffalo Sabres fans. ¶ There has been a schism in a place the team likes to call Hockey Heaven. Conflicted fans have turned against each other. "Tankers" have been cheering for the opponent while claiming Sabres loyalty. Losing to win is the progressive spirit, they declare, a nouveau fandom to be embraced for a potential payoff down the road. ¶ "Anti-tankers" find it distasteful to root against the Sabres and to hope they finish in last place. True fans, they say, never want their team to lose, and tanking is a betrayal. And, oh, the children. What should we tell the children? ¶ With 16 days left in the NHL season, the Sabres are holding down bedrock. The worst team is guaranteed no worse than the second overall draft choice, meaning the Sabres would land Connor McDavid or Jack Eichel, blue-chip prospects who make scouts drool. ¶ But the Arizona Coyotes can bore beneath the Sabres for a more "fracktastic" finish. The teams have two games to play, Thursday night in First Niagara Center and Monday night in Gila River Arena.

If the Coyotes or Edmonton Oilers undercut the Sabres, then a long winter will feel even bleaker. The Sabres still could get a fine player with the third draft pick, but the talent level from McDavid and Eichel falls off the shelf.

That's why, although the Sabres never have admitted to calculated losing, many fans are OK with their favorite team's front office committing to being the NHL's worst club for a second straight season.

Advocates and detractors naturally have visceral reactions to the idea of repetitive defeat being an organizational mission.

From a moral standpoint, however, gut feelings aren't enough to determine what's right or wrong.

We possibly won't know for a few years if tanking was worth the suffering, but we can examine whether it's ethical in sports to lose on purpose.

Ethicists interviewed by The Buffalo News didn't agree across the board about the Sabres' managerial conduct. Some felt the Sabres weren't to blame and that professional sports should be held to a looser standard than amateur athletics.

In general, though, the idea of losing on purpose and the inherent deviousness that traditionally accompanies such behavior was considered an unethical business practice and harmful to the overall sports community.

"It is not ethical for a team to tank. You can put a period on that," said Lee H. Igel, co-director of New York University's Sports and Society Program and writer on sports-business ethics for Forbes magazine.

"Playing for the Connor McDavid, Jack Eichel sweepstakes is not ethical. There's no reasonable circumstance in which losing on purpose is right."

Andrew Koehl, a philosophy professor at Roberts Wesleyan College in Rochester, isn't as rigid in his opinion of the Sabres. He has empathy for General Manager Tim Murray's situation.

"Tim Murray has an obligation to do what's best for the Sabres and in accordance with the rules," Koehl said. "He has an obligation to do that in the short term and the long term. For him to prioritize one or the other doesn't seem to be exhibiting a conflict of interest.

"But the Sabres are in a genuine moral dilemma. GMs are playing within the rules, but they're forced to do something unseemly. They're forced into a situation where they have to be dishonest.

"The real blame, I think, goes to the NHL because the league has had the power to do something about this, and they haven't."

Fay Vincent, the former Major League Baseball commissioner, was aghast at the thought of fans cheering for their teams to lose and for rivals to win – not only because it looks bad, but also because it harms the league's overall business model.

"That's just sick," Vincent said from his home in Vero Beach, Fla. "It's a total perversion for what the sport is all about, which is fair competition with everybody playing to the best of their ability and all teams putting the best product on the field or the ice."

"When you beat the Sabres – and that impacts the postseason – you've beaten a team that's built to lose. That's just bizarre, and it's corrosive."

Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban didn't directly address the issue of tanking because he wouldn't acknowledge it happens in the NBA, although the Philadelphia 76ers have been accused this season of intentionally bottoming out.

"Teams in the NBA don't lose on purpose," Cuban wrote in an email to The Buffalo News. "They just aggregate enough talent to compete for a championship in that year."

But if there were such a thing as tanking, then Cuban might be able to make a case for it. Cuban, a firebrand spirit among old-school NBA owners, is known for challenging the establishment.

"Remember: The goal is not to win games," Cuban wrote. "The goal is to win a championship. Some believe the best approach to get there is by getting the best possible draft picks."

"So those teams are not trying to lose. They are trying to win a championship."

But if championships are the sole purpose in sports, then have the past four decades of Buffalo Bills and Sabres games provided no value to Western New York?

Landslide losses

Nobody has alleged the Sabres' coaching staff or players are on the take. They appear to be giving an honest effort, recently scoring the first goal 10 times in a 12-game stretch.

Where the Sabres have rigged the system is by assembling a team that – no matter how hard they try – still would lose a landslide number of games.

"It's the sneakiness that can have a deleterious effect in the long run," Koehl said. "Tim Murray is exemplifying a kind of dishonesty where you wink at the truth, and he's a public figure. So I think that's harmful for the community."

The NHL's traditional rebuilding method occurs with an in-season decision. Management usually assesses its team after a couple months or a set number of games and determines whether to make a playoff run or reorganize for next season.

The Sabres have looked like a team with a premeditated strategy to lose as many games as possible.

Las Vegas oddsmakers haven't favored the Sabres once all season, not even early at home, against awful opponents or both.

The Sabres have scored 1.77 goals per game, the fourth-lowest average since the NHL legalized the forward pass in 1929. They scored 10 goals through their first 10 games, the lowest such output since 1936.

And when they went on a 14-game losing streak in December and January, management sat on its hands. The Sabres neither waived nor traded any of their players. They didn't fire coach Ted Nolan.

"What it's doing is displaying and encouraging a certain kind of dishonesty, an appearance of a lack of effort, an appearance of gaming the system," Koehl said.

"Everyone else is drawn into it: the sportscasters, the journalists, the fans. Everyone is drawn into this place of acting and feeling in a way that is two-faced.

"That's the opposite of what you would hope a public organization would do. You would hope a public organization would bring out the best in humanity."

What the Sabres appear to be doing isn't new.

The NHL instituted a draft lottery system after the Ottawa Senators flopped to select Alexandre Daigle first overall in 1993. The gambit backfired. Daigle is considered among hockey's biggest draft busts.

Former Washington Capitals coach Ron Wilson admitted this month – without providing all the details – his general manager, George McPhee, ordered him to lose down the 1998-99 homestretch to improve draft position.

The NBA changed its postseason seeding rules when the 2005-06 Los Angeles Clippers seemingly tanked games to dodge Cuban's Mavericks in the first round.

The 2006 Swedish hockey team lost a game to avoid playing Canada or Russia in the Olympic quarterfinals. Four women's badminton doubles teams were ejected from the 2012 Olympics for throwing round-robin matches to manipulate their seedings.

Last month, two Tennessee high school girls' basketball teams were banned from their postseason. They tried to lose to each other and avoid playing the defending state champ in the regional tournament. They committed blatant fouls and even shot into the wrong basket.

Carrie W. LeCrom, director of the Center for Sport Leadership at Virginia Commonwealth University, sees degrees of ethical misbehavior among the various examples.

"I consider there to be a major difference in societal expectation of what is done at the high school or college level versus the professional level," LeCrom said. "Professional sports are so financially driven that I think it's a challenge to say that this version of tanking is similar to pro sports version of tanking.

"Is it ethically questionable behavior either way? Yes, but I really don't think you're comparing apples to apples."

Igel and Koehl noted that even pro sports come with a certain community responsibility, whether the issue is steroids, medical care or competing with integrity.

"A majority of people would roll their eyes," Koehl said. "Talking in terms of character and virtue is something that has probably gone out of style in our culture.

"Then there are people who are just outraged at what the Sabres are doing, that it's shameful, a travesty or makes a mockery of the game. There are a lot of people who find a virtuous approach to sports very refreshing in this day and age."

NHL fails to respond

The NHL has insisted it doesn't have a tanking problem.

NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly did not respond to emailed questions from The News about the league's stance on the temptation to intentionally lose for favorable draft position.

At the NHL's general managers meetings last week, Daly did comment on the widespread perception that teams such as the Sabres, Coyotes and Oilers are diving for a shot at McDavid or Eichel.

"I certainly agree that there has been a higher focus than I have ever seen it," Daly said. "Having said that, I don't think it's an overriding concern for the league.

"I don't think any of the teams are actively tanking, and we have new rules. The odds of the lowest finishers have been reduced dramatically to win a top pick, and beginning next year you could finish last and still pick fourth. We've taken steps to address the perception."

The NHL's Daigle-induced lottery system is being phased out over the next two drafts.

This year's lottery shrinks the chances for any non-playoff team to win the top selection. The second pick then goes to the next team with the worst record and moves back from there.

Next year, the lottery will slot the top three draft choices. Being the worst team will provide fewer assurances of getting one of the top rewards.

"I'm sympathetic to these fans who get so rabid they lose sight of proper perspective," Vincent said, "but it's a terrible view to think 'We can get ahead by deliberately having a poor season.' There's something really offensive about that."

Vincent noted there's a substantial difference between losing on purpose and consistently failing to field a competitive team such as baseball's Kansas City Royals and Pittsburgh Pirates did for decades. Vincent lamented how rotten his Cleveland Browns have been for half a century.

"Taking steps to end up at the bottom involves some purposeful action," said Vincent, a former chairman of Columbia Pictures and vice chairman at Coca-Cola. "Some teams end up doing very badly because they're incompetently run. They didn't do it deliberately.

"That's not nearly the same as affirmatively going out of your way to lose for draft position, which I feel should be condemned."

Is it corrupt?

Should losing on purpose in sports be considered morally corrupt?

The answer depends on the philosophical method. While there are other ethical approaches to decision making, here are the three main approaches used in academic circles:

- Utilitarianism is the belief that, in basic terms, the ends justify the means. It's also known as social hedonism; pleasure is the objective regardless of the cost. This would provide the most favorable view of tanking.
- Deontology says that some actions simply are intrinsically wrong, and we shouldn't do them. A cornerstone to deontology is reversability, meaning a person should be able to switch roles with someone else in a given

situation and still be able to rationally will that action be done. In other words, if you would scoff at the Toronto Maple Leafs for tanking, then you shouldn't want your team to tank either.

- Virtue theory is based on the works of Aristotle, Plato and ancient Chinese philosophy. At virtue theory's core is a flourishing community, with character the most important trait. Under this approach, tanking is not virtuous if done deceitfully or if it damages the league or the sport.

Igel and Koehl disagree about where blame should fall in the Sabres' approach to 2014-15.

Koehl, who considers himself a virtue theorist, can forgive the Sabres' front office because the NHL rewards the most terrible teams.

"The Sabres' leadership has been put in an awkward situation because of an unwise structure," Koehl said. "They're making decisions that are in the best long-term interests of the club."

But just because a team is allowed to lose on purpose, doesn't mean it should.

"Saying that it's OK because that's how the system is set up pushes away any effect that behavior has on the broader society," Igel said. "We tend to forget – and this is a big thing in business ethics – whatever decisions are made in an organization are going to have an effect not only on the people in that organization, but also the industry in a broader sense and, by extension, society.

"That's when you start to get into the excuse business. You can look at business scandal after business scandal and find the same kind of mentality, shifting blame. 'Yeah, I did it, but there were all sorts of other factors that made me do it.'"

Koehl and Igel agreed the ethics of purposeful losing cannot be determined by whether it works or not. The integrity of any decision is founded on the wisdom and information at the time it's made.

So it matters not if a team that loses intentionally all season could be guaranteed A) last place in the standings, and B) a player that wins the team three Stanley Cups.

And it matters not if the team fails to get the player it wanted or he gets seriously injured in a motorcycle accident before he plays a game.

"Your action is ethical not based on how it turns out," Koehl said, "but on all the information you had at the time.

"But the result's not even guaranteed, and that's a point... You can make all these choices that are truly objectionable and still not achieve the goal you're aiming for."

Sabres could get Bogosian, Kaleta back vs. Coyotes

By Brian Hunter

NHL.com

March 25, 2015

COYOTES (22-44-8) at SABRES (20-46-7)

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

Season series: The Buffalo Sabres swept their two-game series against the Arizona Coyotes last season. Sabres forward Tyler Ennis scored in each of the one-goal wins.

Coyotes team scope: Goalie Mike Smith will start for Arizona, coach Dave Tippett said Wednesday. Smith made 33 saves Tuesday when Arizona got a much-needed win, 5-4 in overtime against the Detroit Red Wings. The Coyotes had lost 17 of their previous 18 games. Forward Lauri Korpikoski drew a double minor for high-sticking when Red Wings defenseman Marek Zidlicky caught him with a stick to the mouth; Tippett said Korpikoski's status will be re-evaluated Thursday. Forward Mark Arcobello scored twice, including the overtime winner, and tied a career-high with three points. He has seven goals and 11 points in 19 games since joining the Coyotes, his fourth NHL team this season. Arcobello has set career highs with 15 goals and 26 points.

Sabres team scope: Defenseman Zach Bogosian and forward Patrick Kaleta are hoping to return. Bogosian played more than 30 minutes against the Toronto Maple Leafs on March 11, but hasn't been in the lineup since because of a lower-body injury. Kaleta has missed more than a month with a lower-body injury. Each player said he still had to confer with Buffalo's medical staff about playing. Goalie Matt Hackett could get the start. The Sabres are 1-8-2 in their past 11 games and trail the Coyotes by five points in the overall NHL standings. "We're approaching tomorrow's game like any other. It's two teams desperate for wins, and we want to win," captain Brian Gionta said in comments tweeted by the Sabres.

It pays to lose when Sabres and Coyotes meet

By Kevin Allen

USA Today

March 25, 2015

When the Buffalo Sabres host the Arizona Coyotes Thursday night, winning is in neither team's long-term best interest.

"People who follow these teams closely know that the course of each franchise could turn with these remaining games," Sabres fan Mike Madden said.

The Sabres (20-46-7) are last in the NHL with 47 points, and the Coyotes (22-44-8) are five points ahead of them.

"We know that success isn't an extra W in the win column," Madden said. "It's losing and increasing your chance to draft one of (Connor) McDavid or (Jack) Eichel."

Ontario Hockey League star McDavid and Boston University's Eichel are considered franchise players, able to transform a franchise as Sidney Crosby did in Pittsburgh.

Under the NHL draft lottery setup, the 30th-place team is guaranteed to get one of those players. The team finishing 29th could land one, but might pick third overall. The last three years, though, the No. 29 team has won the lottery.

The Sabres and Coyotes play again Monday in Glendale, Ariz. Considering the Sabres have nine games left and the Coyotes have eight, the Coyotes probably need to lose both games to make the situation more interesting.

Sabres fan Matt Coleman said Buffalo radio station WGR 550 has been pumping up Thursday's game as if it is "the most unique Sabres game in team history."

"We've never been in a position like this," said Coleman. "Most fans that are rooting against the Sabres have done so behind closed doors, and in silence. With Thursday, the thought is that the 'tankers' at the (First Niagara) Center will be vocal — actively cheering against the Sabres. There's been discussion of 'Where can I get a Coyotes shirt?' and wearing bags over their heads. Some worry fights may occur in the stands with the tankers and non-tanker Sabres fans getting into it."

Fans from both teams have to be philosophical about their situation. Legal secretary Danielle Vasiliow, a season ticketholder since the Coyotes' third season in Arizona, says this season has been difficult to accept.

"If they continue to go downhill, we are going to get a great draft pick and that will make this horrible season worth it," she said. "And I feel horrible saying that."

The NHL has had a draft lottery since 1995, but originally non-playoff teams could move up four spots if they won, giving five teams a shot at picking No. 1.

In 2013, the lottery was changed to give all non-playoff teams a shot. With the odds changing this season, the worst team now has a 20% chance of going first.

The draft lottery is televised, but the balls actually coming out of the machine — as you see in lottery shows — isn't shown because it isn't interesting television.

"It has nothing to do with transparency," deputy commissioner Bill Daly told USA TODAY Sports.

The NHL has shown a video describing the process on its website, but not many people have watched. Ernst and Young, the accounting firm that vouches for the integrity of trophy balloting, is on hand to make sure the draft lottery is conducted properly.

"All of the clubs participating are invited into the room (with the lottery machine)," Daly said. "They used to go, but they have stopped going."

The NHL is planning to release video of the lottery machine working because there is so much interest in this year's draft.

"You have some fan hysteria," Daly said. "I had an email (recently) from a Buffalo fan saying he wanted to be the Buffalo fan representative to observe the draft lottery. There is no doubt there is a higher focus on this draft."

Social media have helped heighten the awareness of the stakes of the Arizona-Buffalo game. The Edmonton Oilers, who have drafted first from 2010-12, also are in the mix.

Daly said general managers have asked him whether the league should consider a rule preventing teams from drafting No. 1 overall two seasons in a row.

"That never appealed to me," Daly said, "because as long as you have the right structure, whatever it generates, it generates."

The Amherst Pizza and Ale House in Buffalo is having fun with the McDavid/Eichel sweepstakes.

The establishment is selling a special vodka drink honoring McDavid for 4.97 (McDavid wears No. 97 for the Erie Otters) and one saluting Eichel for 4.09 (he wears No. 9).

Here's the catch: According to sales material, "if you order a McDavid drink, you have an 80% chance of getting an Eichel drink, instead."

Buffalo coach Ted Nolan says he doesn't want to finish in last place

By Josh Cooper

Yahoo Sports

March 25, 2015

Buffalo coach Ted Nolan wants to win. He doesn't want to lose out the rest of the season, which may sound horrifying for a team whose management seems to be all in on giving it the best chance to get the No. 1 pick in the draft.

And this sounds worse on the eve of Buffalo's "Tank Wars" week with two games against the Arizona Coyotes. The Sabres have the fewest amount of points in the NHL, and hence the highest chance to land the No. 1 overall pick in the upcoming draft. The Coyotes have the second-fewest.

Per the Buffalo News:

"I can't control what other people think and what other people do," Nolan said Wednesday afternoon after the team practice at First Niagara Center. "I know what I feel. I'm not speaking for anybody else. I'm speaking for myself. Who wants to finish last? I never went into anything my entire life wanting to finish last. You go into it with the right intentions and it's the integrity of the game. That's the line for me. You just go out and do what you have to do and feel the way you feel and some people want to finish last, well then good for them."

Ah yes, "Tank Wars" ... I feel like this needs a song sung by Bill Murray.

Back to seriousness, even more surprising that during these comments, general manager Tim Murray did not come down from his perch with a chloroform washcloth to snuff out Nolan and take him upstairs for brainwashing. But if anything, Nolan's words show the disconnect between coaches, management and players on this whole situation with the Sabres.

Coaches hardly ever want to lose. It's not in their DNA. Most are laser focused on getting wins, or at least using losses as teaching points for future games where their teams can win. Players sometimes want to win for each other, sometimes want to win for themselves.

A player like Sabres goaltender Anders Lindback who is fighting for another NHL contract for example. He's not alone on the Sabres who per NHL Numbers have 12 unrestricted free agents or restricted free agents.

Management has its own agenda. And fans, it's understandable why they want the Sabres to lose out. Connor McDavid is a generational talent with the possible No. 1 pick. So is second-ranked prospect Jack Eichel. While it's not a foregone conclusion the team with the worst record gets the No. 1 pick, it helps. This is not the first time a team has done this. Pittsburgh basically tanked for Mario Lemieux in 1983-84.

Look at this Washington/Pitt roster for the final regular season game in 2004 before the Alex Ovechkin draft.

Said Nolan per Buffalo Hockey Beat:

"But for the vast majority, I don't think people come here to watch you lose or to want you to lose," he said. "I just don't think it's in the feelings of this city. I never felt it. That's why I don't think it's there."

Oh, it'll be there, again according to Buffalo Hockey Beat:

The coach likely understands the Sabres' rabid fan base will root against them throughout Thursday's highly anticipated tilt against the Arizona Coyotes.

Nolan is not a coach for a massive rebuild. He's a guy who has won in the past, and clearly wants to win. What does this all mean for the future for him?

Who knows ... but it's clear he's tired of losing, which means he and GM Tim Murray are probably not on the same page.

And you know what, good for him for saying what's on his mind.

Ted Nolan believes Buffalo wants Sabres to win

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 25, 2015

BUFFALO – Deep down, Sabres coach Ted Nolan probably knows the scene inside the First Niagara Center could get ugly for tonight's anticipated matchup with the Arizona Coyotes, a contest between the NHL's two worst teams.

With a prized, potentially franchise-changing prospect – either Connor McDavid or Jack Eichel – essentially guaranteed with a loss, fans could do the unthinkable – root *against* the 30th-place Sabres, who trail Arizona by five points with nine games left. There have been some odd cheers recently.

These are bizarre times, indeed, especially for Nolan, who's trying to win games with his team's rabid fan base rooting for him to fail.

"I can't control what other people think and what other people do," Nolan said Wednesday. "The only thing I know is what I feel. I'm not speaking for anyone else. I'm just speaking for myself. Who wants to finish last? I never went into anything my entire life wanting to finish last.

"You go into it with the right intentions. It's the integrity of the game that's in mind for me. So you just got to do what you have to do and feel what you want to feel. If somebody wants to finish last, good for them."

The "vast majority" of fans, Nolan believes, don't come to watch their team lose.

"I just don't think it's in the feelings of this city," he said. "I never felt it. That's why I don't think it's there."

Nolan, of course, hasn't said anything negative about the fans all season. That's not his style.

"I'm positive everything will be normal," he insisted Wednesday.

Clearly, tonight's tilt is anything but normal. Games between two awful teams rarely warrant attention. But Nolan, like a lot of coaches, has tunnel vision.

"He's probably blocking it out like everybody else does," Coyotes coach Dave Tippett said. "Every coach blocks it out. You got so much going on in your day-to-day (work)."

Still, some players know tonight's atmosphere could be interesting. Not everyone can block it out.

"Oh yeah, it's impossible not to think about," Coyotes captain Shane Doan said. "There's been hype about it. It's not hype from anyone that's positive. It is what it is. You can't really control what the fans are going to do."

Doan thinks fans "have to right to do whatever they want to do."

"I'm sure it's not going to be near as bad as anyone thinks it is, and it's going to be one of those things that as a player you're not going to really notice," he said.

Losing has taken its toll on Doan, a respected 19-year veteran. The Coyotes had dropped eight straight games and 18 of 19 before winning 5-4 in overtime Tuesday in Detroit. They had five goals in their previous five games.

Like the Sabres, they're terrible. They plummeted to 29th after selling off assets prior to the trade deadline.

"By no means am I enjoying the losing at all," Doan said. "It's awful, it's disgusting. I hate it. At the same time, you love the fact you get to play in the NHL and you love the game of hockey and you want to keep playing."

That's why both teams haven't quit on the season.

"You don't accept losing," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said. "You're not content with game in and game out, coming up short, no matter how close it is or what you're doing, you got to find ways to get wins. That's what this league is about. That's our main focus, game in and game out, is trying to get a win. It's not good enough to be close."

Doan added: "Nobody wants to be in the position our two teams are in. Not one player. You're embarrassed. You have to be. No one ever wants to be considered the worst. Obviously, both teams are being considered the two worst teams in the league. That's not a good feeling."

The man with his fingerprints all over both teams will be in the building tonight, according to the Buffalo News. Former Sabres general manager Darcy Regier, the godfather of tanking, is now Arizona's senior vice president and assistant GM.

He brought his blueprint to the desert.

Regier hasn't been seen in these parts since the Sabres fired him Nov. 13, 2013. He started the Sabres' deep rebuild two years ago, trading captain Jason Pominville and later warning some "suffering" lied ahead. Within months, the Sabres had become a laughingstock filled with castoffs and youngsters in over their heads.

They strategically timed this rebuild to reap the benefits of a deep draft in June. Now, 16 months after he left town, Regier's plan is about to come to fruition.

The Sabres can still catch the Coyotes. The teams play again Monday in Arizona. But a seven-point deficit would likely be too much for them to overcome.

"You want to finish as high as you can," Gionta said. "In a season like this, you got to find little things to kind of set your sights on, and that's definitely one of them."

Sabres goalie Matt Hackett ready for start, must deal with soreness

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 25, 2015

BUFFALO – Almost a year later, Matt Hackett hasn't fully recovered from his torn right ACL. The goalie still experiences soreness after games, so the Sabres want him to rest.

The 25-year-old performed strongly in Saturday's 3-0 loss in Nashville, making 40 saves. But Sabres coach Ted Nolan started Anders Lindback on Monday in Dallas.

Hackett will likely start tonight's contest against the Arizona Coyotes, his fourth nod this season.

"He fought through a long recovery period," Nolan said Wednesday inside the First Niagara Center. "To throw him in when he's sore would be jeopardizing that situation."

Hackett just has to deal with pain until his knee heals.

"It's going to be sore right now," he said. "I just got to get used to it."

In other news, Sabres defenseman Zach Bogosian (lower body, six games) will likely return tonight. Nolan hinted Nikita Zadorov could sit. The rookie made a huge gaffe Saturday, leaving the ice in the middle of a play after breaking his stick. The Predators scored seconds later.

Nolan told Zadorov his teammates could pay with some skating if he doesn't change.

"When you put a little peer pressure on somebody, they do it a little bit better," Nolan said. "So today he was good. He's just one of those players we have to talk to on a regular basis."

Meanwhile, winger Patrick Kaleta (bone chip, 18 games) will play his first game since Feb. 10. The Sabres returned forward Tim Schaller to Rochester on Wednesday, creating a spot for the Angola native.

Nolan also said winger Jerry D'Amigo, who was high-sticked in the face Saturday, was being examined Wednesday.

It's business as usual for the Sabres

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 25, 2015

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Some of the fans want the Sabres to lose games, but for anybody to think that players or coaches would be any part of losing on purpose, just shows the ignorance of some people. Everybody knows what the prize is for finishing 30th, but Brian Gionta said, "We're not worried about that, its winning games game in and game out and we try to win every game, we prepare that way and it will be no different."

"It'll be no different than any other game, both teams are desperate teams that want to win games. There's no one that makes it to this level that's content losing."

"The guys in this room are proud guys, we've battled hard and we're not content with where we are, no one's happy with it, but each day you have to try to bring something better and improve."

Bogosian said, "No one wants to finish last. As a competitive person this is our job, this is our livelihood, this is what we have to do, we have to go about things professionally."

Gionta echoed what Bogosian said, "For sure, you want to finish as high as you can. In a season like this, you've got to find little things to set your sights on not finishing last is definitely one of them."

There are some people that think Sabre fans will be openly cheering for Arizona on Thursday. Ted Nolan isn't one of them, "I just don't believe that our fans, I mean there'll be some people probably feeling that way, but the vast majority I don't think people come here to watch you lose. I just don't think it's in the feelings of this city, I've never felt it so I don't think it's there and I'm positive everything will be like normal."

Nolan was asked if there was motivation not to finish 30th and he forcefully said, "Who wants to finish last? Nobody wants to finish last, I don't think there's anybody in this league that wants to finish last, but somebody does."

"I can't control what other people think and what other people do, I know what I feel and I'm not speaking for anybody else, I never went into anything in my entire life wanting to finish last. You go into it with the right intentions and it's the integrity of the game, so you just go do what you have to do."

The Coyotes come into Thursday's game with a five point lead on Buffalo.

Sabres' Nolan hopes three hurt players can play

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 25, 2015

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Sabres have three players questionable for Thursday's game.

Ted Nolan would like Matt Hackett to start in goal, but he's has soreness and swelling in his surgically repaired knee since making over 40 saves Saturday in Nashville.

Hackett said after practicing on Wednesday that he is still sore, but wants to play against the Coyotes. Ted Nolan said, "We'll have a discussion about that today and see how he felt on the ice. He fought through a long recovery period and to throw him in when he's a little bit sore would be jeopardizing that situation again so we'll make sure it's 100 percent before we put him in and we'll rely on our medical team for sure."

Talking with Hackett I could tell he's trying not to get too frustrated. "It's OK, like I've said before I put up with the pain right now and it's going to be sore for a while, so I'm used to it."

"I always want to play, but with my knee right now and where it's at I've got to take my rest when I can and it's just too difficult in this league to play back to back especially, so I keep icing it so it's ready for whenever I get in next."

Zach Bogosian has missed six games due to injury, but has practiced the past two days. The defenseman said, "It's felt good, I think getting back with the team is a step in the right direction."

Bogosian needs medical clearance to be able to play against the Coyotes, "We'll see tomorrow, I'll have to talk to the medical staff, but I'm optimistic."

Ted Nolan is equally optimistic with Bogosian and Pat Kaleta, "I think they're real close, I'll just have to confirm that with the medical staff, but they both felt good and looked good."

Jerry D'Amigo is still seeing doctors after getting smacked in the face. Either he or Kaleta will be ready to go as Tim Schaller has been sent back to Rochester.

Could Babcock be interested in the Sabres?

By Matthew Coller

WGR 550

March 25, 2015

As the NHL season winds down and the Buffalo Sabres are trending toward finishing in 30th place, there has been a ground swell of conversation about the future of the head coaching position in Buffalo.

Hockey Central analyst and former NHL coach and GM Doug Maclean said on Tuesday he has heard "big names" associated with the Sabres, but would not specify when he was pressed.

Wednesday, Darren Dreger said he is "convinced (Ted Nolan) is not going to be back" in Buffalo and said Mike Babcock may be interested if the Sabres finish last and select either Connor McDavid or Jack Eichel - although McDavid would up the odds as many front offices feel there is a gap between the two.

Babcock has not signed a contract extension with Detroit and is a free agent at the end of the season. People around the NHL are talking about his next location, saying the favorites are Toronto and Anaheim.

The Maple Leafs would represent a chance to coach in the No. 1 hockey market on Earth and rebuild around a promising prospect system. Anaheim could oust their current coach Bruce Boudreau if the Ducks do not make a deep run – and Babcock would have a good shot at a Cup with Corey Perry and Ryan Getzlaf in their primes. Of course, there are obvious drawbacks with both clubs.

Toronto, Anaheim and Buffalo would not be the only teams in contention. For months, there have been rumblings that Babcock has been gathering information on multiple NHL teams – including the Sabres - such as organizational structure, prospect systems and front office staff.

He could very well choose to stay in Detroit. The problem with the Wings, however, is that their two elite players are getting older and they do not have anyone in their prospect system that would replace the likes of Pavel Datsyuk and Henrik Zetterberg. The writing is on the wall for Detroit to slip soon.

The word is that the Cup-winning Detroit coach would immediately become the highest paid coach in the league, but money is not all he is interested in. Babcock could also want say over the roster, the same way Patrick Roy has decision making power in Colorado.

Outside of finishing in 30th, the hurdle would be whether the Sabres would be willing to give him that power. Word around the league is that teams have already made their interest in the Wings' coach known behind closed doors, but Babcock is likely focused solely on winning with Detroit this year. He would not be able to sign a contract elsewhere until July.

Babcock has reached the playoffs in all but one season during his NHL coaching career and has appeared in three Stanley Cup Finals.

Sabres not paying attention to 'McEichel' noise heading into Thursday's game against Arizona

WKBW

March 25, 2015

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - Given the current state of the franchise, there might not be a lot fans and Sabres players have in common right now.

One thing they do: both have March 26 - the day the Arizona Coyotes come to the Queen City - circled on the calendar.

"You don't need to be on Twitter to see there is a lot of excitement for McDavid or Eichel or that kind of thing," Cody Hodgson said. "From the players perspective we just go out and play like we've been doing."

"We don't look at it like that," Johan Larsson added. "We want to go out and win every game."

With a 140 characters at their disposal the voice of the fans couldn't be louder with Blue and Gold faithful writing "Clutch loss by the swords tonight #McEichel" following the teams 4-3 setback against the Stars Monday night.

Another with six hashtags including "Embrace the Tank" and "Lose Thursday" referencing the matchup against the Coyotes, who sit 29th in the league standings.

When 7 Eyewitness Sports asked Head Coach Ted Nolan if he had a message for fans in an effort to rally around the team rather than the potential reward at the end of the season, his words to Buffalonians were clear.

"It's a city full of workers, and I don't know anybody in this town who'd go to work and not give their best," he said. "That's what we're trying to do as a hockey team. I'm sure the fans will get behind that."

A team fighting to give its city a winner, and fans a reason to cheer.

Kaleta, Bogosian hope to return against Coyotes

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

March 25, 2015

UPDATE (3:17 p.m.): The Sabres have assigned to Tim Schaller to the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League.

With nine games remaining in the season, the Buffalo Sabres hope to get two players back from injury for their game Thursday night against the Arizona Coyotes.

Defenseman Zach Bogosian and forward Patrick Kaleta are just waiting for medical clearance before they can return to the lineup.

Bogosian, who has consistently been Buffalo's ice-time leader since he joined the team last month, has missed the past six games with a lower-body injury. He was a full participant at practice on Wednesday at First Niagara Center and hopes to be back for the 7 p.m. faceoff against Arizona.

"It's felt good. I think getting back with the team is obviously a step in the right direction. It felt nice to be out there," he said. "We'll see tomorrow. I still need to talk to the medical staff and go from there. But I'm optimistic."

If Bogosian does return, the Sabres will have seven healthy defensemen, requiring them to sit one on the blue line. Nolan said he and the coaching staff have an idea as to which player is most likely to be scratched, but didn't elaborate.

Kaleta had surgery to remove a bone chip from his knee in mid-February and has spent the past several weeks rehabbing. He said he's scheduled to have one more checkup with doctors Thursday morning.

"I'm skating 100 times better than when I was playing for the 33 games that I've played this season," he said. "I feel better. I feel like I can actually start beating people with my speed again. Obviously nine games is tough to get in the swing of things, but my heart is in Buffalo and all I want to do is play for the Sabres."

Matt Hackett could start in goal for Buffalo, but Sabres coach Ted Nolan is going to continue to be cautious with Hackett's health.

Hackett is coming off major off-season surgery on his right knee and while he's worked hard to get himself back to the NHL, he's still dealing with some soreness after games. Hackett has played 14 games for the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League and three games for Buffalo.

"He fought through a long recovery period and to throw him in when he's a little bit sore would be jeopardizing that situation again," Nolan said. "We'll make sure it's 100 percent before we put him and we'll rely on our medical team for sure."

In his last start on Saturday, he stopped 40 shots on the road against the Nashville Predators. The coaching staff could have put him in again on Monday in Dallas, but decided to give him some extra rest.

"I always want to play. With my knee right now, where it's at, I've got to take my rest when I can," Hackett said. "It's just too difficult in this League to play back-to-back especially, so I've just got to keep icing it and make it's ready for whenever I get in next."

Jerry D'Amigo missed practice again and Nolan did not have an update as to his status. D'Amigo took a high stick to the mouth on Saturday and while he was able to return to that game wearing a full cage, he missed the game in Dallas as he underwent further medical evaluations.

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College hockey report

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 25, 2015

RIT TIGERS (19-14-5 overall, 14-9-5 Atlantic Hockey)

For the second time in the program's Division I history, RIT is headed to the NCAA Tournament. The Tigers edged Canisius 2-1 on Friday, and then ran away late in a 5-1 victory over Mercyhurst on Saturday to claim their second Atlantic Hockey Championship. They'll face the No. 1 team in the country, Minnesota State, in a first-round matchup that will be broadcast on **ESPNU at 4 p.m. on Saturday, March 28.**

For Tigers head coach Wayne Wilson, the championship was a testament to his team's growth throughout the season. Prior to the New Year, RIT was below .500 in conference play. By season's end, they were arguably the hottest team in Atlantic Hockey.

"It feels great, there's really a sense of accomplishment from where we had to come from," Wilson said. "We weren't the frontrunner from start to finish; we just kept getting better as the year went on. We kept closing the gap and then we ran out of time during the regular season to get a regular season championship. But I thought that we were moving up the ladder in the right direction. We were playing well at the time and it carried into the playoffs."

RIT rode its hot streak past Air Force and into its semifinal matchup with rival Canisius, the No. 2 seed in Atlantic Hockey, at Blue Cross Arena on Saturday. The game began fittingly for the Tigers, as Atlantic Hockey Player of the Year Matt Garbowsky fed fellow senior Brad McGowan for the game's first goal with under a minute to play in the first period.

Shane Conacher evened the score for Canisius midway through the second period, but sophomore Danny Smith responded with the deciding goal roughly five minutes later, scoring on his own rebound after a long pass from Andrew Miller. From there on, Canisius never relented – the Griff's outshot RIT 10-5 in the final period. But senior Jordan Ruby was strong in net, making 27 stops on the night, and, as it's been all season, the Tigers' defense played strong and smart. RIT committed only one penalty on the night, limiting the strong Canisius power play.

"There's a real sense of calmness around our team defensively, so when it's a 2-1 game and they're certainly creating opportunities, there's a poise factor," Wilson said. "We're not off the handle, we're not panicking. There's a real sense of 'we've got this.' We've played very relaxed but with some intensity, if that makes sense."

Mercyhurst had gotten hot since closing out their regular season with two losses to RIT, most recently upsetting top-seeded Robert Morris in the conference semifinals. In the championship game, the Lakers came out firing. Mercyhurst outshot the Tigers 16-8 in the first period, but a flawless Ruby took a 0-0 tie into intermission.

RIT appeared to take control in the second. Freshman Matt Abt scored two minutes into the period to put the Tigers ahead, and then Garbowsky and McGowan assisted linemate Josh Mitchell for RIT's second goal later in the period. Early in the third, however, their momentum was put in jeopardy when Mercyhurst's Stephen Hrethoriak put the Lakers on the board and cut RIT's lead to one.

"I was more worried about what the goal did for them, because they've made some great comebacks throughout the playoffs against Bentley and against Robert Morris," Wilson said. "I said, 'Oh boy, we've got our hands full now.'"

But just as they had against Canisius, the Tigers remained composed. They never let Mercyhurst gain too much offensive momentum and, late in the period, they delivered the finishing blows when Miller and McGowan scored within three minutes of another to put the game out of reach. McGowan added an empty-net goal, and the Tigers were champions.

For Garbowsky and McGowan, the victory meant that their careers had come full circle. Both were freshmen the last time the Tigers made it to the Atlantic Hockey Final, a 4-0 loss to Air Force in 2012. At that time, RIT was coming off three-straight appearances in the championship game, but since that 2012 loss the team had never gotten back.

"I think they're two key, resourceful people for getting us back there and putting us back on track," Wilson said. "I guess we just got so accustomed to going there, we took it for granted and there might've been a lot of different reasons why we missed the rope the last two years but I also think I can point to them as the reason we did get back."

In addition to being named Player of the Year, Garbowsky was named Atlantic Hockey Tournament MVP and is a finalist for the Hobey Baker award as the nation's top player. On Saturday, he'll finally have a chance to show his skills on the national stage, and so will his fellow Tigers. They won't be picked to beat Minnesota State, of course, but then again this Tigers team was never the frontrunner.

"I think we've been playing within ourselves," Wilson said. "I think we have a good mindset. We're not too full of ourselves thinking 'we're unbeatable, look at our streak.' We're very respectful of who we play, and I think who we've played down the stretch has been very difficult. We're preparing for what's coming next and I think we just got to worry about our own game."

CANISIUS COLLEGE GOLDEN GRIFFINS (18-12-7 overall, 15-7-6 Atlantic Hockey)

The postseason result wasn't what they wanted, but the season in general was yet another positive step forward for the growing Canisius College hockey program. The Griffs opened their new home ice downtown at the HARBORCENTER, finished second in Atlantic Hockey in the regular season, and came a goal shy of playing in their third-straight title game.

While the disappointment of falling short lingers, Canisius head coach Dave Smith points to the Griffs' behind-the-scenes accomplishments as cause for celebration when reflecting on the season.

"It's another big step forward," Smith said. "We finished second-place in the league; we accomplished so many of our team goals. Internally, we felt like we accomplished all but maybe two of our goals. Often, success is only measured by the championship or the final game, but we had a very successful season. Our team GPA is 3.6. Our guys are very involved in the community. We have so many bright, positive things. The HARBORCENTER and the second-place finish, those are just the most public of our internal team goals."

Canisius graduates key contributors including: captain Doug Jessey, second-team All Atlantic Hockey goaltender Keegan Asmundson and forward Mitch McCrank. But expect the Griffs to come back with another talented roster next season, as they return All Atlantic Hockey Players in defenseman Chris Rumble and forward Ralph Cuddemi as well as their assist leader, Shane Conacher, to lead a young promising crop of players in 2015-16.