



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Maple Leafs-Sabres preview

By Nicolino Dibenedetto

Associated Press

March 31, 2015

After the Buffalo Sabres were booed for scoring and cheered for losing on home ice, things aren't likely to change in that regard for the rest of the season.

With the race for the worst record in the NHL still undecided, the Sabres could get another bizarre reception Wednesday against the Toronto Maple Leafs in a matchup of teams heading for the draft lottery.

Buffalo (21-47-8) owns the fewest points in the NHL - four fewer than Arizona - and the club's fans appear to want it that way in order to improve its chances of getting the first draft pick and perhaps selecting star prospect Connor McDavid.

Finishing with the worst record in the league would give a team a 20 percent chance of getting the top pick, 6.5 better than the next.

Those emotions were on display Thursday when fans booed Buffalo's comeback and cheered as it fell 4-3 in overtime to the Coyotes. They certainly weren't thrilled with the team splitting a two-game trip and ending a five-game slide with Monday's 4-1 win at Arizona.

"I really believe for the last number of weeks, we've been giving what we have to give," coach Ted Nolan said with another lost season winding down. "It's great to see when you give it, you get rewarded for it."

The fans have a different idea of what they consider a reward, and the Sabres are likely to hear it with four of their remaining six games coming at home.

Buffalo has given them little to cheer for anyway, losing 15 of 17 at First Niagara Center. However, the Sabres are 14-1-1 in their last 16 there against the Maple Leafs (29-42-6) after winning their fourth straight home meeting 6-2 on Nov. 15.

Tyler Ennis had three points in that matchup and equaled that total before missing his shootout attempt in a 4-3 loss at Toronto on March 11. The center has missed the last two games with an upper-body injury, but Nolan is hoping he'll be back against the Leafs.

Andrej Meszaros has two goals in each of the last two games, but the defenseman has just two assists in his past six meetings with Toronto.

The Maple Leafs have also been eliminated from postseason contention and will be a factor in the lottery, but haven't exactly helped their odds of landing the top pick after beating Tampa Bay 3-1 on Tuesday, three days after a 4-3 overtime victory versus Ottawa.

Toronto hasn't won three in a row since a season-best six-game run Dec. 6-16.

"It's just fun when you're winning, that's really the bottom line," center Nazem Kadri said. "Everything that we've been through, it's hard. I think realistically in the end, that makes you stronger as a person and as a player, just being able to handle all that adversity. It came all at once, so it's not like it was in separate pieces.

"You've got to give credit to the guys for showing some character and just being able to persevere."

James Reimer has been particularly impressive, stopping 62 of 66 shots over the last two games. He could start on back-to-back nights for the fourth time this season, but he's 2-3-2 with a 4.17 goals-against average in seven visits to Buffalo.

Jonathan Bernier has a 1.90 GAA while winning three straight meetings with the Sabres - though all of them came at home.

Kadri, looking to build on his two-point effort Tuesday, has five in his last four visits to Buffalo.

Win over Coyotes has Sabres gunning for more

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

March 31, 2015

As shouts of joy echoed from the dressing room behind him Monday night, Sabres defenseman Tyson Strachan walked past assistant coach Tom Coolen in the hallway.

"One out of seven!" Strachan said with a smile, with the words bringing a matching grin to Coolen's face.

It's clear the team that has spent two seasons failing to win is determined to do it for the next six games – much to the chagrin of Connor McDavid and Jack Eichel fans.

Buffalo's convincing 4-1 victory over the Arizona Coyotes sent the Sabres back home feeling mighty good about themselves. They partied hard in Gila River Arena, cranking the music while singing and dancing along. Every win is something to treasure for a last-place team, but it was obvious this victory carried special significance.

"Yeah, for sure," captain Brian Gionta said. "We worked hard for it. Like we've said all along, there's character in this room and everybody's pushing hard 'til the end. There's a lot of pride in here."

Plenty of folks are worried the jolt of pride could cost Buffalo a guaranteed shot at McDavid or Eichel. The Sabres climbed to within four points of 29th-place Arizona, with one fewer game played. They'll make it up Wednesday night when the Toronto Maple Leafs visit First Niagara Center.

"There's what, six games left?" Sabres left wing Nicolas Deslauriers said. "We've got one win. We'll try to get six other ones."

The Coyotes own the tiebreaker of regulation/overtime wins (18-13), so the Sabres would need to pass Arizona to avoid the basement. The 30th-place team gets either the first or second pick in the NHL Draft.

Buffalo's players hated finishing at the bottom last season, and those who remain don't want to be back-to-back cellar -dwellers. Newcomers like Anders Lindback have noticed.

"You don't want to be last," said the goaltender, who stopped 28 of 29 shots Monday. "All these guys are here for a reason. They're good hockey players and winners. They want to win. That's why you make it to this league."

While the Sabres were a desperate, hungry team Monday, the Coyotes were awful. Perhaps the return home after a week out East caused the lethargy. Maybe the Sabres just want to avoid 30th more than them.

The final two weeks of the season won't be easy for either team. Here's the breakdown:

- Strength of schedule - The Coyotes' remaining five opponents (San Jose twice, Calgary, Vancouver and Anaheim) have a points percentage of .594. The Sabres' six opponents (Toronto, Chicago, New York Islanders, Carolina, Columbus and Pittsburgh) are at .542.

- Playoff teams – Buffalo and Arizona each have to face three playoff teams. The Sabres will host Chicago, visit the Islanders and close the season at home against Pittsburgh. Arizona visits Calgary and Vancouver before wrapping up the year at home against Anaheim.

The season ends April 11 for both clubs..

- Home games – Arizona plays two of its five games at home, the Sabres play four of their six at home.

It'll be interesting to see if the games in Buffalo are a help or hindrance to the Sabres. They were taken aback and peeved that folks wearing Blue and Gold rooted for the Coyotes last week. With the stakes remaining high, the atmosphere should remain mixed.

Wednesday night's game likely won't be an accurate measuring stick because Leafs fans always invade downtown and cheer against Buffalo.

The Coyotes have performed slightly better away from the desert. They are 13-22-3 on the road and 10-24-5 at home. The Sabres are 12-20-5 in Buffalo and 9-27-3 on the road.

The last road game was perhaps Buffalo's best of the season. The Sabres took a 31-19 shot edge into the third period, and the play seemed more lopsided than that.

"All around, it was probably one of our best games lately," Deslauriers said. "We had confidence, and Lindy just played phenomenal."

Lindback made several stellar saves while keeping the Sabres up, 2-1. Lindback improved to 2-5-2 with Buffalo, numbers that fail to reflect his stellar .926 save percentage since being acquired in February.

"He looked like a true NHL No. 1 goaltender," coach Ted Nolan said.

Andrej Meszaros, Rasmus Ristolainen and Gionta are also on hot streaks. After scoring just three goals in his opening 52 games with the Sabres,

Meszaros has four in four periods. Ristolainen has goals in three straight games. Gionta has four goals and nine points in his last eight games.

"They're a real good group of guys," Nolan said. "We've got a real young team. We've got some guys trying to prove themselves in this league. We've got some veterans trying to teach them the way.

"We've been giving what we have to give, and it's great to see that when you give it you get rewarded for it."

Weber nominated for Masterton Trophy

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

March 31, 2015

No one in Mike Weber's family was into hockey, but that changed when he was 6 years old. The youngster walked to a rink near his home in Beaver Falls, Pa., and it was love at first sight.

"I can still remember going to the rink and watching it and seeing it," the Sabres defenseman said. "At 6 years old, I fell in love with it. I knew I had to play this game."

Weber dedicated his life to making the NHL, so it's fitting that he's up for an award given to the player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey.

The Buffalo chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers' Association has voted Weber as its nominee for the Masterton Memorial Trophy. Writers in each NHL city select a candidate, and the winner is chosen from the list of 30 players. The award is named for Bill Masterton, the only player in NHL history to die as a direct result of injuries suffered during a game, that in 1968.

Don Luce (1975) and Pat LaFontaine (1995) are the Buffalo players who have won the award.

Weber earned the nomination in part by being a veteran leader on a young team in need of them. The longest-tenured player in the organization mentors teammates such as Ramsus Ristolainen and Nikita Zadorov. He also shows how to be a spokesman during tough times, like when he eloquently represented the Sabres in speaking about the death of former teammate Steve Montador.

The 27-year-old leads Buffalo in blocked shots while playing a career-high 18:43 per night.

"I owe everything I have to this game," Weber said. "I'm not the most talented, the most skilled, but I knew where I wanted to be. I knew where I wanted to end up, and I've worked hard to get here. I try to work hard to stay here."

"I truly believe this is the greatest game there is. It's fast, it's hard. There's nowhere to run out of bounds. Guys are flying around 20 to 30 mph and shooting the puck 100 mph. It's a special game. It's old-school gladiators at times."

Weber also recognizes who the true heroes are in his world. He sponsors the "Tickets for Troops" program and donates tickets to every home game to members of the military, with the honoree invited to the dressing room after the game.

"It's nice to give back to them because obviously we wouldn't be able to enjoy this game, we wouldn't be able to enjoy the simple things in life if we didn't have their sacrifices and their bravery," Weber said. "It gets emotional in the locker room sometimes. You see these guys and you see how much they enjoy just coming to a hockey game. It's hard to convey how appreciative you really are of them."

"It's been something special, and as long as I'm here, I'll keep it going."

Sabres return home to host Maple Leafs

By Benjamin Zweiman

NHL.com

March 31, 2015

MAPLE LEAFS (29-42-6) at SABRES (21-47-8)

TV: SN, MSG-B

Season series: The Toronto Maple Leafs have won two of three games against the Buffalo Sabres, including a 4-3 shootout victory in the most recent game at Air Canada Centre three weeks ago. Toronto center Tyler Bozak scored the deciding goal in the shootout. Sabres forwards Tyler Ennis, Johan Larsson and Matt Moulson each had a goal and two assists.

Maple Leafs team scope: Toronto begins a two-game road trip Wednesday and has won two consecutive games for the first time since Feb. 26-28 after a 3-1 win against the Tampa Bay Lightning on Tuesday. Goaltender James Reimer made 40 saves in his second consecutive victory. "James has battled, deserved to play those two games, and getting those two wins was a confidence booster for him," interim coach Peter Horachek said. Center Nazem Kadri had a goal and an assist. Forward Phil Kessel has 18 goals and 18 assists in 50 games against Buffalo.

Sabres team scope: Defenseman Mike Weber was selected as the Sabres' nominee for the 2015 Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy on Tuesday. "I owe everything I have to this game," Weber told the Buffalo News. "I'm not the most talented, the most skilled, but I knew where I wanted to be. I knew where I wanted to end up, and I've worked hard to get here. I try to work hard to stay here." Buffalo ended a five-game losing streak with a 4-1 road win against the Arizona Coyotes on Monday. Goaltender Anders Lindback made 28 saves and defenseman Andrej Meszaros scored two goals for the second consecutive game. Rookie defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen has scored in three straight games. The Sabres play three of their final six games against teams in a Stanley Cup Playoff position.

Buffalo Sabres, Arizona Coyotes make things interesting in the McEichel Derby

By Scott Stinson

National Post

March 31, 2015

Andrej Meszaros might want to keep an eye out for Sabres general manager Tim Murray, carrying a telescoping metal baton.

It was about eight minutes into the first period at the First Niagara Center on Thursday night, when Arizona Coyotes winger Jordan Szwarz grabbed a loose puck in the Buffalo slot and quickly snapped it past Sabres goalie Matt Hackett.

The crowd cheered noisily. And then it booed. It sounded like the crowd was disgusted with itself.

Three periods later, when Arizona's Sam Gagner ripped a power-play shot past Hackett for the 4-3 overtime winner, the cheers rang out again. In Buffalo. For a loss.

"You know what, I'm not going to complain about the fans in this city," said Sabres coach Ted Nolan after the game. But then later, asked about the angry reaction of some Sabres to the cheers for the Arizona goal, he allowed that "you gotta be a little disappointed, as a player."

The Buffalo Sabres defenceman scored twice Monday night in a 4-1 victory over the Arizona Coyotes, keeping the race for last place very much alive.

None of the Sabres has ever said they were trying to do anything other than win games as the season draws to a close, but none has made a finer point of showing it than Meszaros, who has scored five goals this year — and four of them in the last two games.

And so, McEichel Bowl II: The Reckoning, three days after Arizona's win in the first game between the two worst teams in the league, leaves the Coyotes with 54 points on the season and the Sabres with 50.

The Coyotes have five games remaining in the season, and the Sabres have a treacherous extra game left, meaning the question of which team will finish in the coveted 30th spot is far from settled. (Last place guarantees a shot at drafting one of Connor McDavid or Jack Eichel, both potential franchise centres. The team that finishes 29th could be bumped into the third pick if a team above them in the standings wins the draft lottery next month.)

Had Arizona beaten the Sabres on Monday night, Buffalo's position in the cellar would have been all but assured, with eight points separating the teams. But the Sabres went out and played one of their best games of the year, which admittedly isn't saying much. After the Coyotes scored only 1:17 into the game on a Connor Murphy point shot, the Sabres dominated the play the rest of the way. Meszaros scored twice in the second period — four minutes in, and again at the 13-minute mark — as Buffalo outshot Arizona 19-9 in the frame.

Those two goals in a nine-minute span are more than the Sabres have averaged in a game for two seasons running — their 1.81 goals per game average coming into Monday night is the lowest in the NHL since the Second World War, other than the 1.83 goals per game that the Sabres averaged last season. And the 19 shots they piled up in the second period was two short of the 21 per regulation game they have averaged over the course of the season. A handful of excellent saves from Coyotes goalie Mike Smith kept the Sabres from blowing the game open, which is a phrase possibly never written about the Sabres this year.

Sabres goalie Anders Lindback responded in kind in the third, making 11 saves as the Coyotes pressed for a tying goal. Buffalo killed two late penalties and scored twice in an empty net to seal the game.

Unlike Thursday's game in which a good chunk of the crowd in Buffalo was enthusiastically cheering for Arizona, there was little evidence that the fans at Gila River Arena were doing anything other than cheering for the Coyotes. It is fair to say that McDavid and Eichel have not been big news items in the desert.

Buffalo hosts the Maple Leafs on Wednesday — a dangerous potential for two points, especially since Toronto will be playing the second half of a back-to-back — and also has games left against Carolina and Columbus. The Sabres will also face Chicago, Pittsburgh and the New York Islanders in games that would seem unlikely to generate points for Buffalo.

Arizona has a home-and-home against San Jose, a team not quite eliminated from playoff contention yet, and then games against Calgary, Vancouver and Anaheim, all of which should be playing for playoff positioning.

Should the Coyotes and Sabres finish tied in the standings, the Sabres would win the last-place tiebreaker, so to speak, by having fewer wins in regulation and overtime.

"We worked hard for this win," said Sabres captain Brian Gionta. "There is a lot of pride and character in this room and we are pushing hard to the end."

His team's fans — and management — might prefer they push not quite so hard.

Sabres could still finish 29th, lose guarantee of elite prospect

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 31, 2015

BUFFALO – Just like that, 29th place – a precarious spot that wouldn't guarantee the Sabres either Connor McDavid or Jack Eichel, the mega-draft prospects they covet – is back in play.

Sorry, fans, the race isn't over yet. The Sabres' 4-1 victory Monday in Arizona moved them to within four points of the Coyotes, who looked awful throughout the night.

The 30th-place Sabres also have a game in hand, so after tonight's tilt against the hapless Toronto Maple Leafs inside the First Niagara Center, they could be just *two points* behind Arizona. The Sabres would lose a tiebreaker because they have fewer regulation-overtime wins.

Still, here's why so many Sabres fans are fretting: Buffalo faces three bottom-feeders and only three playoff opponents. The Coyotes, meanwhile, close with five games against teams either in the playoffs or fighting for a spot.

The Sabres are 4-7-1 this season against their remaining opponents.

The schedule:

- Home tonight against Toronto (62 points, seventh in Atlantic Division).
- Home Friday against the Chicago Blackhawks (98 points, third in Central Division).
- Road Saturday against the New York Islanders (95 points, third in Metropolitan Division).
- Home Monday against the Carolina Hurricanes (67 points, eighth in Met).
- Road April 10 against the Columbus Blue Jackets (76 points, sixth in Met).
- Home April 11 against the Pittsburgh Penguins (95 points, second in Met).

The Coyotes are 4-7 against their remaining opponents:

- Road Friday against the San Jose Sharks (83 points, fifth in Pacific Division)
- Home Saturday against San Jose.
- Road Tuesday against the Calgary Flames (91 points, third in Pacific).
- Road April 9 against the Vancouver Canucks (93 points, second in Pacific).
- Home April 11 against the Anaheim Ducks (105 points, first in Pacific).

Six days after Sabres fans cheered for the Coyotes throughout their 4-3 overtime win here, what could happen tonight? Games against the Leafs usually feature a loud bipartisan crowd. Would Sabres fans really root for the Leafs? Are four home games down the stretch harmful?

The Sabres, who had Tuesday off, are 12-21-5 at home this year. They annihilated the Leafs 6-2 on Nov. 15 here in arguably their most dominant performance all season.

Usually late-season games between the Sabres and Leafs have some real meaning in the standings. Both teams are rarely awful at the same time.

The home team has won 18 of the last 20 meetings. The Sabres lost a 4-3 shootout March 11 in Toronto.

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In his first 52 games, Sabres defenseman Andrej Meszaros scored three goals. In the last two games, the Slovak has four goals, two in each outing.

Where the heck have these goals come from?

"Shooting the puck, I guess," Meszaros, who possesses a wicked shot, told reporters Monday in Arizona.

Meszaros has seven shots in his last two games – three and four – but just 55 all season. The 29-year-old had only three games with three or four shots before scoring twice in Saturday's 5-3 loss in Colorado.

"Last couple of games, the puck's getting through for him, and good for him," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said.

Meszaros did little after signing a one-year, \$4.125 million deal on July 1, becoming arguably one of the NHL's worst defensemen and a whipping boy for frustrated fans.

But he's been showcasing some of the talents that made him one of the league's best young defensemen not long ago, possibly saving his career.

Ironically, Meszaros recently hurt his hand.

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The Buffalo chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers' Association has selected gritty Sabres defenseman Mike Weber as its 2014-15 Masterton Trophy nominee.

The award recognizes the "NHL player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship, and dedication to hockey."

"I owe everything I have to this game," Weber said. "As a young kid, my parents weren't hockey people. At 6 years old I remember walking down to the local arena and seeing it. At 6 years old, I fell in love with it. I knew I had to play this game."

The 27-year-old is perhaps the Sabres' most passionate player – on and off the ice. So far, he's the only player who voiced his displeasure with Buffalo fans for cheering for the Coyotes.

Weber made himself into an NHL talent after some rough times. When he got cut from his eighth grade team in Pittsburgh, his family drove him nearly 300 miles a day so he could play for a team in Cleveland. He was home-schooled on the Internet the entire year.

"Obviously, I'm not the most talented, the most skilled, but I knew where I wanted to be," Weber said. "I knew where I wanted to end, and I've worked hard to get here. I try to work hard to stay here."

Notes: Leading Sabres scorer Tyler Ennis, out the last two games with an upper-body injury, could play tonight, Nolan said Monday. ... Nolan said also goalie Matt Hackett, who underwent major knee surgery less than a year ago, had swelling after playing the final 40 minutes on Saturday. The Sabres recalled goalie Andrey Makarov on Monday ... Nolan on goalie Anders Lindback, who stopped 28 shots Monday: "He was in control, he was in proper position. He looked like a true NHL No. 1 goaltender." Lindback has a .926 save percentage in 11 appearances with the Sabres. ... The Sabres have won only 23 of the last 158 games in regulation, including 12 this season. ... The Americans have signed Rochester Institute of Technology forward Matt Garbowsky to an amateur tryout for the rest of the season. The 24-year-old, one of 10 finalists for the Hobey Baker Award, scored 26 goals (tied for third in the NCAA) and a school-record 54 points (tied for fourth) in 40 games this season.

Last-place buzz about to get louder

By Mike Schopp

WGR 550

March 31, 2015

Wasn't it fun being on ESPN last week? Who knew they still had our address?

Last Thursday's overtime Sabres loss to Arizona provided good fodder for national sports talk, with fans openly rooting for the opponent. Kornheiser and Wilbon discussed our emotions on "PTI", and Van Pelt and Russillo did the same on their ESPN Radio show. So did Mike Greenberg on his, which surprised me because I thought Greenberg only pitched products.

(Pro hockey itself is no longer an ESPN-pitched product, a source of our discontent.)

The chapter on whether arena fans overstepped by cheering the Coyotes that night has been closed, but the book's wide open. And this week, with the race not over and opponents Sabres fans are used to caring about coming by, the scene could be even more controversial.

Memo to Mike Weber: Brace yourself.

Tomorrow it's Toronto, a team thousands of ticket-holders commonly show up to root for. That Arizona game made easy sense: Buffalo fans, comprising the vast majority of the crowd and seeing the benefits of losing, preferred the Coyotes. But Toronto's different. Leafs fans are fed up with their team and while not much can be gained in the standings, they may heckle the Leafs out of spite.

In short, the usual rivaling chants of "Let's Go, Buffalo" and "Go Leafs Go" at a Toronto game may occur, but with fans trading roles.

And you thought the Arizona game was a weird one.

Some Sabres fans' feathers were ruffled by Weber when he called them out for wanting a Sabres loss. Do these fans try to save a little face -- backward as this may sound -- by *dressing up* as a Leafs fan? A fan wearing the other uniform is one thing. A fan taping the other team's logo on his Sabres shirt is another. I guess.

Finding a Coyotes jersey to wear is tough, like finding a Sabres highlight on ESPN. The Leafs, though? I bet many of you know someone that owns a Leafs jersey. (Full disclosure: I own six. I grew up rooting for both the Sabres and Leafs, and in my 20s living in Rochester I preferred Toronto.)

What happened to all those Leafs jerseys the Toronto fans threw onto the ice?

Can we borrow them?

Sabres and Leafs fans cheering for each other's teams. With a nod to next week's Masters, there's a tradition unlike any other.

Who even knows, really. It's not like there's a book you can read. Everybody knows you go to a game hoping your team wins.

It's defining "winning", this year, that serves to divide.

As Arizona doesn't play again until late Friday night, both of the next two Sabres games will be nervous time for fans with their minds on last. Two Sabres wins and the race would be tied. After Toronto's likely-to-be-bizarre visit Wednesday, it's the Chicago Blackhawks on Friday night. Even without injured Patrick Kane on the ice I'd expect a few thousand (original) Chicago fans in-house.

And, as with the Arizona and Toronto games, Sabres fans will be making the switch.

Anxiety remains high. Fans (not to mention Sabres higher-ups) know the stakes. The benefits of winning now are infinitesimal. Of losing, mountainous. All of this may be funny but it's no joke. Find your way to four more regulation losses in six games or tempt fate.

After Wednesday's game the Sabres' schedule is challenging enough: Blackhawks, Islanders, Hurricanes, Blue Jackets, Penguins. That's three good teams and two lesser teams playing pretty well. No complaints from me.

But, of all teams, it's the Leafs that show up next.

If fans thought allegiances switching Arizona's way were confusing, wait until Wednesday.

Mike Weber nominated for Masterton Trophy

By Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

March 31, 2015

Buffalo Sabres defenseman Mike Weber was today announced as the team's nominee for the Bill Masterton Memorial Trophy, an award that recognizes the player who best exemplifies the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to hockey.

Weber was selected in a vote by the Buffalo chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers Association, the organization that oversees this award. One nominee is chosen from each team, and the winner is selected by a poll of the PHWA at the end of the regular season.

From The Buffalo News article announcing the nomination:

"Weber earned the nomination in part by being a veteran leader on a young team in need of them. The longest-tenured player in the organization mentors teammates such as Ramsus Ristolainen and Nikita Zadorov. He shows how to be a spokesman during tough times, like when he eloquently represented the Sabres in speaking about the death of former teammate Steve Montador."

The 27-year-old Weber has played in 305 career NHL games for the Sabres, after being selected by Buffalo in the second round (57th overall) of the 2006 Entry Draft.

The Sabres have had two previous winners of the Masterton Trophy: Don Luce (1975) and Pat LaFontaine (1995).

The award is named for the late Bill Masterton, the only NHL player to die from injuries suffered during a game, while playing for the Minnesota North Stars on January 15, 1968.