



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Kennedy's winding road leads back to Sabres' organization

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

December 19, 2016

SUNRISE, Fla. – After traveling for more than 30 hours from Sweden to Buffalo, Tim Kennedy was ready to restart his life in Rochester. It almost didn't happen because of a waiver claim.

But after Sabres General Manager Tim Murray worked out a deal, Kennedy took the ice with the Amerks on Monday. He's looking forward to being part of the Sabres' organization again.

"I'm just really happy to be back in Rochester," Kennedy told the Amerks' website. "I'm just going to come in and try to help the team win."

Kennedy, who played parts of two seasons with the Sabres, has led a gypsy life since getting bought out by ex-Buffalo GM Darcy Regier in 2010. The 30-year-old has gone from Connecticut to Florida to Rochester to Texas to Massachusetts to San Jose to Phoenix to Maine to Pennsylvania to Russia to Finland to Sweden. He started this season with Lulea of the Swedish Hockey League, recording two goals and two assists in 18 games, but the sides terminated the contract Thursday.

Buffalo signed Kennedy to a minor-league deal Saturday, but he needed to go through waivers because he started the season in Europe. Carolina's American Hockey League affiliate in Charlotte claimed the center.

The South Buffalo native signed with Rochester to get his wife and three young children close to home, so it's possible he wouldn't have reported to the Checkers.

"Charlotte has since transferred his contract back to our organization," Murray said. "We are happy to have Tim join the Amerks and look forward to his contributions this season."

Kennedy becomes the second-oldest player on the Amerks, behind 31-year-old defenseman Tyson Strachan. The Amerks are banking on Kennedy to boost their offense and the prospects' chances of reaching the NHL. Kennedy played 162 games with the Sabres, Panthers, Sharks and Coyotes, so he knows what it takes to reach the big leagues.

The center will skate between two of Buffalo's top prospects, left wing Alexander Nylander and right wing Justin Bailey.

"I can remember when I was a young guy," Kennedy said. "Now it's reversed where I'm the older guy. I think your time in hockey goes quick, and you have to like the experience. You have to just take advantage of it, and it's cool to be the older guy now and just help these young guys hopefully mature into really good young professionals."

Kennedy has played 335 games in the AHL, recording 71 goals, 196 assists and 267 points. The Amerks entered Monday's game in middle of the pack in scoring, ranking 15th with 77 goals in 28 games, an average of 2.75.

With an 11-16-1 record, they entered the home game against Binghamton in 12th place in the 14-team Eastern Conference.

"He certainly is going to bring some leadership to our group," Amerks coach Dan Lambert said. "He's been right around a point-a-game guy at this level. He's got the NHL experience. It's certainly something we were probably short of in the first part of the season, so having him is certainly welcoming.

"I think it's important to surround your young prospects with older guys that do things the right way and can provide leadership and a better chance at success as well. He's a guy that is capable of doing that. He's done that in the past, and we are looking forward to adding him."

Sabres Notebook: Trump tabs Panthers owner to lead Army

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

December 19, 2016

SUNRISE, Fla. – The Florida Panthers have been far more intriguing off the ice than on it. That reached another level Monday.

President-elect Donald J. Trump has nominated Panthers owner Vincent Viola to serve as Secretary of the Army, pending approval by the Senate. Ownership of the Panthers will be placed in a trust in the name of Viola's family, and Florida Vice Chairman Douglas A. Cifu will take over the team.

"Whether it is his distinguished military service or highly impressive track record in the world of business, Vinnie has proved throughout his life that he knows how to be a leader and deliver major results in the face of any challenge," Trump said.

Before buying the Panthers in 2013, Viola was a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point and served as an Airborne Ranger in the Army.

"If confirmed, I will work tirelessly to provide our president with the land force he will need to accomplish any mission in support of his National Defense Strategy," Viola said. "A primary focus of my leadership will be ensuring that America's soldiers have the ways and means to fight and win across the full spectrum of conflict.

"This great honor comes with great responsibility, and I will fight for the American people and their right to live free every day."

Trump held a pre-election rally in BB&T Center, where the Panthers will host the Buffalo Sabres on Tuesday night.

"As Vinnie's longtime business partner and friend, I'm humbled by the commitment to service he is demonstrating by accepting this great nomination," Cifu said. "While we all miss his leadership and guidance day to day, his mentorship over these many years has prepared me to take on this humbling responsibility with the Panthers and the NHL, and I look forward to continuing his legacy and vision once he is confirmed."

Sen. Charles Schumer has endorsed Viola's nomination, saying he is "up to the job" and his dedication to the U.S. Army is "second to none."

"We proudly congratulate Vincent Viola on his nomination to this important position – which, pending Senate approval, obviously will require his full-time attention," the NHL said in a statement. "The club has assured us that the day-to-day operations of the Panthers' franchise will not be affected by this development, and we will certainly work closely with the club to ensure that is the case.

"Viola and team ownership have further advised that they remain completely committed to South Florida and to the Panthers' fans."

After a day off in the sun, the Sabres got back to work Monday. They had a new look up front.

Buffalo had changes on three of its four lines in BB&T Center. Jack Eichel stayed in the middle of left wing Matt Moulson and right wing Kyle Okposo. The moves featured Ryan O'Reilly centering for Marcus Foligno and Sam Reinhart; Johan Larsson between Evander Kane and Brian Gionta; and a four-man unit of William Carrier, Nicolas Deslauriers, Zemgus Girgensons and Derek Grant.

Foligno received a bump in status after a solid third period during Saturday's 2-1 shootout loss in Carolina.

"His third period was his best by a mile," coach Dan Bylsma said. "He was at the net front a couple times in the third. For three scoring chances, he's the guy at the net, around the net, screening the goalie, getting a tip on some of those pucks and creating second opportunities.

"That's the way we need him to play for 60 minutes, for every period."

The meeting with the Panthers starts a run of three games in four nights. Carolina is in Buffalo on Thursday, and the Sabres visit the New York Islanders on Friday.

So far, Dmitry Kulikov's time in Florida feels like any other road trip. That will change when the game starts.

The defenseman spent the first seven years of his career with the Panthers before being dealt to Buffalo in June. He has already faced his former team once, but the Oct. 29 game was in Buffalo. Taking the ice in the Panthers' arena will be different.

"Being on the other side, I guess it'll be a bit emotional," Kulikov said. "I've never been through it before, and I don't know how I'm going to react. I'm sure it'll be fine."

Sabres' Eichel is getting better with every game

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 19, 2016

Sunrise, FL (WGR 550) -- Jack Eichel has played nine games since returning from a high ankle sprain. Eichel has eight points and the team is 5-2-2 which is a point percentage of .667.

I thought Eichel skated as well as I've ever seen him skate the past few games. When he first got back the first few games were almost like a preseason. He said he's getting a good awareness, "In my hands, in your feel for the game, just your understanding of plays."

"I'm just feeling a little more comfortable lately with my ankle. I mean just coming back in the beginning I felt good, but you're not where you want to be right away, but I think I've been starting to feel a lot better in the last few games and been able to use my speed a little more and create more off the rush."

Eichel led all Sabre forwards in ice-time on Saturday. The kid played 21:16 and Dan Bylsma sees that he's coming along, "Game one and two were pretty spectacular from having been off a long time. You saw some effects of getting back and playing. I think in six through 10, I've seen him get a bigger jump and in skating stride."

"He played last game because he was the guy going and skating and been creating for our team when we needed it."

We see Eichel on the ice, but there's more to Eichel the hockey player. Bylsma said, "What you don't get to see is his intensity on the bench and he's right now one of the guys that's leading on the bench and his words and his demeanor, that's something he's been pretty consistent with and he's trying to go on the ice and do it with his play as well."

In Monday's practice Eichel centered Matt Moulson and Kyle Okposo. The rest of the lines were:

Foligno O'Reilly Reinhart
Kane Larsson Gionta
Girgensons Grant Deslauriers (Carrier)

Defensive Pairs were:

McCabe Ristolainen
Kulikov Bogosian
Falk Franson (Gorges)

The team had Sunday off after back-to-back games against the Islanders and Carolina. I wondered if the team was sluggish for practice. Bylsma said, "We had some good flow to the practice, looked good up and down the ice."

Foligno's play earns him an opportunity on a new line

By Chris Rydnak

Buffalo Sabres

December 19, 2016

SUNRISE, Fla. - To spark a comeback on Saturday, Buffalo Sabres coach Dan Bylsma mixed and matched some of his line combinations in the third period.

The result? Their best shifts in the offensive zone and, eventually, the game-tying goal that allowed them to collect a point in Carolina. If we're to read into anything from Monday's practice at BB&T Center, some of those changes might stick for the time being.

Marcus Foligno skated on the top line with Ryan O'Reilly and Sam Reinhart while Evander Kane took reps on the left wing with Johan Larsson and Brian Gionta.

For Foligno, the promotion is well deserved. He earned the secondary assist on Kane's goal Saturday night while the two were on the ice with Larsson. Buffalo was able to cycle the puck down low and Foligno took the puck from the corner to the half wall and found Jake McCabe cross-ice at the opposite point. McCabe's shot ended up being deflected in to tie the game.

Bylsma obviously liked what he saw and will give Foligno a big opportunity on the top line.

"We moved Marcus around in the game and I thought his third period was his best by a mile - playing a big body, playing physical, getting to the net," Bylsma said.

"He was at the net front three or four times there in the third. For three scoring chances, he's the guy at the net, around the net, screening the goalie, getting a tip on some of those pucks and creating second opportunities. That's the way we need him to play for 60 minutes, for every period."

Derek Grant also took first rushes in the middle with William Carrier and Zemgus Girgensons, while Nicolas Deslauriers rotated in. We'll see how the team lines up during tomorrow's morning skate as the Sabres prepare to take on the Florida Panthers at 7:30 p.m. (pregame coverage begins at 7 p.m. Tuesday on MSG).

Monday's practice

82 Marcus Foligno - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 23 Sam Reinhart

26 Matt Moulson - 15 Jack Eichel - 21 Kyle Okposo

9 Evander Kane - 22 Johan Larsson - 12 Brian Gionta

48 William Carrier - 27 Derek Grant - 28 Zemgus Girgensons - 44 Nicolas Deslauriers

Defensemen: 4 Josh Gorges, 6 Cody Franson, 29 Jake McCabe, 41 Justin Falk, 47 Zach Bogosian, 55 Rasmus Ristolainen, 77 Dmitry Kulikov

40 Robin Lehner

31 Anders Nilsson

Out of town scoreboard watching

The Sabres, who have collected 12 of a possible 18 points in their past nine games, are in the midst of a portion of the schedule loaded with Eastern Conference opponents. The Sabres sit in 14th place in the conference with 31 points through 30 games, but their playoff hopes are still very much alive.

It's no coincidence that this 5-2-2 stretch also coincides with Jack Eichel's return. He's set to play in his 10th game of the season tomorrow since returning from the high-ankle sprain that caused him to miss the first 21 games of the year.

After Buffalo's shootout loss to Carolina on Saturday, captain Brian Gionta lamented letting that extra point slip away. The chase is definitely on the players' minds.

"All year long, every game is important, obviously," alternate captain Josh Gorges said. "When we look at it - not only are we playing teams in our conference, but teams that are two, three, four points up on us and we're trying to close the gap. They're enormous.

"You go back to the old adage, it's a four-point game tomorrow night. We need to make sure we get those points."

When it comes to the race in the Atlantic Division, Montreal is in first place with 44 points, and Ottawa (39 points in 32 games) and Boston (37 points in 33 games) are right behind. Buffalo has games in hand on both the Senators and Bruins and play Boston twice more before the end of the calendar year.

It will probably prove to be harder to make up ground in the Wild Card race because of how dominate the Metropolitan Division has been so far. The Rangers are winning the Metro with 47 points in 34 games.

Washington holds the first Wild Card with 41 points in 30 games and Philadelphia is currently the last team in with 41 points in 33 games. The next closes teams to the second Wild Card spot are Carolina, Tampa Bay and Florida, all with 33 points each.

Buffalo's next seven games are intra-conference with four of them, including tomorrow night's match against Florida, being against rivals in the Atlantic.

Five games are on the League's docket tonight, and four of them involve Eastern Conference teams. Philadelphia is in Nashville, while the Hurricanes host Detroit, and the Maple Leafs play Anaheim in Toronto.

"I think you're always aware and you're always watching," Gorges said. "We try not to worry or focus about what other teams are doing because it's out of your hands. We try to focus on where we are, what we're trying to do and what we need to do to get points each night."

Road-weary Panthers return home to face Sabres

The Associated Press

December 19, 2016

SUNRISE, Fla. -- Not much has gone right so far this season for the reigning Atlantic Division champions, the Florida Panthers.

But the Panthers (14-13-5) do lead the league in one category at least - most road games played (19).

Florida finally returns home after playing 13 of its past 17 games on the road to host the Buffalo Sabres (12-11-7) on Tuesday.

Now, though, the trend goes the other way. The Panthers will play eight of their next nine games at home.

Will being at home matter?

The Panthers are 8-5-0 at home and 6-8-5 on the road. So, yes, maybe that extra bit of success at home can get Florida back in playoff position.

After all, the Panthers reside just four points behind the Boston Bruins for third place in the Atlantic, which would be good enough for a playoff berth.

"If we can string a few wins together," Panthers captain Derek MacKenzie told the media, "we can be in pretty good position in 15 days. But we have a lot of work to do to climb the standings."

It would certainly help the Panthers if they could get healthy. Jonathan Huberdeau, who normally skates on Florida's top line with Jaromir Jagr and Aleksander Barkov, is recovering from a torn Achilles tendon. Defenseman Alex Petrovic, who was off to a great start and is still a team-best plus-8, is recovering from a broken foot.

Both players are about a month away.

A third injured Panthers player - forward Jonathan Marchessault - is trying to come back from a groin injury. He missed four games, returned for one and then missed the past two after aggravating his injury. Despite the time missed, he still leads the team with 10 goals.

Buffalo, meanwhile, is led by 22-year-old defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen, who is fifth in the NHL in minutes played. He also entered Monday ranked fifth in the NHL in points by a defenseman with 21.

Ristolainen has two goals and 10 assists in his past nine games, and a lot of his damage comes on the power play. He is 13th in the NHL with 12 power-play points.

"You are seeing him develop into a force," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma told the media. "He's our shut-down guy. He's a horse back there - very tough to play against."

Ristolainen, who is just one point behind Kyle Okposo for the team lead, is part of a young Sabres' core that also includes centers Jack Eichel, 20, and Sam Reinhart, 21.

Eichel, who was the second overall pick in the 2015 draft, has five goals and three assists. But injuries have limited Eichel to just nine games. He missed the first six weeks of the season but is now healthy, producing two goals and one assist last Tuesday against the Los Angeles Kings.

Reinhart, who was the second overall pick in the 2014 draft, has six goals and nine assists in 30 games.

Those young Sabres will match sticks and skills with the 44-year-old Jagr, who is just three points shy of Mark Messier for No. 2 on the NHL all-time list. Only Wayne Gretzky ranks ahead of Messier.

Sabres shake up forward lines in preparation for Panthers

By John Vogl

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"That's the way we need him to play for 60 minutes, for every period."

The Sabres skated for about an hour in preparation for Tuesday's game against the Florida Panthers. It starts a run of three games in four nights that features Carolina in Buffalo on Thursday and the Sabres visiting the New York Islanders on Friday.

"I don't know if there was a little sand on their toes, but we had some good flow to the practice, good up and down the ice," Bylsma said. "It's really just getting ready for a push here with the last three games before the break."