



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

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## **Sabres vie to get back on track vs. surging Predators**

Associated Press

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BUFFALO, N.Y. -- As the NHL season heads into its critical stretch, the Buffalo Sabres and Nashville Predators are heading in separate directions.

The two teams will face off on Tuesday in Buffalo.

After a strong start through the first three weeks of February, the Sabres came out of their bye with a disastrous set of back-to-back games over the weekend that may have permanently derailed any hopes of a late playoff push.

On Saturday, the Sabres (26-26-10) sustained a 5-3 defeat to the worst team in the league, the Colorado Avalanche. One day later, they fell to the Arizona Coyotes -- the second-worst team in the NHL in points -- after surrendering the winning goal with 18.9 seconds remaining. The losses put Buffalo seven points behind the final wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference.

The Sabres were especially frustrated after the loss to Arizona.

"We just didn't do enough to win the game," Sabres center Jack Eichel said, according to the team's website. "It's frustrating. These are the ones that we need to have and we're just slowly (taking) our chances away. It's frustrating for all of us. I don't know what it is, but we sit back, let them take the puck to us. We don't push for that next one. We're not forcing turnovers. We're not getting in a forecheck.

"It seems like everyone just skates backwards. Every single guy is at fault here. As a group, we've been losing. We didn't do enough to win the game."

Eichel had a goal and an assist in the loss and continues to be a bright spot for the Sabres despite their recent turn of events. On the season, Eichel has 36 points (14 goals, 22 assists) in 41 games.

All three of Arizona's goals came in the third period against Buffalo.

"Regardless of the opponents, it can't happen," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said after the loss to Arizona, according to the team's website. "And we just got the feel where you have the two points in your back pocket and you let them slip away."

The Predators (31-22-9), meanwhile, are in third place in the Central Division and appear to be well on their way to the postseason.

Nashville is riding a three-game win streak with recent victories over Colorado, Washington and Edmonton. The Predators have brought the offense as of late with 23 goals in their last five games; their only loss over that span was a 6-5 overtime loss to Calgary on Feb. 21.

Filip Forsberg was named the NHL's First Star last week after an incredible showing of eight goals and two assists in four games. Forsberg had back-to-back hat tricks against Calgary and Colorado.

"I've been working on my shot as long as I can remember playing hockey," Forsberg said, according to the team's website. "I've always loved scoring goals and tried to do it in different ways."

Forsberg (46 points -- 24 goals, 22 assists) is second on his team in scoring, behind only center Ryan Johansen (47 points -- nine goals, 38 assists).

## **After disastrous road trip, Sabres return to Buffalo with trade deadline on the mind**

By Amy Moritz

The Buffalo News

February 27, 2017

Tuesday night is the last game for the Buffalo Sabres before the NHL trade deadline.

Will it also be the last game in the Blue and Gold for some players?

After a road trip which evoked the word "disaster" so many times it nearly lost its meaning, Sabres players may be playing for one last chance to stay in Buffalo when they face the hot-trending Nashville Predators in KeyBank Center.

The team was off on Monday after losing back-to-back games against the two worst teams in the National Hockey League.

Coming off their bye week, the Sabres played the Avalanche in Colorado on Saturday, getting into a 3-0 hole before losing, 5-3.

Then on Sunday, the team had a 2-0 lead over the Coyotes in Arizona in the third period, only to lose, 3-2. The Coyotes scored three third-period goals, including the game-winner with 19 seconds left.

For the record, the Avalanche are the worst team in the NHL with just 17 wins in 60 games while the Coyotes are 29th in the league with 51 points in 61 games.

When the Sabres entered their bye week, they sat three points out of a wild-card spot with the playoffs very much a possibility. Now, they're seven points back of the final wild-card spot and the playoffs have moved back into pipe-dream territory. That means Sabres General Manager Tim Murray may decide to move players before the NHL trade deadline, which is 3 p.m. on Wednesday.

Who might be on the trading block?

The first looks usually go to players scheduled to become unrestricted free agents next season. Since they can sign anywhere once free agency opens in July, trading them allows the team to get something (another player, draft choice or combination) in return.

The Sabres have four key unrestricted free agents – captain Brian Gionta, defensemen Dmitry Kulikov and Cody Franson, and goaltender Anders Nilsson.

Gionta has a no-move clause and will accept a trade to only five teams, although he has not said which five those are. The forward is having a resurgence-type season with 12 goals and 15 assists through 62 games, while his leadership off the ice has been seen as imperative for a young, growing team.

Kulikov, who came to the Sabres in a trade during the NHL draft that sent Mark Pysyk to the Florida Panthers, has had difficulty dealing with a recurring back injury. He has played just 36 games for the Sabres with one goal, one assist and a minus-15 rating.

Franson, in his second season in Buffalo, has three goals and 13 assists through 55 games.

Nilsson has played in 21 games for the Sabres this season with 19 starts. He has rivaled starter Robin Lehner at times for the net with a 2.69 goals against average and a .921 save percentage.

Others in the Sabres system scheduled to become unrestricted free agents are Cal O'Reilly, Derek Grant, Cole Schneider, Taylor Fedun and Erik Burgdoerfer.

Players scheduled to become restricted free agents are Marcus Foligno, Zemgus Girgensons, Johan Larsson, Evan Rodrigues, Robin Lehner and Linus Ullmark.

While the Sabres play the trading-deadline waiting game, the Nashville Predators come to town having won three straight and claimed seven of eight points in their last four games. With 71 points, the Predators are in the third playoff spot in the Western Conference Central Division.

Left-winger Filip Forsberg was named the NHL's First Star of the Week after scoring eight goals with two assists in four games, including back-to-back hat tricks.

Forsberg recorded his third career hat trick on Feb. 21 in a 6-5 overtime loss to Calgary. He then scored three goals, including the game-winner, in a 4-2 win over Colorado on Feb. 23. He became the first player in Nashville's franchise history to notch back-to-back hat tricks and the first player in the NHL to do so since Vancouver's Alexandre Burrows did it Jan. 5 and Jan. 7, 2010.

Forsberg leads Nashville with 24 goals and ranks second on the team with 46 points.

For the month of February, the Predators have the two highest goal-scorers in Forsberg and Viktor Arvidsson (each with nine) and the highest-scoring defenseman in Roman Josi with 14 points.

## **Sabres Prospects: A look around the organization as trade deadline looms**

By Amy Moritz  
The Buffalo News  
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With the National Hockey League trade deadline looming at 3 p.m. on Wednesday, March 1, here's a look at the prospects in the Buffalo Sabres organization.

Among those players in major-juniors having outstanding seasons are forwards Giorgio Estephan with the Lethbridge Hurricanes and Cliff Pu with the London Knights.

Defenseman Brendan Guhle already made an NHL impression this season with an emergency call-up but he is out of the Prince George Cougars lineup indefinitely with an ankle injury.

Among the college hockey prospects are Harvard senior Sean Malone, having a career-best season with 32 points, while Notre Dame junior goaltender Cal Petersen has backstopped the Irish to a No. 12 ranking in the latest USCHO.com Division I poll.

### American Hockey League

In Rochester, Cole Schneider leads the team with 45 points (19 goals, 26 assists) through 50 games. Cal O'Reilly has 41 points followed by Nick Baptiste with 20 goals and 32 points.

Justin Bailey and Evan Rodrigues, both up with the Sabres, have also produced for the Amerks this season. Bailey has 19 goals and 10 assists in 40 AHL games while Rodrigues has nine goals and 18 assists in 45 games.

The Sabres first-round pick in 2017, Alexander Nylander, has 22 points (seven goals, 15 assists) in 49 games.

The Amerks lost their last two games, both the Syracuse Crunch. They play back-to-back home games this weekend, hosting the St. John's IceCaps at 7 p.m. Friday and the Bridgeport Sound Tigers at 7 p.m. Saturday in Blue Cross Arena.

### WHL

Vojtech Budik (Prince Albert Raiders, defenseman) – Has three assists in his last four games. While still looking for his first goal he has 24 assists in 53 games.

Giorgio Estephan (Lethbridge Hurricanes, forward) – Ranks third on the Hurricanes in scoring with 72 points in 58 games. Has 27 goals, six on the power play, with 45 assists.

Brendan Guhle (Prince George Cougars, defenseman) – Out indefinitely with an ankle injury. Has not skated since Jan. 29 in Edmonton. In 40 WHL games he has 12 goals and 12 assists.

Brandon Hagel (Red Deer Rebels, left wing) – Picked up two assists in his last two games to give him 34 for the season. With 22 goals (six on the power play, two short-handed) he has 56 points in 55 games.

Devante Stephens (Kelowna Rockets, defenseman) – Had a four-point game Feb. 26 in a 9-5 win over the Spokane Chiefs. He scored his 11th goal of the season and picked up three assists. On the season he has 33 points (11 goals, 22 assists) in 58 games.

### OHL

Austin Osmanski (Mississauga Steelheads, defenseman) – The East Aurora native scored his second goal of the season on Feb. 24 in a 10-1 win over the Peterborough Petes. Through 48 games has seven points (two goals, five assists).

Cliff Pu (London Knights, forward) – On a six-game point streak with four goals and four assists over that span. Ranks eighth in the OHL with 76 points (33 goals, 43 assists) in 54 games.

#### QMJHL

Vasily Glotov (Cape Breton Screaming Eagles, forward) – In 56 games has 13 goals (three power play, one game-winner, one short-handed) and 34 assists.

#### NCAA

William Borgen (St. Cloud State, defenseman) – The sophomore has two goals and nine assists in 29 games.

Christopher Brown (Boston College, center) – Returned to the lineup for the weekend when the Eagles dropped two games to UMass-Lowell. Has seven goals and 15 assists in 30 games.

Ivan Chukarov (UMass, defenseman) – Scored his second goal of the season in a 6-2 loss to Providence on Feb. 24. In 34 games the sophomore has eight points.

Casey Fitzgerald (Boston College, defenseman) – Has 20 points (five goals, 15 assists) in 33 games.

Anthony Florentino (Providence, defenseman) – The senior has nine goals and seven assists in 27 games for the Friars.

Connor Hurley (Notre Dame, center) – ND Insider reports that the junior is out for the rest of the season with an undisclosed personal issue. Has four goals and 12 assists in 21 games.

Sean Malone (Harvard, center) – Registered his 18th assist of the season in a 4-1 win over Clarkson on Feb. 24. The senior from West Seneca has 14 goals and 32 points in 29 games.

Philip Nyberg (Connecticut, defenseman) – Scored his first collegiate goal, on the power play, in a 5-3 win against New Hampshire on Feb. 24. Has six points in 14 games for the Huskies.

Cal Petersen (Notre Dame, goalie) – Split the weekend against Boston University, stopping 37 shots in a 3-1 win on Feb. 24 then let in four goals on 36 shots in a 4-1 loss on Feb. 25. On the season the junior has a 2.12 goals against average and a .927 save percentage and a 19-10-5 record.

Judd Peterson (St. Cloud State, center) – Scored his 10th goal of the season late in the third period to send Friday's game against national No. 1 Denver into overtime, but the Huskies lost, 4-3. The junior has 10 goals and five assists.

Max Willman (Brown, forward) – The junior had an assist in a 7-2 loss to Princeton on Feb. 24 and an assist in a 4-1 loss to Quinnipiac. Through 29 games has 10 goals and 15 assists.

#### Europe

Rasmus Asplund (SHL, forward) – Has four goals and 13 assists in 34 games for Farjestad BK.

Jonas Johansson (Allsvenskan, goalie) – Has a 2.24 goals against average and a .914 save percentage in 35 games for Almtuna IS.

Victor Olofsson (SHL, forward) – Has nine goals and 17 assists in 46 games for Frolunda HC.

Gustav Possler (SHL, forward) – Has two goals and one assist in 16 games for Djurgardens IF after missing the first half of the season with a broken ankle.

## **Bucky Gleason's Power Take: With Sabres on block, Murray should be on clock**

By Bucky Gleason

The Buffalo News

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Tim Murray had an easy time immediately after he was named Sabres general manager in 2014 because he was taking over a team in ruins. His job called for making a terrible team worse and rebuilding the Sabres from scratch with the idea they would be better in the long run.

Murray continued dismantling the roster and made sure the Sabres finished in last with a series of moves anyone could have made. In his first two drafts, he selected players anybody could have selected. Although he has made some good trades, nearly all were deals anybody with the same assets could have been completed.

For all moaning over Dan Bylsma and the Sabres' lackluster play of late, there's no denying Buffalo's inferior roster. Murray deserves the same scrutiny. The Sabres aren't deep enough, talented enough or tough enough to push for a playoff spot. They're on pace to finish one point ahead of where they finished last season.

The trade deadline is Wednesday. Murray has little choice but to sell off veteran free agents and maximize his return while he can. Time is running out on the season. Murray should be on the clock, too.

## **Jerry Sullivan's Power Take: Sabres are a consistent tease**

By Jerry Sullivan  
The Buffalo News  
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Quite a tease, the Sabres. They win three in a row to draw close to a playoff spot, then lose three straight, including back-to-back losses to the worst teams in the league.

But all we heard was how the poor Sabres had to play at high altitude in Denver the first game back from the bye. True, the bye has hurt teams. That doesn't explain the third-period collapse in Arizona the next night. Or was the desert an issue?

There's always an excuse. The big one is Jack Eichel's injury at the start of the season. But they haven't been much better with him. They're 26-26-10 overall and 17-17-5 in their last 39 games with Eichel.

That's who they are, a mediocrity, a .500 team in points. They were 9-9-5, 12-12-8, 17-17-9, 21-21-10. They've been skating in place all year, despite some great goaltending by Robin Lehner and the best run of Evander Kane's career.

With 20 games left, they probably need to go 14-5-1 or better to have a chance at the playoffs. It's hard to imagine. They're more likely to finish last in the East.

## **Button: Nylander's game 'screams important player'**

By Joe DiBiase

WGR 550

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Buffalo Sabres prospect Alexander Nylander has been quietly developing his game with the Rochester Americans in the American Hockey League this season. Amerks coach Dan Lambert has admitted that he's been struggling with inconsistent play, and that it has been an up and down season for the 18-year old prospect. Nylander has seven goals and 15 assists in 49 games this season after being selected with the eighth overall pick in the 2016 NHL Draft.

However, the hype hasn't died down.

TSN's Craig Button came out with his list of the best players not in the NHL and had Nylander second only behind Arizona Coyotes prospect, Clayton Keller. He was ahead of players drafted higher like Coyotes prospect Dylan Strome (4th), Edmonton Oilers prospect Jesse Puljujärvi (7th), and Columbus Blue Jackets prospect Pierre-Luc Dubois (16th).

Button joined The Instigators on Monday, and said that Nylander reminds him of San Jose Sharks captain, Joe Pavelski. Being a guy that can play any position on the ice, and adding that "his game screams important, important player".

Also, on the list was Sabres prospect Rasmus Asplund coming in at 34. Button says Asplund is hard to play against, tenacious, and can be a great complementary player on the team a few years down the road.

Button didn't stop their when talking about the Sabres going forward. He says he thinks defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen is a "pillar" defenseman, the type of guy you can build around. Button also says he really likes defenseman, Jake McCabe.

Other prospects that Button talked about on Monday included Brendan Guhle, Hudson Fasching and Cliff Pu.

## **Slumping Sabres have assets to trade**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
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BUFFALO – So what should the Sabres sell off before Wednesday's trade deadline? After their most wrenching weekend in years, they can't possibly be buyers, right?

Brutal road losses to the hapless Colorado Avalanche and Arizona Coyotes kicked them down the standings, effectively eliminating them from contention with 20 games left.

Desperate for wins, the Sabres couldn't handle the NHL's two worst teams. Think about that. Against the Coyotes, they frittered away a 2-0 third-period lead, imploding late.

It was an ugly two days for a franchise that hasn't tasted the playoffs since 2011.

Almost four years after the old regime began gutting the Sabres for a long rebuild and an eventual return to glory, they appear to be a long way from truly contending.

The Sabres, who had Monday off and host the Nashville Predators tonight at KeyBank Center, could look much different in just a day. With some notable veterans on expiring contracts, at least a few players could be dealt.

They also have winger Evander Kane, one of the league's hottest scorers with 21 goals in his last 37 games. Would they deal him?

Below are a few players who could be in play before the deadline. Considering the Sabres' recent struggles, how many players should general manager Tim Murray really keep off limits?

Kane, one year left at \$6 million

Five or six months ago, as rumors swirled the Sabres wanted to dish Kane, he appeared to have little or no value.

A misdemeanor charge stemming from an incident at a local bar as the Sabres hosted the NHL Draft on June 24, his second off-ice incident in six months, still hung over his head.

Kane, 25, was also coming off a disappointing 20-goal season in which he earned a one-game benching after partying and missing practice.

Who was going to take that and a \$6 million price tag?

Now, thanks to a stunning in-season turnaround, Kane's value might never be higher.

After breaking four ribs opening night, Kane struggled following a three-week absence. He scored his first goal Dec. 3, his 13th appearance.

Right now, Kane's enjoying one of the best stretches by a Sabres forward in years. He has a whopping 20 even-strength goals.

Before Sabres coach Dan Bylsma reunited him with linemates Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart, Kane did most of his damage on the third line. In today's low-scoring NHL, lethal scorers rarely skate outside of the top six forwards.

Kane's .552 goals per game since Dec. 3 is the Sabres' highest number since Thomas Vanek averaged .548 in his 40-goal season in 2008-09, according to local statistician Mike Haim.

Among 20-goal seasons, Kane has the highest goals per game since Alexander Mogilny had .99 (76 goals) and Pat LaFontaine had .63 (53 goals) in 1992-93, according to Haim.

That's some elite company.

The Sabres gave up a slew of assets to acquire Kane from the Winnipeg Jets in 2015 because they believed he could score 30 goals.

Now that Kane has essentially become that player, why would they want to deal him? They rank 25th in scoring, averaging just 2.4 goals a game. They need Kane.

Winger Brian Gionta, final season of contract

At 38, Gionta is still productive, showcasing durability, smarts and speed. The captain has 12 goals and 27 points in 62 games and skates almost 17 minutes a night.

Gionta also won the Stanley Cup with the New Jersey Devils in 2003.

With that impressive resume, a contender would almost certainly want to add him to its third or fourth line for a playoff run.

But Gionta has said he wants to stay in Buffalo. Would the Sabres honor that request? His contract stipulates he can only accept a trade to five teams he has chosen.

Given how well he has played, the Sabres might want to re-sign him. Still, he has value in a seller's market.

Could the Sabres pass up, say, a solid prospect or a high pick, especially when they can just bring him back in a few months?

And if, say, the Chicago Blackhawks or another team built for a Cup run comes calling, would Gionta turn that down?

Defenseman Dmitry Kulikov, final season of contract

In his first and probably only season with the Sabres, Kulikov, 26, has been a total bust.

The Russian has been dogged by a lower-back bruise since getting knocked into an open bench door in his preseason debut. He has one goal, two points and a team-worst minus-15 rating in only 36 games.

The Sabres acquired him to be Rasmus Ristolainen's partner, but he has skated sparingly beside the No. 1 defenseman.

Rather than lose Kulikov for nothing – they sent defenseman Mark Pysyk to Florida and swapped picks for him at the draft – the Sabres might just cut their losses.

Kulikov was arguably the Panthers' best player during their opening-round loss last season, so he has a recent history of playoff performance.

Defenseman Cody Franson, final season of contract

The affable Franson, 29, can eat up minutes and quarterback the power play.

Following a slow start, Franson started earning more ice time and showcasing the talents that have helped him score 29 or more points four times.

Given the Sabres' weak defense depth throughout the organization, Franson could be an attractive option for next season.