



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*March 2, 2017*

## **Quiet deadline for Sabres is 'speed bump'**

By John Vogl  
The Buffalo News  
March 1, 2017

The seller's goal at the NHL trade deadline is to improve the team's future. It doesn't work when no one wants what is being sold.

The Sabres couldn't make a trade Wednesday, so the future failed to get a boost.

"Today was a small little speed bump," Buffalo General Manager Tim Murray said. "I'm excited about the direction we're going in, but it takes time. I've given my plan to ownership and our scouting staff. We know our timeline, and it's not an exact timeline. There are things that come up and make it quicker, slow it down, but those are just little things every day.

"There's a part of the fan base here that thinks we're going in the right direction. I think there's a part of the fan base that wants to see it done quicker, and I understand that. Nothing good in life comes quickly."

Nothing came at all Wednesday. The Sabres figured they had a few moveable assets heading into the NHL trade deadline. Even receiving a couple of draft picks would have added to the franchise's bottom line.

"I made a lot of calls to set the table on trading away a couple guys," Murray said in KeyBank Center. "I made a few calls to see if I could make a hockey trade, get younger. This is the end result."

It was Buffalo's most uneventful deadline since 2002. The same Sabres who played Tuesday will take the ice Thursday. That includes pending unrestricted free agents Dmitry Kulikov and Cody Franson.

"I'm a little bit surprised," Murray said. "We didn't have a ton of UFAs, as you know. We had two on the back end that I thought would create some interest. I had some calls on them. Price-wise I was very open.

"My market was to just get fair value, so I didn't miss out on trading a guy by demanding too much or by using previous trades in the day or the week as the template for what I had to do. I don't think that came into play at all.

"I'm just about being fair. I think I am. I think I know the value of players, and I couldn't make a trade. I think I'm honest to you guys. Am I disappointed? Of course I'm disappointed. We still have two players here who are here, so I don't want to sit here and just say I couldn't get anything for them. I don't want them to walk in tomorrow with their tail between their legs."

On the surface, it seemed Kulikov would be easy to move. Though this year has been a disaster – he got hurt in his preseason opener and has two points in 37 games – he has a history of producing. Plus, the market for rental defensemen was one of the few that showed movement.

Instead, he'll be in the lineup when Arizona visits Thursday.

"I had a lot of calls on Kulikov, and I didn't ask too much," Murray said. "Multiple guys said that's a fair price. I know injuries are not an excuse and I'm not supposed to use that, but that came up a lot in the conversations."

The only deal that apparently intrigued Murray featured Brian Gionta. The captain has a limited no-trade clause, however, and professed a desire to stay in Buffalo. Murray called Gionta about the offer, but the Rochester native wasn't interested.

"He's the captain of our team," Murray said. "He's a local guy. He's a longtime player and a longtime character person in the league. I called him and asked him a couple questions and got answers."

Murray declined offers for streaking scorer Evander Kane – “I didn’t like what I heard,” he said – but that doesn’t mean the GM is ready to embrace a long-term future with the left winger. Murray is not convinced Kane’s off-ice problems are in the past. Kane is under contract through next season, and the sides can talk extension July 1.

“I’d be open to that. I’m not sure I’m going to do that,” Murray said. “There’s a lot of bridges to cross before that time. But would I be open to it in a scenario where a couple things he has going on off the ice go away and stuff like that, absolutely.”

The next round of trades will come in the spring. With an expansion draft looming, deals could be plentiful.

That wasn’t the case Wednesday in Buffalo. The Sabres couldn’t add to the future, and the present is a team that’s 26-26-11, including 0-3-1 in the last four.

“Our approach as a group and as a team is we’re trying to win hockey games here, and we’re trying to win every game we’re in,” coach Dan Bylsma said. “That’s not going to change regardless of the situation.”

## **Deadline dud adds to Murray's disappointment over lost weekend**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 1, 2017

Until Wednesday, we've never seen Tim Murray at a loss for words.

The Sabres general manager has regaled us with tales of rainbows, jujubes, mushrooms and even scouts in diapers over the past three years, but there was no jocularly in his voice and no flaring in his eyes as he met reporters in KeyBank Center.

Murray seemed stunned, a little catatonic at times even, in discussing what he admitted was the quietest NHL trade deadline he had ever seen. Too many teams still think they're on the fringe of the playoffs to be real sellers. Murray was trying to sell but there was no real interest in making what Murray called a "fair trade."

There's no way to paint this as anything but a disappointment. The Sabres aren't making the playoffs and Murray figured he could pick up some extra draft picks for the likes of Cody Franson and Dmitry Kulikov. There was simply no goalie market around the league so Anders Nilsson wasn't in play much. And Murray honored Brian Gionta's wish to stay, even though it seemed there was some interest in the captain.

As we learned back in 2006, teams normally say they can never have enough defensemen. And Murray can't get anyone to drop, say, a fourth- or fifth- or even sixth-round pick in his lap for Franson or Kulikov?

A mere bag of pucks would have been some compensation for the gruesome sight of watching Kulikov -- who can't possibly be healthy -- play this year. Alas, it turns out other teams have scouts too. It was another bad day to add to the worst week of Murray's three years as GM.

Even Doug Whaley probably thinks Murray is screwing up asset management of this franchise.

When the Sabres landed in Denver for practice on Friday, they were optimistic about a four-point weekend against the league's worst teams. Of course, they frittered both games away against Colorado and Arizona and returned home with nothing. Then they blew a 4-2 lead in the third period here Tuesday, suffering an overtime loss to Nashville.

In just that time, the Sabres have fallen nine points out of the race for third in the Atlantic Division and six back in the wild-card. Sportsclubstats.com said they entered Wednesday with a 1.1 percent chance of making the playoffs -- but a 54 percent chance of a bottom-3 finish in the East. That's not what the rebuild template said.

Murray sure seems to sense his team is toast. The GM admitted he was in the arena meeting with the coaches until 12:30 Wednesday morning following the Nashville loss and flat-out called the last three games "unacceptable."

And sorry to tell you this, denizens of social media. But Murray isn't blaming Dan Bylsma and his staff.

"We go out West and we just can't play. That to me is squarely on the players," Murray said in the money quote of the day. "There was no less preparation by our coaching staff. There was no less working by the coaching staff. We didn't fly to Denver and go and get drunk for three days. We got off the plane, had a real good practice in Denver with a lot of pace to try to get them up to speed." In the game "we were mentally not there and I would say we were physically not there."

This season is going to be a mulligan because of all the injuries this team has had. Frankly, that's an excuse that drives me crazy and the Sabres are only in the top third of the league in man-games lost. But in terms of important injuries, nobody can touch them when you think of the prolonged absences of Jack Eichel, Evander Kane, Ryan O'Reilly and even Kulikov. Remember, when Kulikov was acquired, he was immediately slotted in as Rasmus Ristolainen's partner on the top pair.

While Eichel brought instant results with his triumphant return at Ottawa and his two third-period goals to win his home debut against the New York Rangers two nights later, the results haven't really been there. Buffalo's record without Eichel was 7-9-5. Its record with him is a still-mediocre 19-17-6, not remotely a playoff-level team.

Bylsma has his problems for sure. This team sits back far too much with leads. According to longtime Western New York stats guru Mike Haim, the Sabres and Minnesota are the only teams in the NHL to lose four games in regulation this year where they had two-goal leads.

And that stat, of course, doesn't count two other massive meltdowns: The blown 3-0 third-period lead in October in Philadelphia that turned into a shootout loss, or Tuesday's self-destruction against Nashville in which a pair of two-goal bulges suddenly turned into an overtime loss.

The analytics show how the nooses really tighten around the Sabres' necks when the lead gets sliced to one. In those spots, the Sabres' Corsi rating of shot attempts at 5-on-5 is just 41.1 percent -- second-last in the NHL to Arizona. Up a goal on the road, the figure drops to an abominable 39.8 (28th in the league).

The players are constantly talking about not wanting to sit back. More than once this year, you've heard Eichel say he's not the coach. Kane talked Tuesday morning about no rule against scoring more goals. Reinhart's game, elegant in its simplicity and decision-making last season, has too often gone awry in recent weeks.

The disconnect between the players and Bylsma seems large at times, as if there was a move being waited for inside the dressing room. Murray made it clear Wednesday he's not going to allow any entitlement to go on within his room and was clearly still chafed by Sunday's collapse in Arizona.

"Three goals in the third period ... That's just a complete mental breakdown and it's certainly not acceptable," he said. "... I wasn't happy after those two games. To blame the coaches, I think we all should take our fair share of the blame.

"If the blame is all me, it's all me and I'm good with that. But I think the players have to take responsibility for that too."

So it's going to be interesting going forward these last 19 games. No new faces. Guys who thought they were gone still here. A clear tug o' war between the coach's system and his young stars. A GM openly backing the coach and telling his young studs to zip it.

This is not one big happy family. Without using any memorable words, the GM made that pretty clear Wednesday.

## **As Sabres sell, they need to buy their next Briere**

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

March 1, 2017

The Sabres are sellers, but that doesn't mean they can't bring someone to Buffalo. In fact, that should be their goal.

They need their next Daniel Briere.

Buffalo was a clear seller back in 2003. Captain Stu Barnes and fan favorite Rob Ray got shipped out. The following day, the Sabres traded center Chris Gratton for a youngster.

Briere, of course, became a charismatic face of the franchise. He led the team on and off the ice, helping Buffalo to back-to-back conference finals.

This edition of the Sabres needs another young player who can make a difference. Jack Eichel can hold his own on the ice and in the dressing room. Other players are having trouble embracing the role.

Ryan O'Reilly has disappeared too many times, including the last four games. With the Sabres hoping to avoid seller status, he put up no goals, one assist and a minus-3 rating. In the 21 losses he's been part of, he has no goals, four assists and a minus-11. He demonstrates a great practice ethic, but his voice hasn't dominated.

Kyle Okposo is another quiet player who leads by example. Rasmus Ristolainen and Sam Reinhart are too inexperienced.

Briere was a sixth-year pro with a chip on his shoulder when he arrived in Buffalo. He wanted the puck and commanded attention. He relished the chance to make a difference.

As the Sabres continue their selling ways, they need to be on the lookout for a guy just like that.

## **Sabres make no deals on deadline day**

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

March 1, 2017

The trade deadline came and went ... but no Buffalo Sabres went.

The Sabres didn't make any deadline deals Wednesday. On a slow day throughout the NHL, Buffalo either failed or declined to move rentals such as Dmitry Kulikov, Cody Franson and Brian Gionta.

Several defensemen with expiring contracts have switched teams in recent days, but interest was minimal on Kulikov and Franson.

Franson has three goals and 17 points in 56 games. He trails only Rasmus Ristolainen in production from the blue line.

Kulikov has just one goal and two points in 37 games. Acquired in Buffalo's biggest deal of last summer, he suffered a back injury during his opening preseason game and never got on track.

Gionta had professed a desire to stay.

Coach Dan Bylsma said following the morning practice that his team's mindset would remain the same regardless of any deals.

"Our approach as a group and as a team is we're trying to win hockey games here, and we're trying to win every game we're in," Bylsma said in KeyBank Center. "That's not going to change regardless of the situation."

<http://buffalonews.com/2017/03/01/sabres-make-no-deals-deadline-day/>

## **On trade deadline day, the Sabres look for answers to losing skid**

By Amy Moritz  
The Buffalo News  
March 1, 2017

The list of things going wrong for the Buffalo Sabres keeps growing.

They're giving up tons of shots.

In 63 games, opponents have outshot the Sabres 42 times. Buffalo has had the shot advantage in just 18 games with three games featuring equal shots on goal.

They can't hold on to leads.

In Tuesday's 5-4 overtime loss to the Nashville Predators the Sabres twice had two-goal leads, including in the third period, but failed to hold on. It was the second straight game they blew a two-goal third-period lead after collapsing in Arizona for a 3-2 loss on Sunday.

And speaking of the Coyotes, who come to Buffalo Thursday night, they're the second-worst team in the National Hockey League, highlighting another problem facing the Sabres – their inability to win against teams below them in the standings.

The Sabres are a combined 4-9-3 against teams with fewer points and that's inflated by their 2-0-1 mark against Detroit.

There weren't a whole lot of new answers Wednesday as the Sabres held about an hour-long practice in KeyBank Center as the clock ticked on the NHL trade deadline.

"It's a funny thing when you're really close to being a good team and I think we are," Sabres forward Kyle Okposo said. "I've talked about it quite a bit this year – I feel like we need to learn how to win. We're just finding ways to lose critical games and it's not one specific thing, it's a bunch of different things and we have to figure out how to stay mentally sharp and doing the right the things for the entire game."

The mental aspect is what veteran defenseman Josh Gorges feels is the key component needed for the Sabres to right their ship with 19 games remaining in the season.

While the team's roster was up in the air pending any trades on Wednesday, nothing had drastically changed from when they went on a three-game winning streak from Feb. 14-18 and followed it up by losing their last four, including two against the bottom two teams in the NHL.

"You get in these situations and the biggest thing is the mental battle," Gorges said. "Has the team changed from when we won three games in a row to losing four games in a row? It's the same team. Our systems haven't changed. It's how we see the game, how we think the game, how we feel the game."

"You get in situations where you start to feel a little tense. You've got to go out there and find that line of confidence and urgency. We're going to get in situations where we have leads. We're going to have situations where we're going to have to be from behind. Our mindset has to stay the same. That desperation to win pucks, move pucks, win puck battles, execute properly, communicate – all the little fine details of the game is a mindset. You just have to make sure you come with the right mindset. And I know it's cliché but as we've seen it has to start right at the puck drop through to the last buzzer. You have lapses; you have let downs. Five minutes. Ten minutes. That could be the difference in the game."

While General Manager Tim Murray was surely on the phone looking at deals that ended up not being there, coach Dan Bylsma was running practice in KeyBank Center and preparing for the next day's game against the Coyotes.

"Our actions today were about guys on this team going forward," Bylsma said.

And going forward, the coach wants to mix up the lines in an attempt to shake the team out of its four-game skid.

Jack Eichel centered a line with Marcus Foligno and Brian Gionta.

Evander Kane was moved to the wing of Zemgus Girgensons with Sam Reinhart on the other side.

Evan Rodrigues centered Tyler Ennis and Justin Bailey while Matt Moulson skated on the wing with Ryan O'Reilly and Okposo.

"It hasn't worked. It hasn't been very good frankly," Bylsma said when asked about changing the lines. "You have minuses and goals against. I think I'd be silly to stay with the status quo and hope for a different change."

## **Sabres' Murray sums up his quietest deadline**

By John Vogl  
The Buffalo News  
March 1, 2017

Tim Murray tried to make deals. He tried to be fair.

It didn't matter. The Sabres failed to make any moves on a deadline day that Murray called the quietest since he arrived in the NHL.

"I just go with what's put in front of me," Murray said Wednesday. "I have no expectation going in. I made some calls. I made a lot of calls to set the table on trading away a couple guys. I made a few calls to see if I could make a hockey trade, get younger.

"This is the end result."

The end result is the Sabres couldn't unload potential assets in Dmitry Kulikov and Cody Franson. The market for rental defensemen showed movement, but not in Buffalo.

"I'm a little bit surprised," Murray said in KeyBank Center. "We didn't have a ton of UFAs, as you know. We had two on the back end that I thought would create some interest. I had some calls on them. Pricewise I was very open.

"My market was to just get fair value, so I didn't miss out on trading a guy by demanding too much or by using previous trades in the day or the week as the template for what I had to do. I don't think that came into play at all.

"I think I know the value of players, and I couldn't make a trade. I think I'm honest to you guys. Am I disappointed? Of course I'm disappointed. We still have two players here who are here, so I don't want to sit here and just say I couldn't get anything for them. I don't want them to walk in tomorrow with their tail between their legs here."

The general manager did get a call on captain Brian Gionta, but the pending unrestricted free agent made it clear he wanted to stay in Buffalo. Gionta has a limited no-trade clause in which he listed five teams to which he'd accept a deal.

"I also spoke to Brian Gionta today after I did get a call," Murray said. "He's the captain of our team. He's a local guy. He's a longtime player and a longtime character person in the league. I called him and asked him a couple questions and got answers."

Murray also got calls on Evander Kane, but none regarding the 22-goal scorer intrigued the GM.

"I had a couple teams call on him," Murray said. "I said, 'I'm not actively trying to trade him. If that's your goal this week, today or yesterday or whatever is, I said I'm willing to listen, as I am on all players.'

"I didn't like what I heard. There was really no traction on that."

Murray also was hesitant to embrace a contract extension for Kane, who has another year on his deal. The GM is not ready to believe the left winger has put his off-ice issues behind him. Kane and the Sabres can talk extension beginning July 1.

"I'd be open to that. I'm not sure I'm going to do that," Murray said. "There's a lot of bridges to cross before that time. But would I be open to it in a scenario where a couple things he has going on off the ice go away and stuff like that, absolutely."

## **Sabres can't find trade partners before deadline**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
March 1, 2017

BUFFALO – Tim Murray's history as Sabres general manager shows he usually takes *anything* for a player who can leave for nothing following the season.

But as Wednesday's trade deadline dragged on and some deals started materializing around the NHL, the Sabres curiously stayed quiet.

When the 3 p.m. deadline hit, word quickly spread the Sabres, who have four unrestricted free agents, hadn't made any moves.

Murray couldn't, say, get a late-round pick for defenseman Dmitry Kulikov?

Nope.

"I just go with what's put in front of me," Murray said inside KeyBank Center. "I have no expectation going in, so I made some calls – I made a lot of calls – to set the table on trading away a couple guys. I made a few calls on trading to see if I could make a hockey trade, get younger, and this is the end result."

The result is the reeling Sabres, losers of four straight contests entering tonight's tilt against the Arizona Coyotes, will finish with the same lineup that has them stuck in seventh place in the Atlantic Division, destined to miss the playoffs again.

Murray, of course, showcased his usual personality during his 15-minute chat with the media, occasionally making some jokes. Still, he almost seemed stunned he couldn't complete a deal on a low-action day around the league.

"I'm a little bit surprised," he said.

Murray believes the market has changed, perhaps because of the upcoming expansion draft.

Despite that, Kulikov, who has been a total bust, and defenseman Cody Franson figured to generate interest as cheap rentals.

"We didn't have a ton of UFAs, as we know," Murray said. "We had two on the back end that I thought would create interest, and I had some calls on them. Price-wise, I was very open."

What was Murray's price?

"My market was just to get fair value, so I didn't miss out and trade a guy by not demanding too much or by using previous trades in the day or week as the template for what I had to do," he said.

Since the Sabres still have those players, Murray wanted to be respectful.

"I don't want to sit here and just say I couldn't get anything for them," he said. "I don't want them to walk in tomorrow with their tail between their legs. We're six points out of a playoff spot. We'd like to be competitive until the end of the year."

While Kulikov, 26, has been a colossal disappointment, his body of work is still better than the one goal, two points and minus-15 rating he has compiled in 37 games.

The lower-back bruise he suffered in the preseason that has dogged him all year was a concern for other teams, Murray said.

"I had a lot of calls on Kulikov and I didn't ask too much," he said. "Multiple guys said, 'That's a fair price.'"

Murray said he took calls on everyone, including 22-goal winger Evander Kane – "I'm not actively trying to trade him," he said – and captain Brian Gionta, a free agent.

"I didn't like what I heard," Murray said of the offers for Kane, who has morphed into arguably the league's best goal scorer in the last three months.

Murray said he could be interested in talking to Kane, a free agent after next season, about an extension in the future. He wants some of Kane's off-ice problems resolved, however.

Murray said he spoke to Gionta, who repeatedly said he wanted to stay, after a team contacted him Wednesday. Honoring the wish of the 15-year veteran was also important.

"He's the captain of our team," Murray said. "He's a local guy (from Greece). He's been a longtime player and a longtime character person in the league. I called him and asked him a couple questions, got answers."

So where does a day of inactivity leave the Sabres, whose long rebuild is about to hit the four-year mark?

"I guess it delays it a little bit," said Murray, who took over as GM halfway through 2013-14.

To Murray, Wednesday was "a small little speed bump" in his plan.

"There's a part of the fan base here that thinks we're going in the right direction, and then I think there's a part of the fan base that wants to see it done quicker," he said. "I understand that."

Murray said he's "excited about the direction we're going in."

"But it takes time," he said. "I've given my plan to ownership and our scouting staff. We know our timeline, and it's not an exact timeline. ... But that's not for me to decide if we're going quick enough."

Murray believes nothing good in life comes quickly.

"It takes a long time to raise your kids, to raise them properly," he said. "Most marriages where you meet the girl the night before in Vegas, they don't last."

## **Sabres GM Tim Murray: Awful road trip players' fault**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
March 1, 2017

BUFFALO – Despite a loss in their final outing before last week's bye, the Sabres entered the short break playing perhaps their best hockey all season. For the first time in years, the playoffs, while still a long shot, felt like a possibility.

Then the schedule resumed with road games against Colorado and Arizona, the NHL's two worst teams.

"We go out west and we just can't play, and that's to me squarely on the players," Sabres general manager Tim Murray said Wednesday inside KeyBank Center.

Saturday's brutal 5-3 defeat to the Avalanche and Sunday's season-killing 3-2 loss to the Coyotes, a game in which the Sabres blew a 2-0 third-period lead, kicked them down the standings.

"There was no less preparation by the coaching staff," Murray said. "There was no less working. We didn't fly to Denver and go and get drunk for three days, the coaching staff. We got off the plane, we had a real good practice in Denver, lots of pace, tried to get them up to speed.

"We were mentally not there and I would say we were physically not there. We're usually a somewhat physical team. We do have a physical element on our team. That didn't come out in those two games."

Murray called the collapse against the Coyotes, tonight's opponent, "a complete mental breakdown."

"It's certainly not acceptable," he said.

The wretched stretch continued with Tuesday's 5-4 overtime loss to Nashville, a game in which the Sabres blew two two-goal leads and wilted again late.

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma has endured criticism all season, and perhaps Murray's comments were designed to lessen some of the pressure.

"We should all take our fair share of the blame," Murray said. "If the blames on me, it's on me. I know that. I think the players have to take responsibility for that, too."

He added: "The last three, four games are unacceptable. We still have games to play. We still have to show this market that we're improving and we want to be a good hockey club."

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Sabres winger Evander Kane, who has a team-leading 22 goals, practiced beside center Zemgus Girgensons and Sam Reinhart on Wednesday.

That's essentially the third line.

"Just putting a guy in a position where I think he can be at his best and has been at his best for us with him and Zemgus," Bylsma said.

Kane scored a chunk of his goals on the third line before recently getting moved beside center Jack Eichel.

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Bylsma said the bone bruise that has sidelined rookie winger William Carrier 13 games has worsened. Carrier is staying off the leg and not putting weight on it.

## **Sabres' Murray dropped the ball in not trading off assets**

By Nick Wojton

Batavia Daily News

March 1, 2017

The 2016-17 NHL trade deadline has come and gone, and even after flushing their playoff hopes down the drain just prior to 3 p.m. on Wednesday with a four-game losing streak, the Buffalo Sabres did nothing.

Scratch that.

Minor league forward Dan Catenacci was sent to the New York Rangers for defender Mat Bodie.

Outside of that deal, general manager Tim Murray made a puzzling decision to not send any of his expiring contracts out.

"Am I disappointed? Of course I'm disappointed," Murray said.

In certain circumstances, it's understandable. Evander Kane and his 22 goals didn't need to go anywhere. Captain Brian Gionta, while on an expiring contract, didn't either.

But to keep the likes of Dmitry Kulikov, Cody Franson, and Anders Nilsson, all on expiring deals, is surprising to say the least.

Nilsson is the least surprising of the three. As a backup goaltender, the 26-year-old has had a strong year (2.69 GAA, .921 save percent, 9-8-4 overall) but has been an inconsistent player for most of his career.

Kulikov and Franson are the concerning ones. There was a market for rental defenders.

Murray said he believes he has good gauge of value on his players. That's in question now.

The 26-year-old Kulikov only has a goal and an assist this season and has battled injury for most of the year.

Franson hasn't done much good during his Buffalo tenure, even the things he was supposed to be strong at, such as quarterbacking the power play.

Franson has 3 goals and 13 assists this season and only two power play points. Franson doesn't move well like many players with a 6'5" frame (see: Bogosian, Zach) and has committed 26 turnovers this season.

Murray replaced Darcy Regier as GM, who was criticized for overvaluing his own players and not pulling the trigger on deals.

That's exactly what Murray did on Wednesday.

"I had a lot of calls on Kulikov and I didn't ask too much," Murray said, citing Kulikov's back injuries this year as a reason for deals falling through.

That's also the reason why Murray shouldn't have expected much for him. Same with Franson, who has struggled in his own right.

Teams he talked to were going to know they've had struggles. They were also going to know Buffalo wanted to unload them because of their expiring deals.

So what was Murray expecting in return?

Don't trade them so you can resign them? Because the Sabres haven't ever traded a guy then approached him to resign before? (see: Moulson, Matt).

Even a mid-to-late pick would be acceptable, something conditional?

Now, I'm with Murray in one sense.

"I have a plan and today was slight, little speed bump in that plan," Murray said.

I agree, it's a little bump. Maybe he gets those late picks and they turn into nothing. But it's an addition to what he's already done.

I don't put much stock in Murray tanking a franchise for two seasons. I think the jury is still out on the Ryan O'Reilly trade as Buffalo sent prospects the other way. They haven't developed yet.

As for landing Kane, it's working out now, but in Kane and O'Reilly's case, both were halfway out the door when deals went down, too.

Kane, of course, hasn't come without his headaches.

But heck, I'll give him that one; I'm just not crowning him the best general manager in the NHL quite yet.

## **Sabres' Kane thinks he can be even better**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 1, 2017

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Sabres did practice Wednesday morning while Tim Murray was upstairs working the phones. The lines were all mixed up and most fans didn't like them.

Wednesday's lines:

Moulson O'Reilly Okposo  
Foligno Eichel Gionta  
Kane Girgensons Reinhart  
Ennis Rodrigues Bailey

Dan Bylsma thought changes needed to be made. He said, "Yes there'll be some changes to the lines for tomorrow's game. It hasn't worked, it hasn't been very good frankly. When you have minuses in goals against, so I think I'd be silly to stay with the status quo and hope for a different change."

We spoke with Evander Kane before the trade deadline came and he wasn't real worried about his name being bantered about, "I'll have my phone on me, but I'm probably going to shower up and have some pizza and enjoy the rest of my day."

"I feel pretty secure and pretty comfortable, so I'm not worried about it to be honest."

Kane is on a pace for 35 goals this season. He's not surprised with what he's been able to do this year, "Ever since I scored 30 and then we had the lockout there and I started having some injury issues that made me miss quite a few games and I just wanted to come in this year and get back to that."

"For me I just wanted to remind some people what type of player I am and I think I'm playing how I'm capable and I think I can do even more and be even better."

## **Sabres' Murray explains why there were no trades**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 1, 2017

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Tim Murray took calls about Evander Kane, Brian Gionta, Dmitry Kulikov and Cody Franson, but in the end, he couldn't get any deals done before the trade deadline.

Murray's Press Conference was carried live on WGR Sports Radio 550 and he of course was disappointed, "I made a few calls to see if I could make a hockey trade to get younger and this is the end result."

Many felt Kulikov and Franson would definitely be traded. Murray said, "We had two UFA's on the backend and pricewise I was very open and my market was just to get fair value, so I didn't not trade a guy by demanding too much."

"I can tell you I had multiple calls on Kulikov and I didn't ask too much and multiple guys said that's fair price, but injuries came up a lot in the conversations."

Gionta told me that he did not want to leave because as the team captain, he wanted to see this through. Murray said it was important to him to show Gionta that respect, "I spoke to Brian Gionta today after I did get a call. Absolutely, he's the captain of our team, he's a local guy, he's been a longtime character person in the league, so I called him and asked him a couple of questions and got answers."

When it comes to Kane, Murray said he had a couple of teams call on him. Murray told them, "I said I wasn't actively trying to trade him and if that's your goal this week, I'm willing to listen, but I didn't like what I heard so there was no traction on that."

Kane has one more year left on his contract and the Sabres can speak with him about an extension this summer. Murray said that could happen, but it's not a slam dunk, "Yes, I'd be open to that, but I'm not sure I'm going to do that. There's a lot of bridges to cross before that time."

"Would I be open to it in a scenario where he has a couple of things going on off the ice go away and stuff like that, absolutely?"

The Sabres have lost four straight games and I know it would be no surprise to you that Murray was very upset. He said, "After the game I stayed here until 12:30 at night and had long meetings with the coaching staff because the last three of four games are unacceptable. We have to show this market that we're improving and we want to be a good hockey club."

Lately, there have been many calls for Murray to be fired and for him to fire Bylsma. The GM doesn't blame the coaching staff, "The players are the game. We played really well going into the break except for the last two periods against Chicago. We had a very condensed schedule so the Chicago game, they have a hell of a team and I can live with a loss like that. I'm still going to be pissed off after the game, but I'll be rationally pissed off and then we go out west and we can't play and that's to me is squarely on the players."

"There was no less preparation by our coaching staff. We didn't fly to Denver and go and get drunk for three days. We got off the plane and had a real good practice in Denver and we were definitely not there and I would say we were physically not there. We're up in the Arizona game and their goaltender played very well, but still we're up, but that's just a complete mental breakdown and it's certainly not acceptable."

"To blame the coaches, I think we should all take our fair share of the blame. If the blame's on me, I'm good with that, but I think the players have to take responsibility for that too."

Murray was asked if he's aware of the fan unrest that has been simmering as this season has gone on. He said, "I think there's a part of the fan base here that thinks we're going in the right direction and then I think there's a part of the fan base that wants to see it done quicker and I understand that, but nothing good in life comes quickly, but I'm not asking for time from you. I have a plan, we have lots of picks, we've got some good

prospects coming, so I'm excited about some of our kids, but it takes time, but that's not for me to decide if we're going quick enough, that's for you guys to decide."

## **Sabres stand pat, make no deadline trades**

By Matt Bove

WKBW

March 1, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - At every Buffalo Sabres home game, there's a gentleman that yells "CLOCK'S TICKING MURRAY" in section 316. He does it every single game as a subtle reminder of the looming N.H.L. trade deadline.

Apparently, Murray didn't hear him because on Wednesday the clock ticked past the 3:00 p.m. deadline, and the Sabres stood pat, making no trades.

"It was the quietest (deadline) since I've been here," Murray told reporters on Wednesday afternoon. "I made some calls, made a lot of calls to set the table on trading away a couple guys and made a few calls on to see if I could make a hockey trade and yet younger."

Murray admitted that he was disappointed he couldn't swing a deal, but said today's inactivity is just a minor speed bump for the organization's plan.

The Sabres general manager specifically addressed Dmitry Kulikov, Brian Gionta and Cody Franson (all pending UFA's) and said that he took calls on all of them, but couldn't find a fair offer.

"I took every call on everybody, that's what I'm here to do" Murray added when asked specifically about trading away Brian Gionta. "

Murray said that when he received interest for Gionta he talked with the Sabres captain and decided to keep him in Buffalo.

*Here are some of the other topics Murray addressed:*

### **Dmitry Kulikov**

According to Murray, injuries were a big concern for the teams that reached out, which was one of the reasons the team couldn't get a deal done.

### **Evander Kane**

Murray said that a few teams called about Kane, but the offers weren't anything to consider. When asked about Kane's long-term future Murray said:

*"On the ice this year he has played very well. I think next year going into his contract year he's going to be highly motivated. I think most games he's highly motivated when he steps on the ice. I've said this 100 times, I like when he gets on the ice I like his game. You know, if he has the start to his year next year that he had this year without the injury I'm sure that there will be a ton of interest in his services and I'm sure we'll have an interest in talking contract moving forward. So, that's to be determined at a later date, but his play will dictate both of those scenarios."*

Murray was then asked if he would extend Kane's contract in the offseason.

"In a scenario where he has a couple of things going on off the ice go away, and stuff like that, absolutely.

### **Dan Bylsma**

When asked about a lackluster return from the bye week Murray said he puts the blame on everybody but said the players on the ice need to perform better.

## **Expansion draft**

With the expansion draft looming, Murray said he thinks held back on some potential deals out of fear that they wouldn't be able to protect players in the summer. Murray added it was absolutely a factor.

The last time the Sabres didn't make a move at the deadline? 2002. Crazy.

## **Deadline day: Six Sabres that could be traded**

By Matt Bove

WKBW

March 1, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - Happy trade deadline day Buffalo Sabres fans. Wednesday will surely be filled with rumors and speculation, just remember to watch out for fake Twitter accounts!

Here's six players that could be dealt before Wednesday's 3:00 p.m. deadline.

\*\*\*Note: List is based off potential return, not probability of getting dealt\*\*\*

### **#5 -- Cody Franson**

#### **Season summary:**

Everyone seems to have a stance on Cody Franson and it's amazing how different those opinions can be. A few weeks ago someone who covers the Toronto Maple Leafs tweeted that Franson was the Sabres best defenseman. Twitter basically exploded.

What makes Franson so polarizing is his impressive numbers. In 56 games Franson has 17 points, the second most from a defender on the Sabres. What's even crazier is his -1 plus/minus rating. By no means is this a perfect stat, but Franson actually has a better plus/minus than Ristolainen (-6), Kulikov (-15), Zach Bogosian (-12) and Josh Gorges (-3).

Personally, I think he's played better as the year has gone on, but he really had nowhere to go but up. His best hockey came when paired with Jake McCabe, but the McCabe and Ristolainen pairing is just too solid to be messed with.

It's no secret that Franson has his flaws, but he's also been asked to do a lot more than expected due to all the injuries on the blue line. If Franson played in a more limited role I'd imagine the criticism and takes wouldn't be nearly as hot when his name is brought up.

#### **Why he could be moved:**

Franson could be an attractive addition to a team with an already solid blue line in the case of an injury. He can step in and play 18 minutes a night without issue and help most teams second power play unit.

Remember when the Sabres traded Mike Weber to the Washington Capitals? It was a move by a good team to add some depth for a playoff run. I can absolutely see something similar happening with Franson.

#### **Possible return:**

Don't expect a king's ransom if the Sabres send Cody Franson to greener pastures. I'd bet General Manager Tim Murray would be content with a third round pick. Weber was traded for a third, but the Sabres retained some of his salary. If Franson isn't part of the plan for next year then the Sabres should get something for him, instead of just letting him walk in July.

### **#4 -- \*TIE\* Marcus Foligno and Zemgus Girgensons**

#### **Season summary:**

At times both have impressed but I'll give the advantage to Foligno -- he's been more consistent and versatile in the Sabres first 63 games.

That being said, Foligno has had the luxury of playing with more talented linemates for the majority of the season. At the beginning of the year, Foligno lined up on the left with Johan Larsson and Brian Gionta, a group that had played well together dating back to last season.

When Larsson suffered a season-ending wrist injury Foligno started to see some time with Sam Reinhart and Jack Eichel. For a while, it worked, but he was eventually moved back into a 'third' line role with Brian Gionta.

His game has declined a bit over the past few weeks, but he's still a valuable young asset to the team and could very well sign a new deal in the offseason.

Girgensons has shuffled up and down the lineup and hasn't played as consistent as Sabres fans hoped. In 2017 he has only three goals and only six on the season in 56 games.

After last season Girgensons (and Foligno) signed one-year 'prove it' deals, and so far this season Girgensons hasn't been much better than he was last year (71GP, 7G, 11A).

### **Why they could be moved:**

Both players are so young and have potential to be solid role players on contending teams. Girgensons hasn't been great but he could play and contribute on almost any fourth-line in the league. Foligno, like Girgensons, could add a viable bottom-six option to a contending team.

I actually don't think either player is going anywhere, at least before the deadline. Since both players are free agents there's a chance it happens, but I'd expect one, if not both, back next season. If I could only pick one to return I'd bet the Sabres were more likely to bring back Foligno.

### **Possible return:**

Since both are young I'd imagine General Manager Tim Murray would want more than a mid-round draft pick. If the Sabres could get a second round pick I think they'd be thrilled, I just don't see that happening.

If either player is dealt I'd imagine Murray would ask for a player in return. Maybe someone from a different team in a similar scenario. Sometimes changes of scenery actually work.

## **#3 -- Brian Gionta**

### **Season Summary:**

Gionta has exceeded expectations and has already surpassed his goal total from last season [13] and is only four points behind his point total from last year [33] with 19 games left in the regular season. Not bad timing for the deadline to come a day after Gionta scored a goal and added an assist.

He's not a top-six forward, but he's a nice third line winger that plays a responsible game at both ends of the ice.

The Sabres captain is a leader on and off the ice and that's what makes his future so particularly tricky.

Gionta has said multiple times that he'd like to stay in Buffalo and not be moved at the deadline. That being said, he may be one of the Sabres most attractive players at the deadline because of the aforementioned qualities.

### **Why he could be moved:**

Teams that are primed to make a run for the Stanley Cup want to surround their young players with guys who have been there before. Gionta has won a cup and played in this league since gas was less than \$1.50 a gallon.

He's the perfect addition to a contending team because of his versatility. He'll play a bottom-six role if moved but can also chip in on special teams.

### **The potential return:**

Gionta has a no-trade clause, which certainly complicates things. However, there's a small catch -- Gionta can be traded to five teams that he has hand selected. I don't know for sure, but you'd imagine at least one of those teams would be interested in adding Gionta. If the Sabres think they have a deal with another team, Gionta needs to approve the move before the deal is made.

If that happens, Gionta would likely be traded for a second or third round pick. I would lean towards a third round pick as a potential return, but you never know.

Before you say or tweet "The Sabres got a first for Paul Gaustad" --- Remember, that was a long time ago and Darcy Regier got away with highway robbery.

If Gionta decides he wants to keep playing after this year the Sabres could do something similar to what they did with Matt Moulson -- trade him and then resign him in the offseason. Making a move like this could ruffle some feathers in the locker room, and if the Sabres keep winning games it may not be a bad idea to keep Gionta around unless the return is 'worth' it.

## **#2 - Dmitry Kulikov**

### **Season Summary:**

The 2016-2017 season has not been kind to Dmitry Kulikov, and that may be putting things lightly. Kulikov, 26, has played in 37 games and has only two points and a -15 plus/minus rating, the worst on the team.

Ouch.

Kulikov was acquired in a trade at the draft last year that sent former Sabres defender Mark Pysyk to the Florida Panthers. The teams also swapped second-round picks in the deal [Buffalo selected Rasmus Asplund].

When the deal was made the Sabres thought they were trading for a reliable, physical defender who could log top-four minutes. Instead, they got a player that has been incredibly inconsistent and at times made some really head-scratching plays.

In Kulikov's defense, it's not easy to come to a new team and immediately deal with a lingering injury. At times he's looked like the player that General Manager Tim Murray envisioned in the Sabres lineup, but that hasn't been the case very often. That likely has a lot to do with Kulikov's health, but with an expiring contract in the summer, it makes sense to move him now unless he's part of the long term plan.

### **Why he could be moved:**

This hasn't been a good year for the young defender, but you can tell he's a talented player. With the playoffs right around the corner, plenty of teams are looking to add a big defenseman, and Kulikov may just be one of the most attractive options.

There's no denying that Kevin Shattenkirk from the St. Louis Blues will be the most sought-after blueliner, but for teams who miss out on Shattenkirk, Kulikov may make sense.

According to TSN, Kulikov is the highest rated defenseman (remaining) at this year's deadline. He hasn't had a good year, but come playoff time Kulikov could be a nice piece for a team in either their second or third pairing.

### **Potential return:**

Not to sound like a broken record, but I'd imagine Kulikov could be moved for a second round pick based on how the market has played out.

The big question with Kulikov is his health. If a team thinks he's good to go then maybe the return will be greater than expected.

## **#1 -- LW Evander Kane**

### **Season Summary:**

Since December 1, Kane has 22 goals, 21 of which have been scored at even strength, the most in the league during that span. His 21 even strength goals are also tied for the fifth most in the league this season.

When you consider that Kane didn't score in his first 12 games of his injury-shortened season, his numbers look even more impressive. In 51 games Kane has 33 points (22G, 11A).

### **Why he could be moved:**

Now is the time for playoff contenders to make a splash and bolster their lineups for a run at the Stanley Cup. Adding Kane to any team would do just that.

The 25-year-old winger has a knack for finding the back of the net and can play solid top-six minutes on most teams. Last year the Pittsburgh Penguins proved that having three viable scoring lines can be the difference between coming up short and winning it all. For many teams, Kane may be the final piece to their three-line puzzle.

Kane is also under contract next season, and with a \$5.25M cap hit, he could be an attractive option for teams trying to win this season or next year. In the grand scheme of things, that's not a bad cap hit. Zach Bogosian, for example, will make more next season. Who do you think deserves more?

### **Potential return:**

Your guess is as good as mine. So many Sabres fans want to see Kane dealt because his value is sky-high, or at least so we think. His return will all depend on how desperately a team needs a scoring winger and how much they trust Kane with his history of off-ice issues.

## **Murray discusses quiet deadline day, state of Sabres**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

March 1, 2017

Tim Murray called it the quietest trade deadline he's experienced as a general manager. Only 18 trades were made when the deadline was all said and done on Wednesday afternoon, and none of them involved the Buffalo Sabres. That's not to say it was for a lack of trying.

"I just go with what's put in front of me," Murray said. "I have no expectation going in. I made some calls, I made a lot of calls to set the table on trading away a couple guys and I made a few calls to see if I could make a hockey trade, get younger. This is the end result."

The Sabres have four players who are set to become unrestricted free agents this season: goalie Anders Nilsson, captain Brian Gionta and defensemen Cody Franson and Dmitry Kulikov. While he didn't touch on Nilsson, Murray did say he took calls on the latter three players.

When it came down to trading Franson and Kulikov, he said, he simply couldn't get what he perceived to be fair value. In Kulikov's case, the lower-back injury that has limited him to 37 games this season played a large part in those discussions.

"I'm just about being fair," Murray said. "I think I am. I think I know the value of players, and I couldn't make a trade. I think I'm honest to you guys. Am I disappointed? Of course I'm disappointed."

"... We still have two players here that are here. I don't want to sit here and just say I couldn't get anything for them, I mean, I don't want them to walk in tomorrow with their tail between their legs. They're here. We're six points out of a playoff spot."

"We'd like to be competitive until the end of the year. We played last night and I stayed here until 12:30 at night and we had long meetings with the coaching staff. The last three, four games are unacceptable. We still have to play games. We still have to show this market that we're improving and we want to be a good hockey club. But, in saying that, there was a lot of concerns."

So, what now? Buffalo has lost four games in a row, including three since their bye week concluded on Saturday, and trails Toronto by six points in the Eastern Conference wild card race with 19 games remaining.

Murray admitted that not being able to acquire an asset for an expiring contract could be looked at as a setback, but a minor one at that. We're approaching the end of the second season since Buffalo retooled its lineup with players like Jack Eichel, Ryan O'Reilly and Evander Kane and hired Dan Bylsma as coach; here's how Murray assessed the state of the team.

"I think there is a part of the fan base here that thinks we're going in the right direction and I think there is a part of the fan base that wants to see it done quicker, and I understand that," he said. "Nothing good in life comes quickly. It takes a long time to raise your kids, to raise them properly. Most marriages where you meet the girl the night before in Vegas and get married, they don't last. What other scenarios can I use?"

"... I have a plan. Today was a small, little speed bump to that plan. That's all. We've got lots of picks. We've got lots of good prospects coming and are kids have come up, and some of them have played very well ... I'm excited about the direction we're going in. but it takes time. I've given my plan to ownership and my scouting staff. We know our timeline, and it's not an exact timeline. There are things that come up to change it, make it quicker, slow it down, but those are just little things every day."

Here's what else we learned from Murray's press conference on Wednesday:

**Gionta's wishes were taken into account**

Gionta has said openly that he would prefer to stay in Buffalo, and Murray said it was important to him to at least take Gionta's wishes into account when taking calls on him this week.

"I took calls. I took every call on everybody, that's what I'm here to do. I also spoke to Brian Gionta today after I did get a call," Murray said. "He's the captain of our team, he's a local guy, he's been a long-time player and a long-time character person in the League so I called him and asked him a couple questions and got answers."

Gionta has 13 goals in 63 games this season, already surpassing his 2015-16 total of 12.

### **Murray took calls on Evander Kane, but did not actively try to trade him**

Kane is Buffalo's leading goal scorer with 23 goals this season, despite having played in just 51 games due to injury. At the same time, he's set to become an unrestricted free agent at the end of next season, which is why outside speculation circulated around a trade involving his name.

"I had a couple teams call on him," Murray said. "I said I'm not actively trying to trade him and, you know, if that's your goal this week or today or yesterday, whatever it is, I'm willing to listen on all players and I didn't like what I heard. There was really no traction on that."

Murray didn't rule out the possibility of Kane staying in Buffalo beyond the 2017-18 season.

"Well, we'll see," he said. "On the ice, this year, he's played very well. I think next year, going into his contract year, he's going to be highly motivated. I think most games he's highly motivated when he steps on the ice."

"I've said this 100 times, I like when he gets on the ice and he plays the games. If he has the start to his year next year that he had this year without the injury, I'm sure that there will be a ton of interest in his services and I'm sure that we'll have interest in talking contract moving forward. That's to be determined at a later date, but his play will dictate both of those scenarios."

### **The impact of expansion on the deadline**

Murray expressed belief that the upcoming expansion draft might have had something to do with the slow deadline day, and he used Linus Ullmark as an example. He made it clear that he wasn't trying to trade Ullmark - he referred to Ullmark as a "hell of a goalie" and said he'd like to keep him - but he was still surprised to not even have received a phone call regarding a young player with his level of upside.

While Buffalo is likely to protect Robin Lehner in the expansion draft - teams can only protect one goalie - Murray sufficed that an inability on the part of other teams to protect a player like Ullmark or other prospects may have had something to do with the minimal interest shown.

"I'm not sure, the expansion draft, what it had to play in this, but this has been the quietest deadline since I've been around," Murray said. "We do have an expansion draft coming. I would say it had a big part to do in this."

## **Sabres return to practice with deadline looming**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

March 1, 2017

While there were no surprise absences at practice for the Buffalo Sabres on Wednesday morning, there was undoubtedly a hint of uncertainty. The 3 p.m. traded deadline is quickly approaching, leaving the question as to whether or not all of the players on the ice would still be in Buffalo come Thursday.

"A little of that lingers with the impending three o'clock deadline," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "But you treat the situation and the players like they're going to be there tomorrow and going forward."

It's an especially uncomfortable time for players set to become unrestricted free agents at the end of the season, of which the Sabres have four: Anders Nilsson, Brian Gionta, Cody Franson and Dmitry Kulikov.

"For guys like myself there's definitely a little more stress to it and things like that," Franson said. "As a player you can only control certain things and being moved or being kept is something that's not really in our hands. All we can do is focus on our play and what we're doing on the ice and you hope for the best on the other side of things."

Franson has been traded once before - from Toronto to Nashville during the 2014-15 season - but a new wrinkle has been added to his situation at this deadline. The defenseman is a father now, a factor he hadn't had to deal with the first time he was dealt.

"When kids come into the equation, it makes things a little different but having that experience definitely does help keep the stress level down a little bit," he said.

Moving forward with the mindset that the team on the ice would still be there when the Sabres host the Coyotes on Thursday, Dan Bylsma shuffled his lines in an effort to snap the team's four-game losing streak.

"It hasn't worked," Bylsma said. "It hasn't been very good, frankly. We have minuses and goals against so I think it'd be sill to stay with the status quo and hope for a different change."

Here's how the full lineup looked at practice on Wednesday:

26 Matt Moulson - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 21 Kyle Okposo  
82 Marcus Foligno - 15 Jack Eichel - 12 Brian Gionta  
9 Evander Kane - 28 Zemgus Girgensons - 23 Sam Reinhart  
63 Tyler Ennis - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 56 Justin Bailey

Defensemen: 55 Rasmus Ristolainen, 29 Jake McCabe, 4 Josh Gorges, 6 Cody Franson, 77 Dmitry Kulikov, 47 Zach Bogosian, 41 Justin Falk (Nicolas Deslauriers also skated reps on defense)

40 Robin Lehner  
31 Anders Nilsson

### **Update on Will Carrier**

Bylsma said that Carrier, who has been out since Feb. 4 with a bone bruise, has not progressed as the team had hoped and remains off the ice.

"I probably don't have the exact medical terminology, but that's what it is," Bylsma said when asked if the injury was still being classified as a bone bruise. "He's, right now, staying off his leg and not putting any weight on it."

Carrier has six points (4+2) in 35 games this season, his first in the NHL.