



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Hockey helps the healing as tourists, expats hit Vegas for Sabres' first visit

The Buffalo News

By Mike Harrington

October 16, 2017

LAS VEGAS — The sign is in every travel brochure you see for Sin City. "Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas Nevada" is its simple greeting as tourists walk up to take pictures and cars whiz by heading down Las Vegas Boulevard to The Strip.

A beacon in the desert, the sign has a much deeper meaning these days.

It's become the site of the unofficial memorial for the lives lost in the mass shooting that took place here Oct. 1. When Stephen Paddock opened fire from an upper floor at Mandalay Bay on a crowd of 22,000 concertgoers at the Route 91 Harvest Festival across the street, he left 58 people dead and more than 500 injured in the worst act of gun violence on American soil.

The shocking massacre has left an indelible mark on a city that always has out its 24-hour welcome mat.

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The Sabres will play their first game here against the expansion Vegas Golden Knights on Tuesday night in T-Mobile Arena, less than a mile from the site of the shooting. Many fans from Buffalo and Western New York expats will be in the stands.

But whether they live here or are just visiting, their trip to see their favorite team is no longer about just a hockey game.

"This community is still hurting, really hurting," said Brian Blessing, the longtime Buffalo television broadcaster who has been a sport talk radio host here since 2005. "It's not one of these things that happened from afar. It was in your backyard. When this first happened, people are still walking around in a funk and now you're trying to talk sports on the radio, but what do you do? You can't because it's about life, but eventually you have to ease back into what you do. You have to."

At the sign

Under bright, sunny skies Monday afternoon, several hundred people quietly walked around looking at pictures of the deceased. Leaving flowers and stuffed animals. Taking pictures and signing their names to the rocks and the concrete curb to offer a message of support to a still-grieving city.

Josh Schupp and his girlfriend, Terri Wappat, of Mayville got their tickets to Las Vegas in July. They made plans to attend the Sabres' game in September. Then the shooting happened and they knew they had to pay their respects.

"It changed our destination list for sure," said Schupp, a Sabres cap on his head and a Sharpie in his hand after signing a message on a rock. "We were coming to the Sabres' game and coming here became No. 2 after that. It's great to see how many different people from so many different walks of life are here. I just ran into a Boston Bruins fan who was at the game Sunday night and we got talking. Maybe we don't do that otherwise."

Part of the memorial to the Las Vegas shooting victims (Mike Harrington/Buffalo News).

"This brings tears to your eyes," Wappat said of the collection of artifacts and messages. "I was concerned coming here after this. You never know what's going to happen. But you think to when the schedule came out, that's the first thing we were looking for: When is the game in Vegas and can we make it out there to see the brand new arena? So we were coming."

Tourists are a big part of the experience at Golden Knights' games. It will be interesting to see how many Sabres fans have made the trek.

Bill and Kara Neidel of Buffalo, Sabres season-ticket holders from Section 300 in KeyBank Center, are in a group of 130 fans who came West and made a weekend out of it prior to the game on Tuesday night.

"This might be an annual thing for us. It will be a lot of fun," Bill Neidel said.

Neidel said he and his wife stayed at Mandalay Bay to celebrate their 10-year anniversary on a previous trip. They're spending this time at the Mirage but also came to the memorial on Monday.

"To see it involve Mandalay Bay was upsetting," he said, looking at the towering gold hotel a few blocks off in the distance. "We tried to keep it out of our minds but once you come down here, you can't. It's a huge feeling here. You think of people just enjoying themselves and then that happens and it affects everyone's families so much."

Golden Knights rally city

The Golden Knights have been a rallying point for the community with a 4-1 record, becoming the first NHL expansion team ever to win its first three games. They won their season opener in Dallas and then staged an emotional home opener last week in T-Mobile, scoring four first-period goals in a 5-2 win over Arizona.

The night was framed in a solemn tribute to victims and a salute to first responders, and the nationally televised ceremony became a much bigger story than the game. It included a 58-second moment of silence, one second for each of the victims.

"It was awesome, one of the coolest games I've been a part of for sure," Golden Knights defenseman Brayden McNabb, a former Sabre, said after practice Monday at City National Arena in the Summerlin section of the city. "You saw the emotion in the crowd and there was emotion for us. It was a special moment."

"It was an unbelievable night that was much more for the city than for the team," said forward William Carrier, who was taken from the Sabres in the June expansion draft. "The emotions were high and we got three goals so quickly, we were really pumped up for that one."

McNabb was selected from Los Angeles in June and was whisked here on a 4 a.m. flight from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, to be on hand for the expansion draft. He joined four other teammates on a photo shoot at the Vegas sign that day, when it was a much happier place.

"It was very hot. I don't know if I could ever do summers here," he said. "There were a lot of people there. It was cool, a fun day."

On the night of the shooting, the Golden Knights had wrapped up their final preseason game about 2 1/2 hours before the chaos began. Some players were having a late dinner up the street at The Cosmopolitan hotel when word spread on Twitter.

"We didn't really know if it was real," McNabb recalled. "We wanted to get out of there once we heard and they locked us down for a couple hours but our security team did a great job getting us out of there. They sent three cars for us and got us home safely."

From that point, the Golden Knights became ambassadors, much like the Yankees were in New York after 9/11 and the Red Sox were in Boston following the marathon bombings. But those were teams with decades of tradition. This team had yet to play an official game.

"Guys went around to fire stations and have met a lot of people," Carrier said. "The city is really enjoying having a hockey team. We're in the middle of the desert and people are coming in and out from Vegas so you didn't know. But people have enjoyed having us, especially now."

"It's been a crazy time," McNabb said. "The hockey has been a lot of fun and when the tragedy happened, we all knew we wanted to get behind the city. Then you get the first three wins and it's huge for our franchise and our fans."

On the air

Blessing is back to talking sports, like he did on Channel 4 from 1980-1994 and as he did at Empire Sports Network on the Sabres' "Hockey Hotline" postgame show until it the network went off the air in 2004 as part of the Rigas/Adelphia scandal. Blessing says he's thankful the Golden Knights' last preseason game played the night of the shooting was an early start.

"Had that been a normal start time, the odds are high there might have been 7-8-9,000 people still coming out of T-Mobile Arena," he said. "They might have needed to quick go back in and go in lockdown. But it was a 5 o'clock start. I left the arena, got home and was nodding off."

Blessing's 37-year-old son, also named Brian, woke him up.

"He said to put the TV on and that something was going on at Mandalay Bay," he recalled. "It was on locally for 7-8 minutes and then it started getting picked up by CNN, FOX and all the networks. I bet I was up until 3 a.m. watching."

On opening night at T-Mobile, Blessing was particularly moved by the words of defenseman Deryk Engelland, who has lived in Vegas for many years. Said Engelland, closing a brief and touching speech: "To the families and friends of the victims, we'll do everything we can to help you and our city heal. We are Vegas Strong."

"The organization was bang-on with the way they did the tone of the pregame ceremony and the 58 seconds of silence was amazing," Blessing said. "Eighteen thousand people and you could hear a pin drop. Then Deryk Engelland's speech was hair-standing-on-your-arms stuff."

"The game starts and the first 20 minutes, with the emotion in the building, the Golden Knights looked like the Central Red Army."

Blessing said he and his callers have talked of the way the Golden Knights, the first major-league sports team to come to Vegas, have quickly meshed into the town in the wake of tragedy.

"It's a hodgepodge of guys thrown together, a team only here for a few weeks and they all dove right in," he said. "They went out immediately to blood centers, visited with police and first responders. They got out in the community very much so in that first week. It enhanced their sense of community and quicked connected the town to the team."

Expats are ready

Frank Scinta came to City National Arena hoping to see the Sabres practice Monday. He didn't get to see them as the team was given the day off following its win Sunday in Anaheim, its third game in four days.

Scinta, 36, is a die-hard Sabres fan and a Kenmore West graduate. He's a regional manager for Life Storage, the former Uncle Bob's that started in Buffalo. On Oct. 1, he was going to bed to watch Netflix when everything changed.

"My friend texted my wife to put the news on," Scinta said. "As it turned out, I didn't go to bed until 3 a.m. It was crazy. One of my managers was at the concert and left an hour before the shooting started because he wanted to beat traffic."

If the name sounds familiar, it should be. Scinta is the son of Frankie Scinta, the Buffalo native who has spent many years as a musical headliner in Vegas. Now working downtown at the Plaza Hotel, Frankie Scinta did an emotional show two days after the attack.

"After 9/11, entertainers didn't know what to do," his son said. "Do we go to work? But that's what we do. People are stressed out, you go to work. Two days after the massacre here, my dad came out and told the audience that times were tough right now but we're here to laugh. Entertainers' jobs since the beginning of time is to take your mind off what's going on in the world."

"There's firefighters there, the mayor was at the show. It hits home so hard. It was a very emotional show. A lot of tears, a lot of hugs. It took people's minds off things just for a little while."

Evan Wozniak is a 2017 UNLV Law School graduate whose family moved him here when he was 3. He'll be in a group of 10 at Tuesday's game, all of whom have either moved to Vegas or traveled here from Buffalo.

"We're kind of celebrating Vegas hockey," he said. "If the Sabres score I'll be happy but if Vegas scores I'll be happy, too."

Wozniak said it was "worth every penny" to attend the home opener.

"That is a lifetime memory considering the circumstances ... I've never seen an arena almost at capacity 30 minutes before game time. Everyone wanted to be in their seat and see what was going to happen."

"It was impossible not to be choked up. It was this complete and overwhelming sadness but there was joy in celebration in what this team and organization is trying to do for the community putting something together that special."

Scinta did not attend the home opener but talked to several friends who did.

"They said there were people just hugging in the crowd," he said. "Strangers sharing stories, phone numbers. Meeting outside the arena in the park. I've never seen Vegas come together like this. It's a transient town with a lot of different races and nationalities but it's really cool to see."

Wozniak said he's amazed at how in touch the Golden Knights have been in the face of the tragedy.

"This is a community that has been yearning for a pro sports team for 30+ years," he said. "UNLV basketball used to be the hot ticket in town but this community has wanted a pro team. Once we were awarded the team, it has been a buzz since that day. There was more than a year of anticipation and buildup. Then tragedy strikes. How does this brand new team respond to this situation? They've checked every box."

Story topics: Buffalo Sabres/ Las Vegas shooting/ Vegas Golden Knights

Sabres Notebook: Carrier, McNabb thrilled by Golden Knights' fast start

The Buffalo News

By Mike Harrington

October 16, 2017

LAS VEGAS — The two former Buffalo Sabres who are members of the Vegas Golden Knights say their experience with the NHL's newest expansion team has been a whirlwind from the day they were drafted in June.

Winger William Carrier and defenseman Brayden McNabb were both taken by Vegas in the expansion draft, Carrier from the Sabres and McNabb from the Los Angeles Kings.

The Golden Knights became the first expansion club to win their first three games and improved to 4-1 with Sunday's 3-1 win over the Boston Bruins. They host the Sabres Tuesday night at 10 p.m. Eastern time (MSG, Radio 550 AM).

"It's been a good feeling around here," said Carrier, 22. "Guys really enjoy coming to the rink and that's the attitude you have to have. It's a hardworking team and that's what the coaches are implanting in us. Guys are doing exactly that."

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McNabb has one assist in four games, sitting out Sunday as a healthy scratch on the crowded Vegas blueline. Carrier has no points while filling an energy role on the fourth line with Tomas Nosek and Pierre-Edouard Bellemare.

"It's an international line. That's what we call ourselves," said a smiling Carrier, who is French Canadian and playing with Nosek, a Czech, and Bellemare, a Frenchman.

McNabb, a former third-round pick of the Sabres, was traded in 2014 by former General Manager Tim Murray. Carrier made his NHL debut last season with Buffalo, collecting five goals and three assists in 41 games.

Carrier said he texted congratulations to Justin Bailey after the Western New York native scored his first goal of the season Sunday in Anaheim.

"There was disappointment last year," Carrier said. "We felt we had a good team and couldn't get wins together. The coach and the GM get let go and it's really the players who are responsible for that. So they're trying a new system now and we know they've got some good players."

The Vegas players are getting used to lots of visiting fans in their building, which was nearly a 50-50 split Friday against Detroit.

"Those Buffalo fans will be out. I know that," said McNabb. "It's different because you know there will be a lot of tourists. Especially Original Six teams and other places that have been around a while. But our fans are loud. They've been tremendous for us. The city is really behind us and we want to give that back to them."

* * *

It took a review by the National Hockey League but Sabres forward Sam Reinhart officially has his first goal of the season.

The NHL has changed the scoring on the game-winning goal from Sunday's 3-1 victory in Anaheim, crediting the goal to Reinhart on an assist from Benoit Pouliot with 31.3 seconds left in the second period. Reinhart said after the game the puck deflected off his stick after Pouliot harassed the Ducks' defense into a turnover.

So the goal has gone from Pouliot unassisted to Reinhart from Pouliot, whose first Buffalo point becomes an assist.

The league also added an assist to Jason Pominville on the first goal the Sabres scored in Saturday's 4-2 loss at Los Angeles. That goal now reads Zemgus Girgensons from Jack Eichel and Pominville. The second assist had been credited to Jake McCabe.

The change gives Pominville a two-point game and seven points on the season, tied with Eichel and Evander Kane for the team lead.

The Sabres were given Monday off in Las Vegas and will hit the ice Tuesday morning in T-Mobile Arena to prepare for Tuesday night's game.

* * *

The Golden Knights will be without several injured regulars Tuesday, notably three-time Stanley Cup champion goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury. He suffered a concussion Friday against Detroit and has been replaced by Malcolm Subban, who earned his first NHL win Sunday with a 3-1 victory over Boston, his former team.

* * *

The Sabres announced the creation of the "Captain's Class" program, which will reward students and athletes who are making a positive difference in their schools and community.

Buffalo's four alternate captains (Ryan O'Reilly, Zach Bogosian, Jack Eichel and Kyle Okposo, will all participate in the initiative. It begins Friday, when the Sabres host Vancouver.

Students selected to join the Captain's Class will receive four tickets to a Sabres game and passes for the team's Gold Carpet Experience. In addition, each recipient will receive a Sabres puck autographed by one of the club's alternate captains.

"As a group, we felt it was important to recognize kids who were making a positive impact on our community," O'Reilly said in a statement. "We hope these children will feel a sense of pride in being recognized for the good work they are doing and continue to be an inspiration for their peers."

The Captain's Class will recognize students who exhibit one or more of the following characteristics: Leadership, compassion, respect, volunteerism, character and selflessness. The program is open to youths ages 8 to 18 and nomination forms are available at Sabres.com. Family members may not nominate.

Story topics: Brayden McNabb/ Buffalo Sabres/ Sam Reinhart/ Vegas Golden Knights/ William Carrier

Bailey has the right attitude

WGR 550

By Paul Hamilton

October 16, 2017

Las Vegas, NV (WGR 550) - Justin Bailey made an immediate impact in his first NHL game this season. The winger scored on his first shift and it helped Buffalo win its first game.

Bailey scored twice in Rochester's opener on October 6th, and felt things were going well down there, "I felt pretty good. I think our team down there has come together pretty closely and it's been a pretty good start down there for sure."

Many thought Bailey would be mad he got sent down, but he said he had a much more positive exit interview than he ever had with Tim Murray, "In years past, two training camps ago, the message wasn't the same and for me it was great to hear that. I felt like I gave them everything I could and I didn't have any regrets, so for me it was all positive."

"Everything in the exit meeting was positive, Jason [Botterill] and coach [Phil] Housley both told me they liked how I had my camp and to go down there and work on the little things and earn my way back up here."

Tuesday will be four games in six nights for the Sabres, so Housley gave the team the day off.

Sabres center Jacob Josefson was seen in the room after the game with a walking boot on. He left Sunday's game in the second period limping after a check along the end boards. Housley will update us on Tuesday.

Sabres seek to slow surprising Knights

The Sports Xchange

By Javier Morales

October 16, 2017

LAS VEGAS -- The early-season fate of the Buffalo Sabres and the Golden Knights should be reversed, but Vegas is proving it is not a customary expansion team that will take its licks.

The Sabres, in their 47th year as an NHL organization, arrive in Las Vegas for a Tuesday game coming off their first win of the season at Anaheim on Sunday. Also on Sunday, the Golden Knights won for the fourth time in their first five games.

Thanks to a 3-1 win over the Ducks, the Sabres' first triumph under new coach Phil Housley, Buffalo is 1-4-1. Benoit Pouliot scored the decisive goal late in the second period, and goaltender Chad Johnson made 25 saves.

"I think everyone was happy," Johnson said, commenting about his coach's first win. "I think after the fact you realize that it was Phil's first, but I think everybody was eager to get it for everybody."

What better place to celebrate Housley's first win than Las Vegas? Buffalo cannot take that approach with Vegas (4-1-0) waiting to pull another upset at home.

Vegas spoiled the Boston Bruins' first trip to Sin City on Sunday with a 3-1 victory.

Alex Tuch and Vadim Shipachyov, both recalled from the Chicago Wolves of the American Hockey League over the weekend, scored their first career NHL goals against the Bruins.

Goalie Malcolm Subban, making his first start with the Golden Knights, stopped 21 shots while picking up his first career victory in front of a sellout crowd of 17,562 at the T-Mobile Arena.

Tuch and Shipachyov replaced injured center Jonathan Marchessault and left winger Erik Haula.

Subban played in place of starter Marc-Andre Fleury, who was placed on injured reserve with a concussion. Marchessault was also placed on injured reserve due to a lower-body injury.

Fleury started Vegas' first four games this season, going 3-1-0 with a .925 save percentage and a 2.48 goals-against average. Vegas coach Gerard Gallant said he is hopeful that Fleury, who has been sidelined multiple times with concussions during his 14-year NHL career -- mostly with the Pittsburgh Penguins -- could be back by Saturday.

Subban, claimed off waivers from the Bruins on Oct. 3, was making just the third start of his NHL career after compiling a 0-2 record and a 5.82 goals-against average with the Bruins.

"They were great call-ups today, obviously," Gallant said of his influx of talent. "They played a good game, and they capitalized on their chances. When you lose players like Marchessault, Haula and Fleury in the last game and you bring these guys in, they're a big part of our group. They played really well for us."

The Sabres have injury concerns of their own. They placed defenseman Zach Bogosian on injured reserve Sunday with a lower-body injury. Bogosian, 27, had been limited in practice since being injured in Buffalo's final preseason game. In 56 games last season, he recorded two goals and nine assists.

In a corresponding move, the Sabres recalled forward Justin Bailey from Rochester of the AHL, and he scored a goal Sunday against Anaheim in his NHL season debut. Bailey, 22, led Rochester with two goals and was tied for the team lead with a plus-2 rating through three games.

Buffalo defenseman Justin Falk (calf injury) and left winger Evan Rodrigues (hand) are also on injured reserve. Right winger Kyle Okposo is day-to-day with the flu.

Johnson and his teammates understand that playing Vegas will not be easy.

"At times like this (with only one win), you want to draw on your experience," said Johnson, who has played in the NHL since 2009 for Buffalo (two different stints), the New York Rangers, the Phoenix Coyotes, Boston, the New York Islanders and the Calgary Flames.

"You ride the wave and just kind of get through it. ... I think we're gaining that maturity, that kind of composure."

Two former Sabres -- winger William Carrier and defenseman Brayden McNabb -- are with the Golden Knights. Both were taken in the expansion draft. Carrier, 22, played in eight games with Buffalo last year. McNabb, 26, is a former third-round pick by Buffalo who was traded in 2014 to the Los Angeles Kings.

"It's been a crazy time," McNabb told the Buffalo News. "The hockey has been a lot of fun, and when the tragedy happened (the mass shooting that occurred on Oct. 1 in Las Vegas), we all knew we wanted to get behind the city."

"Then you get the first three wins (to open the season) and it's huge for our franchise and our fans. It's been exciting to get the season going."

Sharpen Up: October 16, 2017

Sabres.com

By Chris Ryndak

October 16, 2017

Phil Housley picked up his first career win as a head coach last night as the Sabres defeated the Anaheim Ducks 3-1 at Honda Center. Justin Bailey (in his first game of the season), Benoit Pouliot and Johan Larsson scored for Buffalo, snapping an 0-4-1 skid to start the season.

The Sabres are in Vegas for their first-ever game against the Golden Knights tomorrow night.

Here's what you need to know.

If you couldn't stay awake...

Recap: BUF 3, ANA 1

04:03 • October 15th, 2017

Here's the game recap from Jourdon (which you should check out for a deeper look at the game).

Phil Housley Postgame (10/15/17)

03:38 • October 16th, 2017

"It's great to get your first win obviously," Housley said. "To do it on the road is great. But this isn't about me, it's about those guys in that locker room. They've been through a lot and they found a way to win tonight on the road, in a tough building.

"They gutted it out, stayed the course and I'm just really proud of them."

Bailey pots backhand early in 1st

00:52 • October 15th, 2017

The Sabres opened the scoring 1:26 into the game thanks to a goal from Justin Bailey, which came on his first shift. Bailey was officially recalled that morning from Rochester and made the most of his opportunity in front of the net.

Justin Bailey Postgame (10/15/17)

01:15 • October 16th, 2017

"I think we've been preaching on getting pucks to the net and the good results that can come from that," Bailey said. "The play was pretty simple. I came off the bench, we got pucks to the net and caused a little confusion and I was fortunate to be in the right place at the right time."

The Ducks tied it on a shorthanded goal with 4:10 remaining in the second period - the fifth such goal they've allowed this season.

Pouliot nets lucky bounce

00:33 • October 15th, 2017

However, Buffalo was able to head into the intermission with a lead thanks to a bounce going their way with 24 seconds remaining. Pouliot was credited with his first goal as a Sabre.

Sam Reinhart Postgame (10/15/17)

02:57 • October 16th, 2017

Chad Johnson was solid between the pipes, making 25 stops including this one:

Johnson sprawls to deny Ritchie

02:15 • October 15th, 2017

Rob Ray talked to him after the game:

Chad Johnson w/ Rayzor (10/15/17)

01:21 • October 16th, 2017

With the addition of Bailey, the Sabres are traveling with 14 forwards. Kyle Okposo missed the game due to an illness and Seth Griffith served as a healthy scratch, but we'll see if the Sabres will need those extra bodies tomorrow because Jacob Josefson left the game with an injury. Housley did not have an update on his status.

Feeling lucky?

The Sabres will conclude their four-game trip tomorrow night against the Vegas Golden Knights - who are 4-1-0 - at T-Mobile Arena. It will be Buffalo's first-ever matchup with the NHL's 31st club.

Coverage on Tuesday begins at 9:30 p.m. with GMC Gamenight on MSG. The puck drops at 10 p.m. on MSG and you can also listen to RJ and Rayzor call the action on WGR 550.