



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

January 5, 2018

Niederreiter's hat trick fuels Wild in 6-2 win vs Sabres

Associated Press

By DAVE CAMPBELL

Jan. 5, 2018

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Nino Niederreiter's return made the Minnesota Wild whole again, just in time for the second half of the season.

He turned this into quite the celebration.

Niederreiter marked the end of his five-game injury absence with his second career hat trick, Mikko Koivu contributed a goal and two assists, and the finally fully healthy Wild beat the Buffalo Sabres 6-2 on Thursday night.

"I know we have the ability for every line to go out there and score," Minnesota coach Bruce Boudreau said.

Daniel Winnik and Charlie Coyle also scored for the Wild, who improved to 11-1-1 in their last 13 home games. They're 14-4-2 this season at Xcel Energy Center, with a 60-41 advantage in goals.

Niederreiter, who missed the previous five games because of a lower leg injury, needed less than 25 minutes of game time to get his third goal. His parents were even in attendance, visiting from his native Switzerland.

"It's always great having them around here," Niederreiter said.

The Wild essentially expressed the same sentiment about Niederreiter, who also missed six games in October due to a similar injury.

"Sometimes it takes a little bit for guys that come back from injuries to feel confident again," Coyle said. "He's probably feeling pretty confident right now."

Devan Dubnyk took a shutout into the third period for the Wild, until Sam Reinhart scored early and Evander Kane got a goal late. Dubnyk is 11-2-1 in his last 15 starts since Nov. 9.

With Zach Parise skating for just the second time this season and Niederreiter back in action, the Wild finally had their full complement of forwards as they reached the midpoint of the schedule. With seven of their first nine games at home this month, this is the time for them to make their move back above the playoff cut in the Western Conference.

"Just makes the game a little bit easier. We have four good lines right now. It's fun to play like that," said Mikael Granlund, who had three assists.

The final stretch began to feel more like an exhibition, and given all the connections between these teams it almost could have been an alumni game.

Sabres right wing Jason Pominville and defenseman Marco Scandella, who were sent east by the Wild last summer in a salary-shedding trade for right wing Tyler Ennis and left wing Marcus Foligno, were honored with a highlight video before the opening faceoff.

Scandella is one of four former Wild draft picks and players on the Sabres roster, along with left wings Benoit Pouliot and Johan Larsson and defenseman Justin Falk. Larsson was dealt to Buffalo nearly five years ago in the first Pominville trade consummated by the two clubs. Another former Sabres player on the Wild, right wing Chris Stewart, was a healthy scratch.

Sabres coach Phil Housley and right wing Kyle Okposo each grew up just a few miles from the arena, albeit many years apart, and Okposo also played two seasons in college for Minnesota.

This was the back-to-normal game for Buffalo, coming off an overtime loss to the New York Rangers in the Winter Classic outside at Citi Field on New Year's Day. The Sabres, who have the fewest wins and most goals allowed in the Eastern Conference, were probably glad this one didn't have the same media coverage.

Niederreiter scored just 69 seconds into the contest , snapping a behind-the-net pass from Granlund beneath the pads of Sabres goalie Robin Lehner.

Rasmus Ristolainen was ejected for a five-minute major penalty for interference after delivering a bloody blow to Koivu's face midway through the first period. With 1:23 remaining on the extended power play, Niederreiter knocked a ricochet past sliding defenseman Zach Bogosian that Lehner was too slow to stop.

"I think there should have been a call on the play, but I don't agree with five minutes," Housley said.

Koivu returned with stitches and a puffy upper lip in the second period and exacted his revenge, going low for a one-timer off Granlund's pass to give the Wild a 5-0 lead. Granlund, who had a hat trick himself last week, has eight points in the last five games.

The Wild are 10-3-2 in their last 15 matchups with the Sabres, outscoring them 54-31, since March 9, 2007. That includes a 7-0 victory at Buffalo on Jan. 15, 2015, which was Dubnyk's debut with the team and the largest margin of victory in franchise history.

In the Wild's 5-4 win at Buffalo on Nov. 22, Niederreiter scored twice as Chad Johnson was pulled after giving up three goals on 13 shots in the first period. Lehner made 17 saves in relief to help keep the Sabres close.

"He's been playing really well, and then we didn't help him enough tonight," Ristolainen said.

NOTES: Niederreiter's previous hat trick also came against the Sabres on Nov. 13, 2014. ... Dubnyk moved past Manny Fernandez into second place on the Wild's career list with 114 wins. Niklas Backstrom is first with 194. ... This was just Lehner's second regulation loss in his last eight road appearances.

UP NEXT

Sabres: Play at Philadelphia on Sunday afternoon.

Wild: Play at Colorado on Saturday night.

Sabres don't compete on night where Ristolainen gets an early gate

Buffalo News

By Mike Harrington

January 4, 2018

ST. PAUL, Minn. -- The Buffalo Sabres lost Rasmus Ristolainen for more than 50 minutes Thursday night and you wonder if they might lose their No. 1 defenseman for even longer than that.

All on a play that was originally called a two-minute minor and probably shouldn't have gone past that.

Ristolainen hit Minnesota's Mikko Koivu going across the middle midway through the first period and it's unclear what caused a large gash about Koivu's mouth. There was some thought in the Buffalo dressing room it was Koivu's own stick. Replays seemed to show it was Ristolainen's visor. Whatever the case, the blood seemed to change the mind of officials.

From initially handing Ristolainen two minutes for interference, the stripes had a confab and suddenly changed their minds to a major penalty and a game misconduct.

Now, the Sabres were thoroughly outclassed much of the night in a 6-2 loss to the Wild at Xcel Energy Center. And they were already down 2-0 when Ristolainen's penalty was assessed with 9:44 left in the first period. But losing their key guy on the blueline was a backbreaker, and you wonder if the NHL's Department of Player Safety is going to have something to say too.

"The good thing is he isn't injured," Ristolainen said of Koivu, who was stitched up and returned to the game to score Minnesota's fifth goal. "I tried not to hurt him. It just stinks to get kicked out of the game and you can't help the guys. First it was a two-minute, then they discussed it more and said I'm done for the night. I'm not happy I couldn't help."

Coach Phil Housley was furious with the change.

"I totally disagreed with that. The original call was two minutes for interference," Housley said. "Risto is not a guy that's going to go out and try to hurt somebody. The way it progressed was unfortunate. They made an original call and changed a call after conversing together."

"We lose our best player. I totally disagree with it. I haven't seen that, I haven't seen them make the call, get together as a group. I would just want to know who changed the call. Nobody would tell me that."

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Bradley Gelber

✓

@BradleyGelber

Here is the game misconduct that was called on Ristolainen. #Sabres pic.twitter.com/hO4Ui6AIOO

Bradley Gelber

✓

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Another angle of the Ristolainen game misconduct call. #Sabres pic.twitter.com/OL1RA8u3U2

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Ristolainen was suspended three games in March for an interference penalty and high hit on Pittsburgh's Jake Guentzel. That won't help his case here. For his part, Housley had an animated discussion with referees Frederick L'Ecuyer and Chris Lee prior to the start of the second period after watching replays during the first intermission.

"It's a shoulder hit. Let's face it, Rasmus is a physical player," Housley said. "Somebody coming through the middle with their head down, he's going to finish the check. I don't think he was out there to hurt anybody. I don't think that's part of his game. He's a physical and tough competitor and it's unfortunate."

"It happened quick. Hockey is a quick game," said Marco Scandella, Ristolainen's defense partner. "He's a horse for us, a big part of our team. Definitely losing him that early in the game wasn't ideal."

Sure wasn't. Ristolainen averages 27 minutes per game and plays in all situations. He was out of this one after just 5:43. With Ristolainen gone, Housley did well to spread the minutes around on defense between Zach Bogosian (25:32), Scandella (24:06), Jake McCabe (20:38), Nathan Beaulieu (20:24) and Justin Falk (19:55). Falk finished minus-3 in the game.

The Wild had it easy in improving to 11-1-1 at home in their last 13 games. They needed just 17 shots to score all six of their goals in the first 40 minutes against Robin Lehner, who was mercifully pulled for the third and replaced by Chad Johnson.

"We just left guys open, they score a few easy ones and we're out of the game quickly," Scandella said.

Nino Niederreiter led the way with his second career hat trick. He scored at 1:09 of the first and Daniel Winnik burst down the slot unchallenged to beat Lehner at 2:15 and it was essentially game over.

"On the second goal, I made a bad read," Beaulieu said. "I thought he was going to kick it out and he walked through. Just situational play, playing outside our structure. It seems like we're always playing from behind. It's difficult to adjust to. We're looking for answers in here but giving up two goals that fast, you can't let that happen."

"It looked like the Red Sea parted and he was able to walk right down the gut," Housley said of Winnik. "That's just not the way we've been playing. It was really nothing what Minnesota did. They capitalized on their opportunities. I'll give them credit. It was what we gave them. We gave them too much."

Sabres Notebook: Scandella and Pominville get Minnesota welcome

Buffalo News

By Mike Harrington

January 4, 2018

ST. PAUL, Minn -- Tyler Ennis and Marcus Foligno got feted in Buffalo in November. Thursday night in XCel Energy Center, the welcome mat was put out for Marco Scandella, Jason Pominville and coach Phil Housley.

During the first television timeout, Scandella and Pominville were greeted by the Minnesota Wild in a brief video on the arena's massive video board. Scandella said he went out to dinner with Wild defenseman Matt Dumba here Wednesday night and that it wasn't all that weird to enter his former home and head to a visiting dressing room.

"It's going to be fun. It still feels like home so I'm pretty excited about it," Scandella said. "Honestly, it didn't even feel that weird coming in. It was just nice being back."

Scandella, the Wild's second-round pick in 2008, played 373 games for them from 2010-17. Pominville played 327 games for Minnesota from the time he was acquired from the Sabres in 2013 through the end of last season.

Both of them went to postseason with the Wild for the last five seasons but Minnesota won just two series in that span, a seven-game showdown with Colorado in 2014 and a six-gamer vs. St. Louis in 2015. The Wild were eliminated by Chicago in three straight years (2013-15) and the Blackhawks went on to win the Stanley Cup in two of those.

"Every year it felt like we really had a chance," Pominville said. "Unfortunately we ran into Chicago in three of those years and didn't get past them."

"I came up with Mike Yeo. I had him in the minors, then had him a few years in Minnesota," Scandella said of his former coach in Houston and with the Wild. "I came up as a young guy and then felt like I became a man here. It was home, I lived here for seven years. It was a lot of fun, great experiences and I took a lot from it."

Scandella was victimized by circumstance and Rangers forward J.T. Miller for the winning goal in Monday's Winter Classic in New York, as Miller beat him to the rebound and tapped the puck past Robin Lehner in overtime to hand Buffalo a 3-2 defeat.

"Those 4-on-3s are never easy," Scandella said. "You have to play an 'umbrella' and there's always going to be a man open. That's just kind of the nature of the beast."

While much of the attention went on the ice, it was also Housley's debut in the building as an NHL head coach. Housley's giant likeness from his days with the Sabres in the 1980s is included in a collage of Minnesota natives who played in the NHL high in the arena concourse.

"It's always great coming back to Minnesota, where I was born and raised," Housley said. "I have a lot of family and friends here and being a first-time head coach and coaching against the Wild, it's special. But it's business as usual. We come and get prepared and get ready for the game."

Housley said he understands his place in Minnesota hockey history from his days as a high school and NHL player and his stint as a high school coach here after he retired from the NHL.

"I'm just proud in general, being born and raised here, finding my way through high school and to the NHL," Housley said. "It's a little bit ironic that I started my career with Buffalo and I get my first head coaching job with Buffalo. It's great to come back here. The Buffalo Sabres are a great organization and we're just trying to represent it the best way I can."

Phil Housley's likeness in XCel Energy Center (Mike Harrington/Buffalo News).

Rochester Amerks forward C.J. Smith and goalie Linus Ullmark have been named to the North Division roster for the AHL All-Star Classic to be held Jan. 28-29 in Utica.

Smith, a college free agent signed last March out of Mass-Lowell, is tied for second in scoring among AHL rookies with 30 points. He leads the Amerks in scoring, assists (20) and multi-point outings (7).

Ullmark will play in the game for the second straight year after earning Top Goaltender honors last year following a 15-save performance. He has a 15-5-3 record that ranks third and fifth, respectively, among AHL goalies with a .926 save percentage and 2.33 goals-against average.

A sixth-round pick in 2012, Ullmark is 8-11-2/2.64/.913 in 21 career NHL games.

The two-day event begins Jan. 28 at 8 p.m. with the skills competition. The round-robin 3-on-3 tournament, run much like the NHL has done the last two years, is Jan. 29 at 7 p.m. Former Sabres named to the game include Lehigh Valley defenseman T.J. Brennan and Milwaukee goalie Anders Lindback. Ontario goalie Cal Petersen, an AHL rookie who signed with Los Angeles as a free agent after not signing with the Sabres after leaving Notre Dame, was also named.

The Sabres' representative to the NHL All-Star Game Jan. 28 in Tampa, likely Jack Eichel or Evander Kane, is expected to be named on Wednesday.

CJ Smith

@_CJ_Smith_

Honored to be named to the AHL all star game with @Icebeardude! Thanks everyone for all the support!

<https://twitter.com/amerkshockey/status/949007870057701376> ...

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Linus Ullmark

✓

@Icebeardude

Super excited and honored to be a part of the @TheAHL All-Star Classic.

Congrats @_CJ_Smith_ you've earned it! 🍷 <https://twitter.com/amerkshockey/status/949007870057701376> ...

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The Sabres have a back-to-back Friday in Winnipeg against the Central Division-leading Jets. They will play Winnipeg twice in three games as the Jets will be at KeyBank Center Tuesday night in Buffalo's first home game of the new year.

Winnipeg will be without leading scorer Mark Scheifele, who is out 6-8 weeks with an upper body injury. Scheifele had 38 points in 38 games this season, with 15 goals and 23 assists.

The Sabres have won four straight against the Jets -- after losing nine of the previous 10 meetings.

The Wraparound: Wild 6, Sabres 2

The Buffalo News

By Mike Harrington

January 4, 2018

ST. PAUL, Minn. -- That transition from outdoor hockey to the good ol' indoors didn't go so well for the Buffalo Sabres here Thursday night.

Winger Nino Niederreiter returned from injury and poured in a hat trick over the first 24 minutes as the Minnesota Wild cruised to a 6-2 rout of Buffalo before 19,017 in XCel Energy Center.

Niederreiter opened the scoring at 1:09 of the first period, tallied again on a power play at 13:53 of the first and completed his second career hat trick at 4:02 of the second period. And both of his hat tricks are against Buffalo, with the other coming in 2014.

Niederreiter, who entered the game with 10 goals, had missed the last five games with an upper-body injury. His parents were in the house from Switzerland; Niederreiter played on the Swiss team at the 2011 World Junior Championship in Buffalo.

Ugly margin: Playing its first game after the Winter Classic overtime loss to the Rangers Monday in New York, Buffalo nearly endured its worst loss of the season. The Sabres had previously lost five times by four goals and were down, 6-0, in this one until getting third-period tallies from Sam Reinhart and Evander Kane. The Wild was coming off their biggest win of the season, a 5-1 victory here Tuesday over Florida, and this one equaled that.

First-period blues: The 3-0 Minnesota advantage compiled after the first period continued the Sabres' woes this season in the opening 20 minutes. Through 40 games, Buffalo has been outscored, 36-15, in first periods. The 15 goals are the fewest by any NHL team in any period -- by 10 goals.

Paging Player Safety: The Sabres played with just five defensemen over the final 50 1/2 minutes after Rasmus Ristolainen was banished for interference and a game misconduct at 10:16 of the first period. Ristolainen crossed the middle of the ice and hit Minnesota's Mikko Koivu up high, causing a gash above the mouth that that may have happened with contact from Ristolainen's face shield.

Ristolainen got a three-game suspension for interference in March for a hit on Pittsburgh's Jake Guentzel and the game misconduct will almost certainly generate a review from the NHL's Department of Player Safety. Niederreiter's power-play tally came on the Ristolainen major. Ristolainen ended up playing just 5 minutes, 43 seconds in the game. He averaged a team-high 26:47 entering the game.

Helpless night in goal: Sabres netminder Robin Lehner gave up six goals on 17 shots and was lifted in favor of Chad Johnson to start the third period. Lehner yielded three goals on eight shots in the first period and three goals on nine shots in the second. But he got little help defensively as several of the goals were in tight or unchallenged shots in the slot.

Easy math: The Sabres fell to 10-21-9 on the season. That's 10 wins in 40 games. The Sabres are 5-10-3 at home and 5-11-6 on the road. Minnesota improved to 22-16-3.

Breaking the ice: The Sabres broke Devan Dubnyk's shutout on Reinhart's tally at 1:54 of the third period. It was his seventh of the season and second in two games. He broke a 16-game string with no goals in Monday's Winter Classic; his last goal was Nov. 22 in Buffalo against the Wild. Kane's goal with 1:01 left was his team-high 16th.

On the scoresheet: Koivu and Mikael Granlund both had three points for the Wild, with Koivu collecting his sixth goal of the season and Granlund compiling three assists.

Alumni report: Minnesota's Tyler Ennis had one assist in the game. Marcus Foligno had no points and was banished for the night on a 10-minute misconduct with 6:26 to play along with Buffalo's Jordan Nolan after some mutual chirping developed along the boards.

Lineup switch: Justin Falk returned to the defense corps and Josh Gorges was a healthy scratch after playing Monday in New York. Victor Antipin (flu) continues to be away from the team and is not on the trip. Scott Wilson is the healthy scratch at forward.

Welcome wagon: Vikings quarterback Case Keenum got a huge hand during the first period when he appeared on the video board and was presented with a Wild jersey. The Vikings are hosting their first playoff game on Jan. 14 and are trying to become the first host team to appear in a Super Bowl in their home stadium. Super Bowl LII is at U.S. Bank Stadium in Minneapolis on Feb. 4.

Up Next: The Sabres hit the air after the game for Winnipeg, where they will play the Jets Friday night at 8 in Bell MTS Place. The road trip concludes Sunday afternoon in Philadelphia.

Wild score early, often to defeat Sabres 6-2

WGR550

PAT MALACARO

JANUARY 04, 2018

Nino Niederreiter recorded a hat trick for the Minnesota Wild in their 6-2 win over the Sabres on Thursday night at Xcel Energy Center.

Niederreiter scored his eleventh goal of the season, coming just over a minute into the game to give the Wild a 1-0 lead. Mikael Granlund and Mikko Koivu were credited with the assists on the goal. Just a minute and six seconds later Daniel Winnik doubled the Minnesota lead to 2-0. The two goals came on just three shots for the home team. Winnik's fourth goal of the season was assisted by Nate Prosser and Marcus Foligno.

Niederreiter's second goal of the night came on the power play, and extended the Minnesota lead to 3-0. The goal came after Rasmus Ristolainen was called for a five minute major for interference, in addition to a ten-minute misconduct and a game misconduct. Charlie Coyle and Jared Spurgeon recorded assists on the power play goal.

It took just four minutes into the second period for Niederreiter to score his third goal of the game and extend the Wild lead to 4-0. Just like on the game's first goal, Granlund and Koivu assisted on Niederreiter's score. Koivu would add to his point total with his sixth goal of the season. He scored after a pass through the slot from Granlund. Both Granlund and Jonas Brodin received assists on the goal that made it 5-0 Minnesota.

Coyle added a goal of his own with less than a minute to go in the middle period to balloon the Minnesota lead to 6-0 after forty minutes. Zach Parise and Joel Eriksson Ek recorded assists on the goal that came with forty-five seconds left in the second period. Minnesota took their first penalty of the game when Granlund was called for a holding minor. The Sabres failed to score on the power play.

Buffalo scored early in the third to break up Devan Dubnyk's shutout attempt. Sam Reinhart was able to collect his seventh goal of the season just two minutes into the frame to make it 6-1 Wild. Zach Bogosian and Jake McCabe were credited with assists on the goal.

Chad Johnson replaced Robin Lehner after the second period. Lehner allowed all six goals through two periods between the pipes for Buffalo.

Jason Zucker took a goaltender interference minor midway through the final period, but Buffalo failed to score. Jordan Nolan and Foligno got tangled up after a whistle late in the third, neither player dropped their gloves but the two teams came together. Both Nolan and Foligno were assessed ten minute misconduct penalties.

Evander Kane capitalized on a rebound chance at the side of the net to trim the final score to 6-2. Kane's sixteenth goal of the season came after Marco Scandella took the initial shot from the blue line that was saved by Dubnyk. Both Scandella and Jason Pominville were given assists on the score.

Game Summary

Goal Summary

First Period

BUF: none

MIN: 1:09 - Nino Niederreiter (11) (Mikael Granlund, Mikko Koivu). 2:15 - Daniel Winnik (4) (Nate Prosser, Marcus Foligno). 13:53 - Nino Niederreiter (12) PPG (Charlie Coyle, Jared Spurgeon)

Second Period

BUF: none

MIN: 4:02 - Nino Niederreiter (13) (Mikael Granlund, Mikko Koivu). 13:07 - Mikko Koivu (6) (Mikael Granlund, Jonas Brodin). 19:15 - Charlie Coyle (4) (Zach Parise, Joel Eriksson Ek)

Third Period

BUF: 1:54 - Sam Reinhart (7) (Zach Bogosian, Jake McCabe). 19:00 - Evander Kane (16) (Marco Scandella, Jason Pominville)

MIN: none

Penalty Summary

First Period

BUF: 10:16 - Rasmus Ristolainen (5 min., interference). 10:16 - Rasmus Ristolainen (10 min., misconduct). 15:52 - Sam Reinhart (2 min., high sticking)

MIN: none

Second Period

BUF: none

MIN: 6:54 - Mikael Granlund (2 min., holding)

Third Period

BUF: 13:34 - Jordan Nolan (10 min., misconduct)

MIN: 11:06 - Jason Zucker (2 min., goaltender interference). 13:34 - Marcus Foligno (10 min., misconduct)

Shots on Goal

BUF - 31 (10, 12, 9), MIN - 27 (8, 9, 10)

Goalies

Robin Lehner: 11 saves

Chad Johnson: 10 saves

Devan Dubnyk: 29 saves

Power Plays

BUF: 0 for 3

MIN: 1 for 3

What's Next

Buffalo heads right to Winnipeg to play the Jets on Friday night. They face a team that is just one point out of first place in the Central Division. The Jets have 53 points, trailing the St. Louis Blues who have 54 heading into Friday night's action. The puck drops from Bell MTS Place at eight of Friday on the flagship home of the Sabres - WGR Sports Radio 550. Pregame coverage with Brian Koziol starts at seven.

From the Locker Room: Sabres-Wild

Hear from Rasmus Ristolainen, Marco Scandella, Nate Beaulieu and Phil Housley following the 6-2 loss in Minnesota on

Thursday night

WGR550

JANUARY 04, 2018

The Buffalo Sabres were in Minnesota to take on the Wild in the Xcel Energy Center on Thursday evening. This was the second meeting between these teams this season, with Minnesota taking the opening contest on the road in KeyBank Center on November 22nd (5-4 final).

Minnesota emerged victorious once again, and it was never in question. Jumping out to a 3-0 lead after one period, and a 6-0 advantage after two stanzas of play, the Wild were able to cruise to a win over Buffalo despite a pair of third period goals from the Sabres. Buffalo hits the ice tomorrow night hoping to shake this 6-2 loss off as they travel to Winnipeg for a Friday night matchup.

Go inside the locker room to hear from Ristolainen, Scandella, Beaulieu and Housley following the loss.

Rasmus Ristolainen:

On the game: "We started well. We were in their zone and we got some shots but I made a mistake, and they got an easy goal there... Early on, our mistakes led to easy goals and it was a tough start."

On the team hanging their goalie out to dry: "[Robin's] been playing really well. We didn't help him enough tonight."

Comments about his misconduct penalty: "I don't really want to say too much [about it]. I didn't try to hurt him. It's a good thing he didn't get injured. It sucks I couldn't help the guys."

AUDIO: <http://www.wgr550.com/media/audio-channel/1-4-rasmus-ristolainen-post-game>

Marco Scandella:

On allowing too many "easy goals": "I think we just left some guys open, let in some easy ones, and we were out of the game at that point."

Comments on Ristolainen's hit: "I didn't really see the replay. It happened quick. Hockey's a quick game, so we'll see what happens with that."

AUDIO: <http://www.wgr550.com/media/audio-channel/1-4-marco-scandella-post-game>

Nate Beaulieu:

On tonight's struggles: "It's tough when you get behind the '8-ball' right away. Being down two goals and losing [Ristolainen] in the first couple of minutes is a tough pill to swallow."

On what the team can do to avoid falling behind in first periods: "That's the biggest thing I've noticed from my time in Montreal. Here it seems like we're always playing from behind. It's frustrating. You want to get that early lead because it's more comfortable to play and it brings confidence. You're not always chasing the game. It's something I've found to be very difficult to adjust to. It's not from lack of preparation; we're looking for answers in here."

AUDIO: <http://www.wgr550.com/media/audio-channel/1-4-nathan-belieau-post-game>

Phil Housley:

On Ristolainen's major penalty: "I think there should have been a call on the play, but I don't agree with the five-minute call. I don't know what the reasoning was, I did not receive an explanation. After watching it in between periods, it's a shoulder hit. His intention is not trying to hit somebody. Let's face it - Rasmus is a physical player. Somebody coming through the middle with their head down... he's going to finish a check. I don't think he was out to hurt anybody. That's not part of his game. He's a physical, tough competitor. It's just unfortunate."

On the weak defensive performance: "Couple goals where the defensive zone coverage was completely lost. We worked hard below the dots in our zone, but a bad read after that on the forecheck made it look like the Red Sea parted. They walked right down the gut. That's just not the way we have been playing. We got away from that."

AUDIO: <http://www.wgr550.com/media/audio-channel/1-4-phil-housley-post-game>

Phil Housley on first trip back as NHL head coach: 'It's special.'

By DANE MIZUTANI

Pioneer Press

January 4, 2018

Phil Housley's meteoric rise up the coaching ranks has finally led him back to the place where it all began.

"It's special," he said.

Housley, 53, had been at Xcel Energy Center as an assistant coach in charge of defense in Nashville, but Thursday night's game between his Buffalo Sabres and the Wild will be his first in Minnesota as an NHL head coach. He made a name for himself down the road in South St. Paul, and hasn't forgotten his roots.

"I was born and raised right across the river; I'm very proud to be from South St. Paul," he said. "There's a lot of hockey tradition there in its own right. There's a lot of guys that have gone on and had successful careers. ... I'm always geared up (when I come back here) because it has a special place in my heart."

After starring at South St. Paul High School in the early 1980s, Housley was selected by the Sabres No. 6 overall in the 1982 NHL Draft. His playing career spanned two decades and 1,495 games. He started his coaching career at Stillwater High School and eventually parlayed that into a role as an assistant coach with the Predators.

After Nashville won the Western Conference last season, Housley was called on to turn around a once-proud franchise that hasn't made the playoffs since the 2011-12 season.

"It's a little bit ironic that I start my career with (the Sabres) and I get my first head coaching job there," he said. "It's great to come back here to the Sabres. It's a great organization. We are just trying to represent them as best we can."

It hasn't been a storybook beginning; the Sabres (10-20-9) are last in the Atlantic Division.

While his return to the Twin Cities was a brief reprieve amid a tough rookie season behind the bench, it will be business as usual for Housley when the puck drops.

"I didn't see this coming, as far as the struggles early on the season," he said. "We have been banged up. We didn't have our full six defensemen until the 25-game mark, and that hurt us trying to fill those voids. ... We have learned a lot about what it takes to compete and prepare and also to win in this league. We have a young group. I really like where we're at right now. It's going to be great test moving forward."

Did Ristolainen deserve to be ejected for bloodying Koivu?

NBCSN

By James O'Brien

Jan 4, 2018

Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen was given a five-minute interference major and game misconduct for a hit on Minnesota Wild veteran Mikko Koivu. You can watch video of that hit in the clip above this post's headline.

The NHL's Department of Player Safety automatically looks at situations like these, but should anything come of it? Some wonder if the call was excessive to begin with.

Mike Harrington

✓

@ByMHarrington

If you're thinking about discipline for Risto, he's gonna miss about 50 minutes in this game, almost like a 1-game suspension there. That sometimes mitigates penalties.....And, frankly, I still don't even see how that was a major anyway.

9:11 PM - Jan 4, 2018

6 6 Replies 2 2 Retweets 18 18 likes

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The hit did leave Koivu bloodied:

Paul Hamilton

✓

@pham1717

Here's the cut from the Ristolainen play. <https://twitter.com/MKriegbaumJr/status/949092471417470977> ...

8:38 PM - Jan 4, 2018

11 11 Replies 4 4 Retweets 5 5 likes

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Koivu didn't miss the entire contest, however, scoring a goal (and counting?). Nino Niederreiter continues to victimize the Sabres, generating a hat trick against Buffalo for the second time in his career.

Niederreiter returns with hat trick, Wild cruise past Sabres

Minnesota wins for fourth time in five games

by Jessi Pierce

NHL.com

Jan. 5, 2018

ST. PAUL, Minn. -- Nino Niederreiter scored a hat trick in his return from an ankle injury, and the Minnesota Wild defeated the Buffalo Sabres 6-2 at Xcel Energy Center on Thursday.

Daniel Winnik, Mikko Koivu and Charlie Coyle also scored, and Devan Dubnyk made 29 saves for Minnesota (22-16-3), which is 4-1-0 in its past five games and 11-1-1 in its past 13 at home, where it has won four straight.

Niederreiter, who missed five games, made it 1-0 at 1:09 of the first period and scored on the power play at 13:53 to make it 3-0. He scored his third goal at 4:02 of the second period to make it 4-0. It was Niederreiter's second NHL career hat trick, each coming against Buffalo (Nov. 13, 2014).

[WATCH: All Sabres vs. Wild highlights]

"It's definitely not always going to be easy and going to be like that," Niederreiter said, "but at the same time, we played a good hockey game for most of the part. We played simple. ... It was a good win for us and we've got to take the confidence we got from that game into the next one."

Niederreiter returns with hatty
01:21 • January 4th, 2018

Winnik gave the Wild a 2-0 lead at 2:15 of the first.

Koivu, who had two assists, made it 5-0 at 13:07 of the second period with a shot from the slot. Coyle scored off a pass by Zach Parise with 45 seconds remaining in the second to make it 6-0. It was Coyle's second goal in two games, and Parise's first point of the season; he made his debut in a 5-1 win against the Florida Panthers on Tuesday.

"The ability to score more [from] different people is there, and we've got a team that you almost want everybody to play the 200-foot game," Wild coach Bruce Boudreau said. "We don't have the [Alex] Ovechkins that can just score when they want to, it seems like, but if we get everybody playing the 200-foot game then every night it's a good chance that it's going to be a different line that scores."

Sabres forward Sam Reinhart ended the shutout at 1:54 of the third period with a backhand in the slot to make it 6-1. Evander Kane scored with 1:01 remaining to make it 6-2.

Robin Lehner made 11 saves through two periods for Buffalo (10-21-9), which lost its second straight game. Chad Johnson made 10 saves in relief.

Winnik goes coast-to-coast
00:48 • January 4th, 2018

The Sabres, who were coming off a 3-2 loss to the New York Rangers in the Bridgestone NHL Winter Classic on Monday in New York, are 1-2-2 in their past five games and 2-4-3 in their past nine. They have scored two goals or fewer in 12 of their past 17 games and have been shut out four times in that span.

"I think our urgency without the puck obviously was not there tonight," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "...That's just not the way we have been playing and we got away from that."

Koivu's slick one-timer
00:56 • January 4th, 2018

Goal of the game
Niederreiter's goal at 1:09 of the first period.

Niederreiter nets Granlund's feed
00:46 • January 4th, 2018

Save of the game
Dubnyk's save on Marco Scandella at 2:41 of the second period.

Dubnyk's nice stop
00:38 • January 4th, 2018

Highlight of the game
Niederreiter's goal at 4:02 of the second.

Niederreiter notches hat trick
01:01 • January 4th, 2018

They said it

"It was really nothing that Minnesota did -- they capitalized on their opportunities I'll give them credit -- but it was what we gave them. We gave them too much, we left too much on the table when we didn't have to. Playing on the road like this against a good team fighting for a playoff spot, we knew they were going to try to come and we've just got to be smart about it and tonight we weren't." -- Sabres coach Phil Housley

"You have to be able to push and get the team to have that killer instinct. In the second period I told them before, I said, 'You can make this easy on yourselves or you can make it tough on yourselves.' They went out and scored the fourth goal and I think that was the goal that broke their back a little bit." -- Wild coach Bruce Boudreau

Need to know

Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen was given a game misconduct at 10:16 of the first period for a hit to Koivu's head. ... Granlund had an NHL career-high three assists. ... Dubnyk took sole possession of second place on the Wild wins list with 114, passing Manny Fernandez. Niklas Backstrom is first with 194.

What's next

Wild: At the Colorado Avalanche on Saturday (9 p.m. ET; ALT, FS-N+, NHL.TV)

Sabres: At the Winnipeg Jets on Friday (8 p.m. ET; MSG-B, TSN3, NHL.TV)

Early mistakes, costly penalty snowball into loss in Minnesota

by Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

Jan. 5, 2018

SAINT PAUL, Minn. - With so many of their games having come down to one goal as of late, it could be argued that the difference between winning and losing for the Buffalo Sabres has simply come down to their starts. The Sabres have scored 15 first-period goals this season, the lowest mark in the league.

Such was certainly the case against the Minnesota Wild on Thursday night, when a couple of early mistakes and a costly game misconduct against Rasmus Ristolainen put the Sabres in a quick 3-0 hole, which ultimately snowballed into a 6-2 loss.

Afterward, Phil Housley said the high-scoring night for Minnesota had less to do with the Wild's actions and more to do with the decisions made by the Sabres.

"When you look at the game, it was really nothing that Minnesota did," Housley said. "They capitalized on their opportunities, I'll give them credit. It was what we gave them. We gave them too much, we left too much on the table when we didn't have to.

"Playing on the road like this against a good team fighting for a playoff spot, you know they're going to try to come. We've got to just be smart about it. Tonight, we weren't."

Video: BUF Recap: Sabres allow six straight goals in loss

Minnesota scored twice within the first 2:15 of the contest, the first of which came on a pass from Mikael Granlund to Nino Niederreiter in the slot. Granlund would go on to record three assists on the night, while Niederreiter scored his second career hat trick.

Ristolainen was positioned near Niederreiter when he took the one-time shot from in tight on that first goal, and took responsibility for the mistake of leaving him open. Prior to that goal, the Sabres had actually dominated possession on their first shift of the game.

"We were in their zone, we got some shots," Ristolainen said. "But then I made a mistake there and they got an early goal. That's unfortunate."

Minnesota's second goal, scored by Daniel Winnik, was once again a case of missed coverage. Winnik had both Justin Falk and Nathan Beaulieu in front of him upon carrying the puck into the Buffalo zone, but he was able to split the two defenders and score on an open shot.

Those first two goals foreshadowed how the rest of the night would go for the Sabres. The Wild added another goal on the power play when Ristolainen was assessed a five-minute major penalty later in the period, and then tacked on three more goals in the second.

All of the goals, Housley and Beaulieu agreed, were given to Minnesota with too much ease.

"Just bad reads. Those things are going to happen," Beaulieu said. "On the second goal, I made a bad read. I thought he was going to kick it out and he walked through. It's just situational play. There's nothing to do, we're just playing outside our structure, which I don't know why we did. It sucks to say, but it was just one of those nights."

Robin Lehner was pulled from the net prior to the start of the third period after allowing six goals on 17 shots. Chad Johnson stopped all 10 of the shots he faced in relief, while Sam Reinhart and Evander Kane scored goals in the third period to tighten the score for Buffalo.

Playing from behind was made all the more difficult when the team lost Ristolainen, their leader in ice time, just 10:16 into the game. The call against the defenseman was originally two minutes for interference upon hitting Wild captain Mikko Koivu in open ice. After discussion between officials, it was changed to a five-minute major and a game misconduct.

Housley vehemently disagreed with the decision afterward, and said he was never given an explanation as to who changed the call and why. Koivu sustained a cut to his face on the play, but was able to stay in the game. He went on to score a goal in the second period.

"First of all, it wasn't a late hit and it wasn't interference," Housley said. "The guy had the puck and he was finishing a check, albeit, maybe it was a little high. But when you look at it and you watch the progression of the call, the original call was two minutes for interference. And then their player goes over there to talk to the referees and then they change their mind. I totally disagree with that."

Ristolainen said it was not his intention to hurt Koivu on the play.

"I don't really want to say too much about it," he said. "Unfortunately it happened. Good thing he didn't get injured, and I'm not happy I couldn't help the guys."

Even with Ristolainen, though, the Sabres found themselves in the early hole. With a quick turnaround and a matchup with the Winnipeg Jets awaiting them on Friday, Buffalo's focus after the game was on cleaning up the mistakes that cost them what, if for only a moment, looked like it could be a promising start in Minnesota.

"If you're scored on twice in a game, you need three to win," Beaulieu said. "It's tough to score three goals in this league, especially from our standpoint. We've been struggling to score goals so it's frustrating. We're a team that's got to, unfortunately, take extra, extra detail in our D-zone because we're the lowest-scoring team in the league."

On Thursday, the detail simply wasn't there.

Reinhart nets another

It had been 16 games since Reinhart's last goal when he scored to tie the game at the Winter Classic in New York City on Monday. He followed that up with another goal-scoring effort against the Wild, netting a backhand shot from the slot to end Dubnyk's shutout 1:54 into the third period.

The goal was Reinhart's seventh of the season.

Video: BUF@MIN: Reinhart puts home a rebound in the 3rd

Up next

The Sabres continue their road trip in Winnipeg on Friday night. Coverage on MSG-B begins at 7:30 p.m. with GMC Gamenight, or you can listen to the game live on WGR 550. Puck drop is scheduled for 8 p.m.

Pominville, Scandella return to Minnesota as Sabres visit Wild

by Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

January 4th, 2018

SAINT PAUL, Minn. - Jason Pominville first experienced what it felt like to visit a former team five seasons ago, when he made his first trip back to Buffalo as a member of the Minnesota Wild. When the Sabres visit the Wild on Thursday night, it will be the other way around.

Pominville and Marco Scandella will both play their first game at Xcel Energy Center since being acquired by the Sabres during the offseason.

"It is [weird]," Pominville said. "It's special though. I had a lot of fun here. We had some good teams, we had some battles, went through some ups and downs and I really, really enjoyed my time here. But it is, it's weird to come back and be on the other side of things."

Preview: BUF at MIN (1/4/18)

02:00 • January 4th, 2018

Pominville played 363 games with Minnesota, including playoffs, in five seasons after being traded from Buffalo in 2013. Scandella was drafted by the Wild in 2008 and played parts of seven seasons with the organization, including five playoff runs.

Both players have already played the Wild once, in Buffalo on Nov. 22. Minnesota won that game 5-4, at the time handing the Sabres their seventh loss in a row. That game brought about frustration in the dressing room, and Scandella said they've grown into a new team in the month and a half since.

Since Dec. 5, the Sabres have earned points in nine out of 12 contests.

"We're working a little bit harder and together as a group, so I feel like we're a five-man unit out there, together with the goalie," Scandella said. "We're just playing a lot better hockey."

As the Sabres have begun to develop more consistency as a team, so has their star players. Jack Eichel has scored 11 points in his last seven games, and his seven goals since Dec. 15 lead the NHL. Kyle Okposo has five points in his last five games, Ryan O'Reilly has four points in his last four, and Rasmus Ristolainen is coming off back-to-back multi-point efforts.

It's all been the product of playing a smarter, team-oriented brand of hockey. Back when they last played Minnesota, the Sabres were feeding opponents with bad decisions through the neutral zone, a habit they've largely left in the past.

"We handed them some opportunities and they made us pay," Pominville said. "That's what they do well. They're patient, they wait for other teams to break and they've done it for years. They stick to their plan. They've got a good, veteran group there that knows what it takes to win so they usually play well."

"That game was a frustrating one. I think since then we've made some strides as a team. We haven't always got the results we wanted, but overall just our bench, our room, the way we are in practice, everything's improved. Hopefully things will start turning in the other direction for us."

The game will also serve as a homecoming for St. Paul native Phil Housley, who will be behind the bench in his hometown for the first time as an NHL head coach.

Phil Housley Pregame (1/4/18)

05:23 • January 4th, 2018

"I'm really proud that I was born and raised right across the river here," Housley said. "Growing up just like a lot of young kids, you started skating outdoors and eventually moving into traveling teams and you get to share something special with your community. I'm very proud to be from South St. Paul. There's a lot of hockey tradition there in its own right."

Coverage on Thursday begins at 7:30 p.m. with GMC Gamenight on MSG-B, or you can listen live on WGR 550. Puck drop is scheduled for 8.

Projected lineup

28 Zemgus Girgensons - 15 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart

9 Evander Kane - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 21 Kyle Okposo

67 Benoit Pouliot - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 29 Jason Pominville

22 Johan Larsson - 10 Jacob Josefson - 17 Jordan Nolan

6 Marco Scandella - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen

19 Jake McCabe - 47 Zach Bogosian

82 Nathan Beaulieu - 41 Justin Falk

40 Robin Lehner

31 Chad Johnson

Sharpen Up: January 4, 2018

by Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

January 4th, 2018

It's a game day in Minnesota. The Sabres will continue their stretch of seven straight games away from KeyBank Center against the Wild, looking to build upon the play that's allowed them to earn points in nine of their last 12 contests (4-3-5).

Coverage on MSG-B begins with GMC Gamenight at 7:30 p.m., or you can listen live on WGR 550. Puck drop is set for 8 p.m.

Back in Buffalo, meanwhile, four Sabres prospects will be featured in the semifinal round of the World Junior Championship. That includes the matchup that's sure to be a highlight for Sabres fans: 2016 first-round pick Alexander Nylander and Sweden vs. 2017 first-round pick Casey Mittelstadt and Team USA.

However you choose to spend your evening, here's what you need to know on another busy hockey day in Buffalo.

Tonight's game

It should be a memorable night for a few Sabres with Minnesota connections. Jason Pominville and Marco Scandella will be playing their first game back at Xcel Energy Center after being acquired from the Wild this past offseason, while Phil Housley will be behind the bench in his hometown for the first time as an NHL coach.

As a team, however, the game will represent a return to normalcy following the excitement of the Winter Classic. Players were asked after practice on Wednesday whether they feared any sort of "Winter Classic hangover," a notion they rejected. From yesterday's Ice Level Practice Report:

"I think kind of now that it's over, I'm not too worried about that [based] on how I feel mentally and physically," Kane said. "But I think maybe heading into it you think, jeeze, after this game, the buildup and the magnitude of that game, it's going to be tough to match the rest of the way.

"But you quickly realize you've got to get geared right back up."

Sabres Now (1/3/18)

02:30 • January 3rd, 2018

The Sabres have been generally pleased with their play as of late; they took all three of their games since the holiday break into overtime and have earned points in nine of 12 games dating back to Dec. 5, a stretch in which they're 4-3-5.

Part of what's helping them stay on course, Housley said, is the knowledge of what kinds of tests await them. The Sabres are four games into a stretch of seven consecutive contests away from KeyBank Center, tied for the longest such stretch in franchise history. They'll play three games in the next four days, beginning in Minnesota on Thursday.

After playing the Wild, they'll head to Winnipeg to play on Friday followed by a game in Philadelphia on Sunday afternoon.

"They understand what they're up against," Housley said. "This is a very good hockey team that we're going to be playing tomorrow night and we have to be ready from the start. I think it showed in practice today that guys have a little bit of confidence just from the recent games, but we have to understand that we have to be ready at the start of the game."

Here are a few more stats and storylines on tonight's game from Sabres PR.

Jack Eichel has totaled 11 points (7+4) in his last seven games. Since beginning that stretch on Dec. 15, Eichel ranks in the top three in the league in goals (T-1st, 7), even-strength goals (T-1st, 6) and even-strength points (T-2nd, 10) as of Jan. 3.

Robin Lehner is 4-2-4 with a .934 save percentage in his last 10 games and has only one game below .920 during that stretch. Lehner's .928 save percentage in December ranked fifth among all NHL goaltenders with at least 10 games played in the month.

With a goal and an assist in each of his last two games, Rasmus Ristolainen has recorded consecutive multi-point games for the second time in his career (last: Dec. 13 and 16, 2016). With a multi-point game tonight, he would become the first Sabres defenseman to log three straight multi-point games since Andrej Sekera posted six in a row from Feb. 26 to March 6, 2011.

Meanwhile, in Buffalo ...

If there was any dream matchup for Sabres fans going into the World Junior Championship, this was it. Mittelstadt and Nylander - both No. 8 picks by the Sabres, both in the midst of stellar runs at the tournament - will face off for a spot in the gold-medal game at KeyBank Center at 4 p.m.

Mittelstadt leads the entire tournament with 10 points (4+6), while Nylander is tied for Sweden's scoring lead with six points (1+5). The matchup also includes Buffalo's 2017 second-round pick in Marcus Davidsson, who's scored a goal and an assist for Sweden.

Afterward, Sabres defensive prospect Vojtech Budik and the Czech Republic will play Canada at 8 p.m. Kris Baker has more on Nylander, Mittelstadt, Davidsson and Budik in his tournament update.

For tickets to tonight's games or coverage of the tournament, be sure to visit BuffaloWorldJuniors.com.