



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*May 3, 2021*

## **Islanders visit the Sabres following shutout victory**

Associated Press

May 2, 2021

New York Islanders (31-15-5, third in the East Division) vs. Buffalo Sabres (13-32-7, eighth in the East Division)

Buffalo, New York; Monday, 7 p.m. EDT

FANDUEL SPORTSBOOK LINE: Sabres +226, Islanders -286

**BOTTOM LINE:** The Buffalo Sabres host New York after the Islanders shut out New York 3-0. Semyon Varlamov earned the victory in the net for New York after recording 28 saves.

The Sabres are 13-32-7 against East Division teams. Buffalo serves 6.4 penalty minutes per game, the fewest in the NHL. Steven Fogarty leads the team averaging 0.9.

The Islanders are 31-15-5 against the rest of their division. New York averages only 2.8 penalties per game, the fewest in the NHL. Ross Johnston leads them averaging 0.9.

New York beat Buffalo 5-2 in the last meeting between these teams on March 7. Brock Nelson scored two goals for the Islanders in the victory.

**TOP PERFORMERS:** Sam Reinhart leads the Sabres with 37 points, scoring 23 goals and collecting 14 assists. Casey Mittelstadt has five assists over the last 10 games for Buffalo.

Mathew Barzal leads the Islanders with 41 points, scoring 15 goals and registering 26 assists. Josh Bailey has 8 points over the last 10 games for New York.

**LAST 10 GAMES:** Sabres: 3-7-0, averaging 2.6 goals, 3.9 assists, 3.2 penalties and 6.7 penalty minutes while giving up 3.6 goals per game with a .904 save percentage.

Islanders: 5-4-1, averaging 2.1 goals, 3.4 assists, 2.7 penalties and 5.9 penalty minutes while giving up 1.5 goals per game with a .949 save percentage.

**INJURIES:** Sabres: Carter Hutton: out (lower body), Jake McCabe: out (knee), Jack Eichel: out for season (neck), Linus Ullmark: out (lower body).

Islanders: Ross Johnston: out (undisclosed).

## **Craig Smith's 3 goals carry Bruins past Sabres 6-2**

By Ken Powtak

Associated Press

May 1, 2021

BOSTON (AP) — Craig Smith scored three goals Saturday to help the Boston Bruins complete their season-series dominance over the Buffalo Sabres with a 6-2 victory.

With its ninth victory in 11 games, Boston remained in fourth place in the NHL's East division, a point behind the third-place Islanders, who beat the Rangers, 3-0, on Saturday night. The Bruins' next point will clinch a playoff berth. They also will earn a spot if the fifth-place Rangers don't win all of their final four games.

"It was cool seeing the hats flying," Smith said of his second career hat trick, but first with Boston. "I don't see it very often for myself."

Nick Ritchie added a goal and an assist, and Sean Kuraly and Patrice Bergeron also had a goal for Boston. Rookie goalie Jeremy Swayman made 17 saves in his eighth start, and David Krejci had three assists — all on Smith's goals.

"We're heading in the right direction," Kuraly said.

The Bruins went 7-1 against the Sabres this season and improved to 21-4-1 in the teams' last 26 meetings.

Arttu Ruotsalainen scored, and Riley Sheahan added a shorthanded goal for Buffalo, which has lost six of seven.

"I think a lot of the goals came from self-inflicted mistakes," Sheahan said. "We weren't on our game. ... I guess we got it handed to us."

Buffalo rookie goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, making his third straight start, got his left leg caught awkwardly next to the post late in the closing seconds of the second period. He dropped to the ice and had to be helped off skating slowly after the period ended. He stopped 26 shots before Dustin Tokarski played the third.

"No update until we get back (home)," Sabres interim coach Don Granato said. "It was a tough day all around. It was a great opportunity to get him some minutes and now that's in question."

Smith's first goal had made it 1-0 just 1:21 into the game when he redirected Krejci's pass into the net. His second goal increased it to 5-1 in the third, and he completed the hat trick by redirecting Krejci's pass by Tokarski from the slot for a power-play score with 5:55 to play, sending some hats flying to the TD Garden ice from the limited-capacity crowd.

"He's a popular guy in the room," Boston coach Bruce Cassidy said. "Obviously, with COVID it's hard to get to know guys."

Kuraly scored off the rebound of Ritchie's shot from just outside the crease, moving the Bruins ahead for good with 3:22 left in the opening period.

Bergeron made it 3-1 in the second, scoring off a rebound by slipping a backhander past Luukkonen's stick as he was falling to one knee.

### **FAMILY OUTING**

Bergeron's three young children — two boys and a girl — and his wife, Stephanie, were seated in the loge level watching the game.

His family sat next to the glass during pregame warmups and he was able to chat with them, breaking into a smile.

### **BREAKDOWN**

Sheahan's score made it 1-1 in the opening period. With the Sabres shorthanded two players, defenseman Jacob Bryson sent a clearing pass through the center and, just as Sheahan's penalty was expiring, he collected the puck and scored on a clean breakaway.

#### WEAK SHOWING

The Sabres were outshot 17-4 in the opening period and didn't reach double digits in shots on goal until midway into the second. Boston outshot them for the game, 43-19.

#### UP NEXT

Sabres: Host the Islanders on Monday, the first of consecutive nights at home against them.

Bruins: Travel to the Devils on Monday for the opener of back-to-back nights against them in New Jersey.

## **Sabres Mailbag: Is Don Granato the primary reason behind the improvement?**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

May 3, 2021

BOSTON – As the Buffalo Sabres' 10th consecutive non-playoff season draws to a close, General Manager Kevyn Adams soon will decide which direction to take at head coach.

Don Granato, elevated to the interim role when Ralph Krueger was fired on March 17, has led the Sabres to a combined 7-13-3 record when behind the bench and a 7-9-2 record since the franchise-record 18-game winless streak ended.

Adams' final decision won't be based on record. The Sabres' roster has been hit hard by injuries, and they have been competitive most games against playoff-caliber opponents. These last four games are all about developing the young players on this roster.

Let's get right to that topic in this latest mailbag:

Patrick Allen: Is Granato the primary reason why the Sabres have improved?

Lance Lysowski: Absolutely. Granato implemented a system that fits the modern day NHL and the strengths of the players on this roster. In addition to coaxing more offense out of this group, the Sabres are much better defensively. Imagine what Granato could accomplish with Jack Eichel in the lineup, additional talent on the blue line, reliable goaltending and more of a forechecking presence in the bottom six.

Granato has made the Sabres better by almost every metric, all while facing teams that are battling for either playoff position or a spot in the postseason. Don't forget how poorly this team typically plays late in the season, no matter the level of competition.

Nathan Cohen: Should the Sabres still conduct a thorough coaching search?

Lysowski: It's always smart to speak to as many people as possible. Those conversations can lead to insight about the Sabres' possible needs this offseason, as well as help Adams build relationships with coaches. And hey, maybe you come across an intriguing candidate. For example, Adams should speak to Rikard Grönborg, coach of the Swedish National Team who had a successful season with the ZSC Lions in Switzerland. Providence College's Nate Leaman and long-time NHL coach Bruce Boudreau should also receive interviews.

An exchange of ideas can be beneficial for Adams. This is his first coaching search. He'll want to make sure he gets this right. The last thing this organization needs is to commit to another coach, only to pull the plug again in a year or two.

Rick Higley: How much will it cost to sign Sam Reinhart to a long-term extension? Does it make sense to trade Reinhart if the price is too high?

Lysowski: A long-term extension for Reinhart would cost an estimated \$6.937 million per season, according to Evolving-Hockey.com. Anything higher would be difficult for the Sabres to afford. Jeff Skinner's contract isn't going anywhere. An Eichel trade seems like a long shot given his injury situation, and would Reinhart want to stick around if Eichel is traded?

They can afford all three in the short-term, but the cap gymnastics would become increasingly difficult when young players such as Rasmus Dahlin require lucrative extensions.

There's only so much money a team can spend. Reinhart's value has risen significantly now that teams know he can play center at a high level, and he's been exceptional this season. If Eichel stays, the Sabres may be forced to move Reinhart for multiple players who can contribute next season.

Robert Brawn: Will the Sabres make additional hires for hockey operations?

Lysowski: Adams told the media following the trade deadline that he plans to add to the scouting and player development departments. The Sabres managed to get through this season with a small staff on the scouting side, but this won't be an option when every league is operable in 2021-22.

Additional hires will be needed in player development, especially if Matt Ellis and/or Dan Girardi remain on the coaching staff.

I would recommend another hire at the executive level, specifically Scott Luce of the Vegas Golden Knights. Luce has 19 years of experience as a director of scouting.

@meheser12: Is there a chance that Adams exposes Rasmus Ristolainen in the expansion draft?

Lysowski: Exposing Ristolainen makes little sense unless you can't find a willing trade partner. The question is whether a team would be willing to trade for his \$5.4 million contract after he's struggled when not playing alongside Jake McCabe.

It's important to point out that Ristolainen had a very serious bout with Covid-19 and we can't measure how that's impacted his play.

Ristolainen's performance has been more inconsistent since Granato took over. He doesn't fit with how the Sabres are expected to play next season or where this roster stands. Will Borgen and Mattias Samuelsson should be able to provide a physical presence, and signing McCabe should be a priority for Adams.

If a trade can't be completed, the Sabres should protect Colin Miller, who is owed \$3.875 million in the final year of his contract, and let Ristolainen join Jason Botterill in Seattle.

@drakemaddox28: Can the Sabres realistically use Eichel, Reinhart, Dylan Cozens and Casey Mittelstadt at center next season?

Lysowski: This organization doesn't have enough depth at right wing for this to happen. None of the above should receive fourth-line minutes. You could argue all four should be in the top six. If Eichel and Reinhart stay, the Sabres may have to consider a temporary move to right wing for Cozens, who prefers to play center.

This is a good problem to have. The Sabres have lacked center depth for too long. Arttu Ruotsalainen and Rasmus Asplund also could be options down the middle.

But as stated earlier, Adams would be taking a significant risk moving forward with Eichel and Reinhart. The latter is moving closer to unrestricted free agency, which would impact the return the longer you wait. Eichel's no-movement clause – which would allow him to control where he can be traded – begins in 2022-23. It's a delicate situation, one that would be easier to navigate if the Sabres had not given Skinner a \$72 million contract.

@dazz0\_716: Who is the most valuable player on the team? Least valuable?

Lysowski: Reinhart is most valuable, by a mile. The 25-year-old leads the Sabres in goals (23) and points (37), while his 5.8 goals above replacement, a metric by Evolving-Hockey.com that measures a player's overall contributions, is the best mark on the team.

When the Sabres were hit hard by the season-ending injury to Eichel and the Eric Staal trade, Reinhart provided Buffalo with a top-line center capable of driving play. Reinhart has 11 goals with five assists for 16 points in 18 games since moving back to his natural position.

Cody Eakin has been the Sabres' least valuable player. He wins faceoffs and has helped on the penalty kill, but this doesn't justify his two-year, \$4.5 million contract. Eakin's underlying numbers are ugly. One of his two goals was an empty netter. This is what happens when you give an inexperienced NHL head coach a significant say in personnel decisions.

@R\_lemon90: What are the odds the Sabres re-sign Linus Ullmark before he reaches unrestricted free agency?

Lysowski: The odds are good. Ullmark, 27, will try to get every dollar he can from the Sabres, but no team is going to pay more than Buffalo after he missed so much time with lower-body injuries the past two seasons. He's the only full-time, NHL-ready goalie in this organization.

Ullmark is fond of Buffalo and the Sabres. He also has an outstanding working relationship with goalie coach Mike Bales. Adams will need to sell Ullmark on the vision to build this roster. Ullmark has leverage here. He knows the goaltending situation, especially with Carter Hutton likely to leave as an unrestricted free agent.

That said, Adams would be wise to not give Ullmark term. Two years is the most the Sabres should commit to a goalie with Ullmark's recent injury history. But this team can't afford to let Ullmark walk away.

Jack Keough: Are there going to be any decent free-agent goalies available?

Lysowski: Philipp Grubauer, Mike Smith, Frederik Andersen, Pekka Rinne, Jonathan Bernier, James Reimer, Chris Driedger, Tuukka Rask, Devan Dubnyk, Jaroslav Halak, Petr Mrazek and Antti Raanta are among the top pending unrestricted free agent goalies.

Ullmark will be the priority. The price tag will be lower than the more talented unrestricted free agent goalies, particularly Grubauer. The Sabres can't overpay for a free-agent goalie, and a lucrative long-term contract doesn't make sense given that Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen is close to being a full-time option in the NHL.

Mrazek is a name to watch. The price won't be terribly high – given that he's been limited to nine games this season – and he had a successful 2018-19 season working with Bales in Carolina.

If Ullmark doesn't sign, the Sabres are more likely to try to trade for a goalie.

## **Inside the NHL: Ryan Miller memories abound after retirement announcement**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

May 2, 2021

So much went through my head while participating in Ryan Miller's retirement video call Thursday. When you covered the Sabres in those post-lockout years, Miller's locker was the place to be most days. He could talk about virtually any subject you wanted – hockey or non-hockey. He could analyze the team. And I loved hearing him riff on the state of the game, be it rules, injuries or equipment.

It's no surprise that Miller said he wants to move into hockey management. He's a perfect candidate to work at the team or even the league level. No competition committee should ever be held without first inviting him to serve on it.

Some memories of Miller:

He always seemed to get it: I remember one night in 2008 when the Sabres were having a terrible time winning shootouts, Miller chucked an empty water bottle over a group of reporters toward a garbage can and pointedly said to the group: "We've got to be better in shootouts. All of us." That meant him, too. He was always brutally honest.

Miller spiked the puck into the corner after making the save on the final San Jose shootout attempt when the Sabres beat the Sharks the night after Flight 3407 crashed in Clarence in 2009. He knew what the game meant to a grieving community. Same for the way he led the Sabres' post-victory salute at center ice in 2011 a few hours after the death of Rick Martin. Following a win over Ottawa, Miller pointed his stick to the corner rafters at Martin's retired number banner and his teammates followed suit.

Pittsburgh, March 2010: The first night back from the Olympics, the Penguins introduced all the Olympians from both their roster and the Sabres before the game. Miller – a visiting player – got a roaring ovation, even more than the one afforded to hometown and Team Canada hero Sidney Crosby.

"It was a nice moment. I guess you don't really realize until you get there how big the Olympics can be," Miller said when this corner asked him to reminisce about it Thursday. "I certainly knew there would be a lot of people watching, but I wasn't fully prepared for that amount of attention. It was a special moment for all the guys.

"To have that moment in Pittsburgh was very special. To get that kind of response from a group of people just for playing a hockey game was quite nice. I appreciated the gesture. I know we had a bit of a rivalry going on with the Penguins over the years, the proximity and such. It's interesting. It is possible for Americans to set their differences aside once in a while. Let's carry that forward in the future."

Miller gets air time on 'Today' Olympic hero makes rounds in Big Apple  
Four diehard Buffalo Sabres fans from West Seneca were there. Some natives of hockey-crazed Minnesota were excited to be in his presence. An attorney from St. Louis handed out props even though he didn't know the name. And a few hundred others, most of whom had never heard of Ryan Miller, braved a chilly Manhattan morning to cheer him.

New York, later that month: The Sabres played a Sunday game in New York and the NHL arranged a huge media tour the next day, on an off day. It started at NBC's "Today" show in Rockefeller Center. If you've ever watched it and seen the folks in that plaza, that's where I spent 90 minutes interviewing folks from across the country. Some were die-hard Sabres fans, some only knew Miller as "the guy whose name starts with 'M.'" But they knew him as the Olympic hero. When Miller emerged from inside the studio with Matt Lauer to do the interview, the masses huddled in the cold March morning let out another big roar.

Ready to play: Every night, well before warmups, you'd see Miller on the bench just staring at the ice. No equipment on yet. Usually in shorts. Leaning on a stick. Visualizing. Every night. When he suddenly wasn't there on that fateful Friday night against San Jose in 2014, that was the sign we knew he was about to get traded.

Boston and Montreal, November 2011: Miller's infamous "he's a piece of bleep" press conference after getting plowed by Milan Lucic was a time-tested classic, but the incident put a label on the organization as a soft group

it's still trying to get over. The next day in the Bell Centre, GM Darcy Regier lambasted the team in the locker room before practice and Paul Gaustad, one of Miller's closest friends, was somber with the realization the team had let its franchise player down by not doing more. "That was gutless," Miller railed the night before about Lucic. He may as well have been saying the same thing about his own team.

Exit, Feb. 28, 2014: That intermission press conference with Steve Ott after the trade was a tough one. There was shock, but Miller had hope because he felt St. Louis was a Cup contender. Still, there was a pall in the room I'll never forget. It was clear to everyone the era was over. That 2006, 2007 and 2010, in particular, were now reserved for the history books and could never be repeated. The Sabres still haven't found their franchise goalie since.

Anaheim, October 2018: My last extended chat with Miller was on a Sunday morning nearly three years ago during a Sabres road trip. It was mostly to reminisce on the 10-year anniversary of the Winter Classic in Orchard Park but we delved into goaltending, his family, his dog (named "Puck") and even got into more on the Olympics. Miller, of course, was beaten by Crosby for the ultimate goal in both of the marquee games.

"I guess you could write that's twice in my career where I made a decision that went wrong on Sid in an important kind of moment," Miller said, able to laugh about the moments a few years after they had taken place. "But you make your decision, you make your choice and you kind of live with it."

I remember Miller laughing some more when he thought about the swirling snow of Ralph Wilson Stadium.

"It was funny to look at the bench and everyone is bundled up," Miller said. "The heaters are on and the snow is swirling around. I hadn't done anything like that since squirts and pee wees. Toward the tunnel end where the wind blows strong, you kind of pictured what the kickers on the football team had to go through."

Should Miller's No. 30 get retired by the Sabres? Of course it should. He's the franchise's all-time victory leader in goal and is the most-decorated American goalie of all time. There's an argument out there that the Sabres have too many numbers retired for a team that's never won a Stanley Cup, and I get it. But that's not Miller's fault.

Does that mean the club should never retire another number again? Of course not. If anything, the Sabres should have retired Mike Ramsey's No. 5 years ago and have failed to do so.

And the club has completely let its own Hall of Fame drift away into nothing, with no new inductees since Dominik Hasek in 2014 and no real direction since the death of Robert Swados in 2012.

Such a big miss that it wasn't revived for the 50th anniversary celebrations. And now all the fan favorites from the 2000s who are retired and could be brought back and honored won't be heard of again? That's terrible. The Sabres need to do something about that.

Miller said during his video call he wanted to make sure to come back to Buffalo to show his son, Bodhi, the places that were important to him as a player here before the 6-year-old was born in 2015.

You'd like to think that trip would come attached with some big honors for Dad. He absolutely deserves them.

Time to move on from NBC

The news that NBC is out of the hockey business is sad for the hundreds of folks who worked on the broadcasts the last 16 years, both in front of and behind the cameras. But it just feels like it's time. Things were very stale at NBC and the studio show, in particular, has long been the worst in professional sports.

The games themselves were generally well done, and the NBC contract made Doc Emrick a hockey legend. Ed Olczyk and Pierre McGuire have become the game's most prominent analysts. Others like Kenny Albert and John Forslund have made a big impact and maybe some of them will move on to ESPN and Turner telecasts.

But this is a great opportunity for the game – and not just in the enormous increase in rights fees to roughly \$625 million, or more than double what NBC was paying. Get new ways to present the game and its personalities. Rethink the studio show, understanding that I don't think mortal lock P.K. Subban is close to retirement yet. Let Charles Barkley contribute. The Chuckster loves the game and those of us there will never forget when he

hilariously crashed the Wayne Gretzky-Paul Coffey news conference during the 2017 Stanley Cup final in Nashville.

NBC Sports Network was going away anyway. Let's see if ESPN can recapture its magic from the '90s and early 2000s and it will be fascinating to see what the Turner folks do. If it's remotely close to what they do with the NBA, we're in for lots of fun.

Around the boards

- The Lightning got their elaborate Stanley Cup rings last week during a private ceremony at the home of owner Jeff Vinik. The massive 557-diamond specials, which feature a rotating Stanley Cup, had many touches related to the Bolts' season, including the word "Stockholm" engraved under the Cup.

In November 2019, the Lightning took back-to-back games from the Sabres in Sweden as part of the NHL Global Series, and the team credited the weeklong trip as a unifier after a tough start to a season that came in the wake of their four-game sweep in the first round six months earlier against Columbus.

- Martin Hlinka, an assistant coach at Canisius College the last two years, has been named director of youth hockey for the Seattle Kraken. The expansion team that opens play in October is unveiling a \$90 million training facility later this year.

Hlinka, who played at Augsburg (Minn.) College, had a seven-year pro career in North America highlighted by 192 AHL games with Portland and Hershey from 2000-2005. He has a decade of coaching experience in places such as Austria, Belarus and Poland, and has served as an instructor in Russia at hockey camps run by former Detroit star Pavel Datsyuk.

- The Kraken officially became the NHL's 32nd team Friday when they submitted their final expansion payment to the league. Memo to the other 31 GMs: Don't make the same stupid trades with Seattle that you did with Vegas four years ago. You're losing one player. When Seattle calls you, hang up the phone. Let them take their player and don't give them other players or draft picks.

- According to STATS Inc., the Flyers have become the first team in the four major sports to alternate making and missing the playoffs for 10 consecutive seasons. They're just about locked into sixth place in the East in a season that started with huge promise.

Philly was 11-4-3 and three points out of the Division lead after its back-to-back 3-0 wins in KeyBank Center on Feb. 27-28, but entered the weekend just 11-16-4 since and never won consecutive games in April.

## **'Really tough day' for Sabres worsened by injury to goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen**

By Lance Lysowski  
The Buffalo News  
May 1, 2021

BOSTON – When players finally caught their breath following another fast-paced practice Friday afternoon in Warrior Ice Arena, Buffalo Sabres defenseman Henri Jokiharju skated over to Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen and playfully pushed the 22-year-old top goaltending prospect against the boards.

Rasmus Asplund soon joined in, repeatedly shoving Luukkonen as the group laughed at the conclusion of practice. Colin Miller, a 28-year-old defenseman, skated by with a grin and told his teammates to leave the netminder alone.

Luukkonen, tabbed a possible franchise goalie when he was drafted in the second round back in 2017, has endeared himself to teammates during his short time in the NHL. He has also provided fans with a glimpse at what the Sabres could have in net for years to come, showing pro-ready athleticism and rebound control.

The final games in a 10th consecutive non-playoff season were an opportunity to introduce Luukkonen to the rigors of the NHL and create a foundation for next season. The plan unraveled with his third consecutive start and fourth in a Sabres uniform.

Luukkonen suffered what sources say is an injury to his left ankle when a routine glide to the left post sent him crumpling to the ice in pain Saturday afternoon in TD Garden. He scrambled in the crease until time expired in the second period before leaving a game that ended with a 6-2 loss to the Boston Bruins.

"That's added on to the tough day," a somber interim coach Don Granato said afterward. "It was a tough day all around. That's obviously a big one, because this is a great opportunity for him to get some minutes and now that's in question. He battled tonight. Like I said, every now and then you have a tough day. Everybody had a really tough day today. His was the finish. But he battled extremely well up to that point, obviously."

According to Granato, the Sabres won't know the severity of Luukkonen's injury until the team returns to Buffalo. Luukkonen stood tall against a barrage of Bruins shots for 40 minutes, stopping 26 of 29 on net before the injury occurred.

Luukkonen, who is listed at 6-foot-4, 220 pounds, approached the moment with the proper technique. He glided to his left post while tracking the puck as the Bruins zipped tape-to-tape pass around the zone. When Luukkonen's torso leaned into the post, all his weight shifted to his left leg and he fell backward in pain. Rather than remaining on the ice, Luukkonen propped himself up to try to prevent the Bruins from scoring on a half-empty net. As time expired, he fell back down and needed to be helped off the ice.

This is the latest setback in a calamitous season for the Sabres, including in goal. They are one of only two NHL teams to use five goalies this season. Buffalo has not used six in a season since 2013-14.

Their top two options, Linus Ullmark and Carter Hutton, are unlikely to play another game this season.

Jonas Johansson, previously the team's No. 3, was traded to Colorado for a sixth-round draft pick. Injuries forced the Sabres to turn to Dustin Tokarski, a 31-year-old who prior to this season had not won an NHL game since Dec. 12, 2015. Tokarski stopped 11 of 14 shots in relief Saturday and owns a .904 save percentage in 13 games.

While Tokarski has been serviceable, the Sabres' future is Luukkonen. He had a .906 save percentage in four appearances, including 36 saves to earn a win over Boston in his NHL debut on April 23. Ullmark and Hutton are pending unrestricted free agents, although General Manager Kevyn Adams told reporters that signing Ullmark is a priority.

"It's tough, you know," Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin said of Luukkonen's injury. "Especially how he played. He's been playing really well, he's got a bright future. It's never fun to see a goalie get injured."

Luukkonen faced 17 shots in the first period, two of which he did not stop. His teammates, meanwhile, had only four shots during that span and did not register their 10th until 30:38 into the game. Luukkonen could not do much to stop Craig Smith's easy tap-in, the first of his three goals, on a lapse in coverage by the Sabres at 1:21 into the game.

Luukkonen was unable to cover the puck on a sequence that led to Sean Kuraly's goal to make it 2-1 at 16:38 into the first. However, Luukkonen kept this a two-goal game through 40 minutes despite facing seven high-danger scoring chances at 5-on-5, according to NaturalStatTrick.com. The Bruins scored three goals after he exited the game.

"He works so hard and he's such a great a guy off the ice and he's been doing a great job," said Sabres center Riley Sheahan, who scored a shorthanded breakaway goal in the first period. "Yeah, it's tough seeing him go down. He's been playing great. Especially the timing, close to the end of the season. I hope he recovers quick."

The Sabres (13-32-7) have only four games remaining, capped by their season finale in Pittsburgh on May 8. This gives Luukkonen little time to recover in time to appear in another game for Buffalo, although the Rochester Americans' season does not end until May 16.

Long-term, the Sabres will want to ensure that Luukkonen has a healthy summer to train for training camp. In the short term, the team may need a goalie. Tokarski and Michael Houser, who has no NHL experience, are the only healthy options under contract, and the Sabres need at least three for puck drop Monday against the New York Islanders.

The Amerks' current goalies are both on professional tryouts – Steffanos Lekkas and Billy Christopolous – and had a combined .817 save percentage entering their game at Syracuse on Saturday night.

The Sabres will need a solution quickly because they have a back-to-back Monday and Tuesday, a scenario that could prevent Tokarski from starting both games. Meanwhile, Granato will need to correct all that went wrong Saturday when his players were outshot 43-19 and did little to help either goalie.

"Not good enough all over," said Granato. "They had a very simple put pucks to the net, put players to the net, create the traffic and (it was) obviously part of their game plan, they did it consistently. You could see it from anywhere. ... But they played a real simple game and we struggled to simplify anything today."

## **The Wraparound: Sabres fall apart in series finale against Bruins, lose 6-2**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

May 1, 2021

BOSTON – So much has changed about the Buffalo Sabres since Don Granato took over as interim coach on March 17.

Seemingly every player on the roster has improved, particularly young forwards and defensemen. Sam Reinhart has been exceptional while transitioning back to center. But slow starts continue to haunt the Sabres and they have endured bouts of inconsistency against their usual Atlantic Division foe, the Boston Bruins.

The final meeting of the season was no different. The Bruins overwhelmed the Sabres on the forecheck, exploited poor defensive-zone coverage and took advantage of opportunities in a 6-2 win Saturday in TD Garden.

Buffalo (13-32-7) has lost seven of its last nine games and owns a 1-9-1 record in the past 11 matchups against the Bruins.

"They were working so hard, shift in, shift out," said Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin. "I think us as a young group have got to learn from a team like that. Their star players work as hard as their fourth line. It's a tough team to play against. Definitely something to learn from."

Sabres top goaltending prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, making his third consecutive start, exited at the end of the second period with a lower-body injury. The 22-year-old fell backward after gliding to the left post, and he scrambled in the crease until time expired. Luukkonen, a second-round draft pick in 2017, stopped 26 of 29 shots and was replaced by Dustin Tokarski with the Sabres trailing 3-1.

Buffalo didn't register its 10th shot on goal until 30:38 into the game, but it managed to tie the score, 1-1, on a shorthanded breakaway by Riley Sheahan. Arttu Ruotsalainen added his fifth goal in 13 NHL games to make it 5-2 in the third period.

The Bruins (30-14-6), who have won nine of their last 11 games, received a hat trick from Craig Smith. Sean Kuraly, Patrice Bergeron and Nick Ritchie also scored. Rookie goalie Jeremy Swayman made 17 saves, and Boston finished with 43 shots on goal.

"The goals came from sort of self-inflicted mistakes and we just weren't on our game," said Sheahan. "They were bearing down and winning those little battles and little things you do to win games they were doing."

Another quick strike: The Sabres allowed the opening goal in the first two minutes for the second time in as many games. Taylor Hall entered the zone with ease, slowed the play to find David Krejci in the left-wing circle and Krejci found Smith for the easy tap-in atop the goal mouth at 1:21.

Equalizer: Buffalo killed off 1:59 of the Bruins' first power play, only to have Mattias Samuelsson penalized for tripping. Moments later, Sheahan exited the box and scored a shorthanded breakaway goal to tie the score, 1-1, with 7:25 remaining in the first period.

More mistakes: An inability to win on the forecheck in the defensive zone led to a loose puck in front that Luukkonen could not cover. Rasmus Ristolainen did not clear it from in front and Kuraly scored the go-ahead goal at 16:38 into the first.

Ugly start: The Sabres were outshot, 17-4, in the first period and entered Saturday having led at the first intermission only 11 times in 51 games. The Bruins, meanwhile, had a 17-0-2 record when leading in that situation. They also had five high-danger scoring chances at 5-on-5, while allowing zero, according to NaturalStatTrick.com.

Not-so-warm welcome: Tokarski did not have time to ease into the game, as Ritchie scored 3:18 into the third period by tipping Matt Grzelcyk's shot from the left point to make it 4-1.

Pouring on: The Bruins pushed their lead to 5-1 when Smith was left uncovered in front of the net at 5:31 into the third period.

Winning a battle: Ruotsalainen scored the Sabres' second goal by jamming a rebound off a Rasmus Asplund shot at 7:02 into the third period.

Tensions high: Dahlin drew the ire of the Bruins with hits from behind on David Pastrnak and Brad Marchand. A scrum ensued and officials prevented Dahlin from fighting Marchand.

Unusual season: The Sabres previously played only two regular-season May games in franchise history and both were at Memorial Auditorium at the end of the 1995 lockout season: a 2-0 win over Montreal on May 1, 1995 and 5-4 win over New Jersey on May 3, 1995.

The franchise's last May game of any kind took place on May 19, 2007, a 3-2 loss at home to Ottawa in clinching Game 5 of the Eastern Conference finals. The Sabres lost on Daniel Alfredsson's goal 9:32 into overtime. Ryan Miller made 22 saves, while Buffalo received goals from Jochen Hecht and Maxim Afinogenov.

Lineup: Defensemen Matt Irwin and Colin Miller, and center Cody Eakin were scratches. Jack Eichel, Kyle Okposo, Jake McCabe and Zemgus Girgensons are out for the season. Goalies Linus Ullmark and Carter Hutton are unlikely to return before the regular-season finale in Pittsburgh on May 8.

Next: The Sabres will host the New York Islanders on Monday night in KeyBank Center. It's the seventh of eight meetings between the teams this season.

## **Sabres game day: Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen starting for Sabres in rare regular-season May game**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

May 1, 2021

BOSTON – It's Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen's net again.

Luukkonen, the Buffalo Sabres' 22-year-old rookie goaltender, will start a third consecutive game Saturday against the Boston Bruins in TD Garden. Puck drop is scheduled for 1 p.m. He stopped 35 of 39 shots in a 5-2 loss here on Thursday.

A second-round draft choice in 2017, Luukkonen has a .908 save percentage in four starts with the Sabres (13-31-7), who have lost six of their last eight games. During that span, Buffalo has been outscored 30-19.

The Bruins (29-14-6) have won eight of their last 10 games, a run of success that began with the acquisitions of former Sabres Taylor Hall and Curtis Lazar, and defenseman Mike Reilly.

Lineup: The Sabres will use the same lineup as Thursday, when interim coach Don Granato elevated Drake Caggiula to a line with Dylan Cozens and Anders Bjork. Additionally, Arttu Ruotsalainen had success in his first game on a different line, recording a primary assist on Casey Mittelstadt's goal.

Tage Thompson, on the other, had zero shots on goal in 7:42 of ice time while skating on the fourth line with Riley Sheahan and Tobias Rieder. Granato, though, said the dip in ice time did not occur because of any glaring issues in Thompson's game.

"I'm OK with Tage's game," said Granato. "It can be better. He's pushed to be better. I think he can bear down and help us score more when he gets a scoring chance and I'll keep pushing him that way."

Here's how the Sabres lined up at practice Friday in Boston's Warrior Ice Arena:

Goalie matchup: Luukkoken will be opposed by Bruins rookie goalie Jeremy Swayman, who has a 5-2 record and .946 save percentage in seven appearances. The 22-year-old had stopped 29 of 30 in a 5-1 Bruins win over the Sabres in Buffalo on April 22.

More history: The Sabres previously played only two regular-season May games in franchise history and both were at Memorial Auditorium at the end of the 1995 lockout season: a 2-0 win over Montreal on May 1, 1995 and 5-4 win over New Jersey on May 3, 1995.

The franchise's last May game of any kind took place on May 19, 2007, a 3-2 loss at home to Ottawa in clinching Game 5 of the Eastern Conference finals. The Sabres lost on Daniel Alfredsson's goal 9:32 into overtime. Ryan Miller made 22 saves, while Buffalo received goals from Jochen Hecht and Maxim Afinogenov.

Trending up: Sam Reinhart has scored at least one goal in four consecutive games, his longest such streak since he also scored in four straight from Nov. 29 to Dec. 4, 2019. If Reinhart scores this afternoon, he will be the first Sabre to score a goal in five or more consecutive games since Thomas Vanek had seven goals in five games from Oct. 10 to 18, 2008.

Reinhart has 23 goals in 49 games this season, two shy of tying his career high, which he set in 82 games during the 2017-18 season. It's the fastest he has reached the 20-goal mark in his career. He is one of 15 players in franchise history to have at least five 20-goal seasons with the Sabres.

Reinhart's 15 road goals are tied for the most in the NHL this season.

Change of scenery: Hall has five goals with three assists for 8 points in 10 games since joining the Bruins ahead of the April 12 trade deadline. The 29-year-old has at least one point in seven of those games.

Remember, Hall had only two goals with 17 assists in 37 games with the Sabres.

## **Sabres' Mattias Samuelsson using lessons from his father to continue NHL dream**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

April 30, 2021

BOSTON – Mattias Samuelsson was always keenly aware how much work was needed to achieve his goal of playing in the National Hockey League.

The stops in his young career read like a road map to reaching the highest level. Samuelsson, a 21-year-old defenseman, attended the prestigious Norwood School before earning a highly coveted spot at the USA Hockey National Team Development Program in Plymouth, Mich.

He then chose to attend Western Michigan University, a program led by former NHL coach Andy Murray. Each environment and coach provided a crash course on how to be a professional athlete.

Yet, some of Samuelsson's most valuable lessons came at a much earlier age, when he and his brother, Lukas, joined their father, Kjell, at the rink. Kjell, a retired NHL defenseman whose name is engraved on the Stanley Cup, brought the brothers to many practices with the Philadelphia Flyers or the organization's American Hockey League affiliate.

Those memories were still vivid for Mattias as he made his NHL debut with the Buffalo Sabres on April 18, the next step in what he plans to be a long, successful career like his father's.

"For me, my wife and his siblings, it's a proud family moment," Kjell said during a phone interview with The Buffalo News. "It's more a satisfying feeling because of all the work he has put in and this has been his goal since he went to Northwood probably. ... It's a good feeling, for sure."

The Sabres did not admit fans to the game in which Samuelsson debuted, forcing his family to watch from home on television. Kjell's job as a development coach with the Flyers prevented him from viewing all of Mattias' 19 games with the Rochester Americans live this season.

Kjell always watches, even if he must wait until after the fact. He doesn't provide in-depth advice or instruction, preferring to allow Samuelsson's coaches to point out any corrections. Kjell has always reminded his sons that he didn't want them playing hockey to follow in his footsteps. He let them decide if they wanted to pursue the sport.

But he's always been there with words of encouragement, including the past few weeks as Samuelsson adjusts to the NHL.

Samuelsson has shown resolve in seven games with the Sabres, totaling two points with a minus-3 rating while averaging 17:28 of ice time. He logged a career-high 22:16 on Thursday night in a 5-2 loss to the Boston Bruins, skating alongside Rasmus Ristolainen in a shutdown role.

Since debuting against the Pittsburgh Penguins, Samuelsson ranks third among all Sabres defensemen in defensive-zone faceoffs, and he's been on the ice for the third-most high-danger scoring chances. Listed at 6-foot-4, 226 pounds, Samuelsson has delivered punishing hits to help Buffalo regain possession and bolstered the team's penalty kill, all while having a calm presence.

"I think just every game getting more confident with the puck and more confident playing my style out there and adjusting to the speed and skill," Samuelsson said.

The unprecedented, long offseason provided him with ample time to physically train for the jump to professional hockey. He excelled immediately under Rochester coach Seth Appert, totaling three goals with eight assists for 11 points before earning the promotion.

The goal now is to remain in the NHL, a challenge Kjell knows well. Now 62 years old, Kjell played 813 regular-season games across 14 seasons. He also appeared in 123 playoff games, winning a Stanley Cup with the Penguins in 1992. Kjell did not make the jump to the NHL until he was 26 years old, but his effectiveness as a physical defenseman allowed him to play until he was 40. He's also in-tune with the modern game, as he routinely works with prospects in his post-playing career.

"It's a big adjustment for Mattias right now, even if he played 20 games in the American league," Kjell said. "This is a big step for him and everything is new around him. The players he's playing against, he's basically only seen them on TV. So, it's more don't get too high, don't get too low. Mistakes happen. Everybody makes mistakes. You learn from them, and it's stuff like that. You lose the game you have to keep your head up and stay positive."

Mattias' physical traits and intangibles led former Sabres General Manager Jason Botterill to draft him in the second round, 32nd overall in 2018. Samuelsson went on to appear in consecutive IIHF World Junior Championships, and he captained the United States at the tournament in 2019-20. He also wore the 'C' for his final season at Western Michigan. Samuelsson was college teammates with his brother, Lukas.

His left-handed shot won't produce points at the rate of Rasmus Dahlin. Samuelsson provides a savvy, defensive-minded presence that led Appert to describe him as, "miserable to play against." However, Samuelsson quickly showed in Rochester that he's much better with the puck than some evaluators thought.

According to Appert, Samuelsson was one of the Amerks' best players at driving play off the rush. Samuelsson can deliver perfect tape-to-tape breakout passes and has a fearlessness when trying to make plays in the offensive zone. Appert, who coached Samuelsson at the NTDP, said the next step is improvement when under pressure trying to break the puck out of the defensive zone.

"Certainly, we're really proud of Mattias and we're happy watching him in Buffalo and how good he's playing up there and how comfortable he looks in the National Hockey League," Appert said. "Mattias, I thought, grew in a lot of areas. One was consistency. I thought his consistency got better every day down here and every game. ... You're never going to be perfect and it's OK to maybe have an off game or an off day, but it shouldn't be because of a lack of physical competitiveness or mental engagement or habits and details."

The Sabres' youth movement under interim coach Don Granato has created an opportunity for prospects such as Samuelsson to learn in the NHL during the season's final weeks. He's expected to continue playing alongside Ristolainen, an experienced defenseman who brings a similar physical presence in the defensive zone. And each game will be followed by a conversation with the man who introduced him to it all.

"Yeah, I mean having my dad involved in the NHL still, it helps," Samuelsson said. "Growing up, he'd always teach stuff or show you little things. And then when I was younger, too, I'd go on the ice with the Flyers or Phantoms whenever I had a chance and practice and play against them. I think that was a huge help, too. My dad's taught me a lot. Like even today, I'll talk to him after the game and he'll probably give me a few notes or anything like that."

## **OPINION: Luukkonen's injury very unfortunate; No word on severity yet**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

May 1, 2021

(WGR 550) – The Buffalo Sabres clearly played their worst game under Don Granato on Saturday afternoon, losing 6-2 to the Bruins in Boston, but that's not the story.

The story is Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen having to be helped off the ice at the end of the second period. The big goaltender could not put any pressure on his left leg after getting it caught on the post as he came across the crease. After the game, Granato said he won't have an update until they get back to Buffalo.

There's a good chance Luukkonen may not play in the last week of the season.

"It's added on to the tough day," Granato said in his postgame conference call. "It was a tough day all around, and that's obviously a big one, because this is a great opportunity for him to get some minutes. Now that's in question."

Granato thought Luukkonen battled extremely well in the 40 minutes that he played. The big goalie made 26 saves on 29 shots.

Luukkonen doesn't give up many rebounds, but on the Bruins' third goal, a Jeremy Lauzon shot handcuffed him and he dropped the puck to a waiting Patrice Bergeron.

If this is the end of Luukkonen's season, he will finish 1-3-0 with a 3.88 goals-against average and a .906 save percentage. In Rochester this season, he was 7-5-2 with a 3.60 goals-against average and an .889 save percentage.

Luukkonen also played 13 games for TPS Turku in Finland and went 6-3-4 with a 2.52 goals-against average and a .908 save percentage. That would give him 31 games this season.

Teams averaged 41.2 shots per-game on Luukkonen, which is way too many. Granato likes to say many of the shots were of poor quality, and that's right, but only to a point.

I think Luukkonen has shown a calmness in net that will serve him very well in the National Hockey League. For the most part, he doesn't kick out too many rebounds and he's very athletic in the crease.

The Bruins came at Buffalo in waves, and Luukkonen was very good, especially in close. He had Nick Ritchie in his lap numerous times, but fought through it to make saves.

If Luukkonen's season is over, it'll be a shame, because he probably had three more games coming to him.

I think it was a good thing Luukkonen got up to Buffalo to get some games in. Now the 22-year-old knows what it's like to be in the NHL, and it gives him something to work for during the summer.

Saturday was the first game the Sabres played in May since 2007, and they laid a complete egg. They weren't moving their feet, the awareness was horrendous, and they got run over by a team that they aren't even close to matching up with. That is something general manager Kevyn Adams will need to address in the offseason.

Boston finished 7-1-0 against Buffalo this season, with the only loss coming when captain Patrice Bergeron was out of the lineup. Buffalo ended up 1-6-1 against the Bruins.

One of the many bad habits Granato had gotten out of the Sabres' game was how the team would pull up immediately after gaining the blue line. Trading Taylor Hall helped get rid of one of the main offenders, but it had totally stopped until Saturday.

"It was very, very uncharacteristic of us with that component specifically, but there were so many components, it just didn't look like us. We just kept making it hard on ourselves," Granato said.

Granato went on to say that many things lost them possession.

"We just kept making it hard on ourselves, and we just couldn't, for whatever reason, get to a simple game and the shot is the perfect example," he said. "We didn't get any pucks behind them, we passed on shots that we could've taken, we were too easy to play against and it was self-inflicted."

Buffalo's goals came thanks to one of the few heads up plays they made all day. Casey Mittelstadt took a faceoff with the Sabres down two men for one second. He won the draw, and Jacob Bryson realized that Riley Sheahan was coming out of the penalty box. Instead of firing it down ice, the defenseman slid a backhand pass that allowed Sheahan to skate right into the puck as he exited the box. Sheahan actually scored on a pretty nice shot.

Buffalo rarely got in on the forecheck, but one time in the third period, Arttu Ruotsalainen got in behind the net and forced a turnover to Rasmus Asplund. Ruotsalainen kept going to the net, and pushed one by Jeremy Swayman for his fifth goal of the season.

Swayman basically stood there for most of the afternoon, making just 17 saves.

The Sabres come home for the final two games of the season in Buffalo against the New York Islanders. The first game of the two-game set is on Monday.

## **Luukkonen injured in Sabres' loss to Boston**

By Pat Malacaro

WGR 550

May 1, 2021

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen was injured at the end of the second period in the Buffalo Sabres' 6-2 loss to the Boston Bruins on Saturday afternoon at TD Garden.

Craig Smith's 11th goal of the season came less than two minutes into the game, giving Boston a 1-0 lead over the Sabres in the first period. David Krejci and Taylor Hall were credited with the assists on the game's first goal.

The Sabres were able to tie the score at 1-1 thanks to a shorthanded chance late in the opening period. Riley Sheahan just came out of the penalty box when he was able to score on a breakaway opportunity. The goal came as Mattias Samuelsson was also penalized for the blue and gold.

Boston re-established their lead with a goal by Sean Kuraly with just over three minutes to go in the first period. Nick Ritchie was credited with the lone assist on Kuraly's third goal of the year.

Patrice Bergeron doubled Boston's lead with a goal midway through the second period. The Bruins captain's 19th goal of the season was assisted by Jeremy Lauzon and Brad Marchand.

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen was injured at the end of the second period while the Sabres were on the penalty kill. The rookie goaltender was helped off the ice favoring his left leg:

Dustin Tokarski was forced to take over in goal in the third period for the Sabres.

Boston wasted little time to extend their lead to 4-1 in the final 20 minutes. Nick Ritchie re-directed Matt Grzelcyk's shot into the net. Kevan Miller was also credited with an assist for the Bruins. Smith's second goal of the game less than two minutes later ballooned the lead to 5-1 for Boston.

Arttu Ruotsalainen was able to get a goal back for Buffalo part way through the third to cut Boston's lead to 5-2.

His fifth goal of the season was assisted by Casey Mittelstadt and Rasmus Asplund.

Smith recorded a hat-trick with a power play goal late in the third. Krejci and Charlie Coyle assisted on the special team's score that was also Smith's 13th of the season, making it 6-2 Boston. It came with Will Borgen in the penalty box serving an interference minor.

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### GAME SUMMARY

#### Goal Summary:

##### First Period:

BUF: 12:35 - Riley Sheahan (4) SHG (Jacob Bryson, Casey Mittelstadt)

BOS: 1:21 - Craig Smith (11) (David Krejci, Taylor Hall); 16:38 - Sean Kuraly (3) (Nick Ritchie)

##### Second Period:

BUF: NONE

BOS: 5:36 - Patrice Bergeron (19) (Jeremy Lauzon, Brad Marchand)

##### Third Period:

BUF: 7:02 - Arttu Ruotsalainen (5) (Rasmus Asplund, Casey Mittelstadt)

BOS: 3:18 - Nick Ritchie (13) (Matt Grzelcyk, Kevan Miller); 5:31 - Craig Smith (12) (Mike Reilly, David Krejci); 14:05 - Craig Smith (13) PPG (David Krejci, Charlie Coyle)

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Penalty Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 10:28 - Riley Sheahan (Holding - 2 min.); 12:27 - Mattias Samuelsson (Tripping - 2 min.)

BOS: NONE

Second Period:

BUF: 19:09 - Dylan Cozens (Slashing - 2 min.)

BOS: 8:34 - Sean Kuraly (Slashing - 2 min.)

Third Period:

BUF: 7:45 - Rasmus Dahlin (Cross-checking - 2 min.); 13:39 - Will Borgen (Interference - 2 min.)

BOS: 7:45 - Brad Marchand (Roughing - 2 min.); 7:45 - David Pastrnak (Roughing - 2 min.)

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STATS OF THE GAME:

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Losi and Gangi Three Stars of the Game:

- 1.) Craig Smith - BOS
- 2.) David Krejci - BOS
- 3.) Sean Kuraly - BOS

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What's Next

The Sabres will return home for the final pair of games at KeyBank Center for the season starting on Monday. Buffalo welcomes the New York Islanders to town for a 7 p.m. ET puck drop on the flagship home of the Sabres Radio Network - WGR Sports Radio 550. The Paul William Beltz Pregame Show with Mike Schopp and the Bulldog begins at 6 p.m. ET.

## **Samuelsson: There have been stages to my growth as a player**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

April 30, 2021

(WGR 550) – Mattias Samuelsson has only played seven National Hockey League games, but the 21-year-old defenseman has shown he has a long future ahead of him.

One thing that sticks out in watching the kid is how calm he is. He never gets flustered. Don Granato feels that comes from his father, Kjell Samuelsson, who played 14 years in the NHL.

"He has a calm to him that's way beyond his years. If you knew his father you would understand why," the Sabres interim head coach said following Friday's practice. "He's a player that's benefited from having a father that was a very good NHL player. He's been around the game since he's been a kid, and you can see it's pretty second nature for him, because he does have a real nice calm to him within the context of a pretty competitive environment."

Much of Kjell Samuelsson's career took place with the Philadelphia Flyers. Mattias said his dad and being around the Flyers helped him learn the game.

"Having my dad involved in the NHL still helps. Growing up, he'd always teach me stuff or show me little things," he said.

It was more than just advice. Being a rink rat helped too.

"When I was younger, I'd go on the ice with the Flyers or Phantoms whenever I had a chance and practiced and played against them. I think that was a huge help too," Samuelsson said.

Samuelsson said he talks to his dad after games, and he'll always give him a few notes. Kjell Samuelsson is currently a scout for the Flyers.

In his final season with the U.S. National Under-18 Team, Samuelsson played with Jack Hughes, Joel Farabee, Oliver Wahlstrom, K'Andre Miller, Cole Caufield, Alex Turcotte, Spencer Knight and Matt Boldy. He said he got great development spending two seasons there.

"The [U.S. National Team Development] Program is an unbelievable place to develop players. Playing against the best players in your age group everyday makes every day a battle."

It didn't stop there, though. Samuelsson moved on to play two seasons at Western Michigan.

"That was huge for me. Moving into college and playing against older guys is big, and playing for a legendary coach like Andy Murray," Samuelsson said. "I think he taught me more details about the game than I learned at [the USNTDP], so that was huge to play for him."

Samuelsson said every game he plays, he gets more confident with the puck.

Granato said Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen will probably start in goal for Saturday's game in Boston against the Bruins.

Join Brian Koziol for pregame coverage on WGR starting at 12 p.m. ET when we'll hear from Granato and talk about Ryan Miller's retirement.

## **Sabres lose top goalie prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen to injury in loss to Bruins**

By John Vogl

The Athletic

May 1, 2021

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen has transitioned from goalie of the future to goaltender of the present because of injuries.

But the Sabres' crease curse refuses to quit.

Luukkonen left Saturday's 6-2 loss in Boston in substantial pain, getting helped to the dressing room without putting any weight on his left leg. Interim coach Don Granato said the Sabres won't have an update until Luukkonen gets examined in Buffalo.

"It's a tough day all around, and that's obviously a big one," Granato said from TD Garden. "This is a great opportunity for him to get some minutes, and now that's in question."

The Sabres prospect was making just his fourth career start and lasted only 40 minutes. Luukkonen slid left across the crease during the closing seconds of the second period, planted his left skate on the post and crumpled.

Retired goalie Martin Biron is a studio analyst for Sabres broadcasts and explained the injury during the second intermission.

"This is sometimes the way things go as a goaltender. You do everything right," Biron said on MSG Network. "As Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen was sliding into the post, we teach that. We teach, 'Go heel to post so that you don't overslide.'

"Look at his left heel going into the post, but the whole body leans over that leg, right? That has to have some kind of a release point, and when your foot is on the post, you don't have that release point. At some point when you lean over, your body's telling you, 'Can't lean any more on that leg or on that hip or knee or whatever it is.'

"You could see he was obviously in discomfort in his left leg. That's because that leg doesn't have anywhere to go. Everything was perfect. He came across to make that save. He leaned, but at some point the lean was too much for his lower body to be able to hold it."

Luukkonen, a second-round pick in 2017, made his long-awaited debut April 23 after injuries to goaltenders Carter Hutton and Linus Ullmark. Hutton has been out with a lower-body injury since March 22. Ullmark has been sidelined with a lower-body ailment since April 13 after missing nearly all of March with an injury.

Luukkonen was taking advantage of his unexpected chance. He became just the sixth goalie drafted by the Sabres to win his opening start. After watching the next game, the 22-year-old started his third in a row Saturday.

Though he fell to 1-3 with the loss to the Bruins, he has enjoyed 36-, 38- and 35-save outings.

"It's tough, especially how he played," defenseman Rasmus Dahlin said. "He's been playing really well. He's got a bright future, and it's never fun to see a goalie get injured."

Luukkonen was again doing well on a busy day before getting injured. He stopped 15 of 17 shots in the opening period and 11 of 12 in the second before heading to the trainers' room.

"He battled extremely well up to that point," Granato said.

The only healthy goalies under contract are Dustin Tokarski, who played the third period, and Michael Houser, who is on the taxi squad.

If neither Luukkonen, Ullmark nor Hutton is well enough to be at least the taxi-squad goaltender Monday when the Sabres host the Islanders, the team will have to sign or acquire another goalie. Hutton recently suffered a

setback and Ullmark is doubtful to return before the May 8 finale, though no one has been ruled out for the season.

Regardless, the Sabres could be in a dire situation for their final four games.

Houser, a career ECHL goalie, hasn't played a game anywhere since March 7, 2020. The two goalies in Rochester, Stefanos Lekkas and Billy Christopoulos, are playing on professional tryout contracts. Entering the Amerks' game Saturday, Lekkas was 0-5-1 with an .844 save percentage and 4.90 goals-against average and Christopoulos was 0-1 with a .725 save percentage and 8.06 GAA.

While the obvious short- and long-term concern is Luukkonen's health, the Sabres still have to finish the schedule. They hope their top goalie prospect will be able to join them.

"He's worked so hard and he's such a great guy off the ice," forward Riley Sheahan said. "He's been doing a great job. It's tough seeing him go down."

## **Sabres goalie Michael Houser enjoying first taste of NHL: ‘Cool experiences’**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

May 2, 2021

BUFFALO – Sabres goalie Michael Houser arrived at the visiting dressing room that night six weeks ago in Madison Square Garden sweating.

Minutes earlier, Houser, 28, had been watching the action against the New York Rangers from a suite with other members of the team’s taxi squad.

Then Carter Hutton suffered a lower-body injury less than three minutes into the game, meaning Houser, the emergency backup, had to rush downstairs and get ready.

“I had no idea, obviously, how to get down to the rink then,” Houser said of his mad scramble.

When Houser got downstairs on March 22, he quickly put on his gear – he said he can get ready in about 12 or 13 minutes – and watched the rest of the Sabres’ 5-3 loss in the dressing room. NHL rules prohibit emergency goalies from sitting on the bench.

That night marked the first of eight times Houser, who has spent most of his nine-year career in the ECHL, has dressed as either the Sabres’ emergency or regular backup.

Prior to this season, Houser, a decorated junior star with the London Knights, had never spent any time in the NHL. He played for the Cincinnati Cyclones, the Sabres’ ECHL affiliate, the last two seasons.

Houser hadn’t even signed a big league contract since his entry-level deal with the Florida Panthers expired in 2015.

But the Sabres inked Houser to a one-year NHL contract on March 19, a day before they traded goalie Jonas Johansson to the Colorado Avalanche. Then they recalled Houser from the Rochester Americans to the taxi squad. NHL teams must carry three goalies this season.

“It was exciting, for sure, I obviously wasn’t expecting it,” Houser said of his contract. “I haven’t played a hockey game this year yet, so it really wasn’t that expected.”

Incredibly, Houser hasn’t played a game since March 7, 2020 with Cincinnati, which opted out of this season. He started this year in Rochester but was stuck behind prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen and veteran Dustin Tokarski and did not play.

After Hutton was injured, Houser dressed as a regular backup for the first time March 23 in Pittsburgh, his hometown, with his parents, Bill and Monica, in the PPG Paints Arena stands.

“That was really fun,” said Houser, whose family had Penguins season tickets at the old Mellon Arena. “The very first game, you look over, you see (Sidney) Crosby warming up and all that. And that was a blast. It’s just weird, because I remember when they first came up.”

Houser has dressed as a bench backup four other times, including another game in Pittsburgh. After Hutton was hurt, goalie Linus Ullmark suffered a lower-body injury April 13.

Luukkonen suffered an undisclosed injury in Saturday afternoon’s 6-2 loss to the Boston Bruins, so Houser could back up Tokarski on Monday against the New York Islanders in KeyBank Center.

When Luukkonen departed the game after the second period, Houser was downstairs working out in TD Garden, so he simply got dressed and stayed in the locker room.

“It’s been a little bit of a weird year ... not getting any games yet,” Houser said. “But definitely cool experiences.”

The 6-foot-1, 185-pound Houser could finally play some games soon. The Amerks have four games scheduled after the Sabres' season ends Saturday. If Luukkonen is still injured, they could assign Houser to Rochester for some late-season action.

Houser's status as an elite junior goalie or his ECHL exploits haven't earned him much AHL action.

The undrafted Houser was named the Ontario Hockey League's Most Outstanding Player after a 46-win season in 2011-12. Luukkonen (2018-19) and Edmonton Oilers superstar Connor McDavid (2014-15) also won the same award.

Many teams have a prospect and a veteran with NHL experience on their AHL affiliate.

Houser has played 73 career AHL games, registering a 32-25-6 record with a 2.87 goals-against average and a .901 save percentage.

But Houser has mostly toiled in the ECHL, becoming one of the league's top netminders. In 210 career outings, he has compiled a terrific 127-57-22 mark, a 2.47 goals-against average and a .915 save percentage.

He was named the league's top goalie in 2018-19.

"Things do have to fall your way sometimes," said Houser, who attended the Sabres' development camp in 2011. "You need chances because of an injury or a call-up or what have you. I've just been kind of waiting my turn, and I'm making sure that when it does come I'm ready for it."

## **Sabres lose ugly game to Bruins, goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen to injury**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

May 1, 2021

After a solid few weeks, the Buffalo Sabres have started reminding everyone why they've occupied the NHL's basement for months.

Saturday's afternoon's ugly 6-2 setback to the Boston Bruins was their fourth consecutive loss and fifth in the last six games.

In an outing reminiscent of the Ralph Krueger era, the Sabres looked disjointed all over the ice, allowing the Bruins to throttled them.

On top of their dismal performance, rookie goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen suffered an undisclosed injury when he caught his left skate on the goal post in the waning seconds of the second period.

Interim Sabres coach Don Granato did not have an update on Luukkonen, who has started the last three games.

"That's added on to the tough day," Granato said on a Zoom call of Luukkonen's injury. "It was a tough day all around. That's obviously a big one, because this is a great opportunity for him to get some minutes and now that's in question. He battled tonight.

"Every now and then you have a tough day. Everybody had a really tough day today. (Luukkonen) was the finish."

Luukkonen, 22, was injured as he moved across the crease to stop Taylor Hall's shot. After he caught his skate on the post, he fell backwards and appeared to grab his left knee.

The Finn was helped off the TD Garden ice with the Sabres trailing 3-1. Dustin Tokarski replaced him for the third period.

The Sabres want to give Luukkonen, who underwent hip surgery two years ago, a long look as the season closes. They possibly penciled in their top goalie prospect to start three of their last four games. He has played four of the past five contests.

"He works so hard and he's such a great a guy off the ice and he's been doing a great job," Sabres center Riley Sheahan said. "Yeah, it's tough seeing him go down. He's been playing great. Especially the timing, close to the end of the season. I hope he recovers quick."

The Sabres have become woefully thin in goal. Carter Hutton and Linus Ullmark are recovering from lower-body injuries. Granato said Tuesday that Hutton had suffered a setback and Ullmark "isn't in the picture."

It seems unlikely either will be ready to play again this season.

Michael Houser, who has spent much of the season on the taxi squad, is the only other goalie in the organization on an NHL contract. Houser has never played an NHL game.

So the Sabres could rely on Tokarski, who has played 13 games this season. He allowed three goals on 14 shots in the third period Saturday as the Sabres imploded late.

Despite their struggles, the Sabres hung around. After Craig Smith scored the first of his three goals 1:21 into the game, Sheahan's short-handed breakaway goal at 12:35 tied it. It was only their second shot on goalie Jeremy Swayman, who faced just 19 all afternoon.

Sean Kuraly scored later in the first period before Patrice Bergeron extended the lead in the second.

"They were working so hard, shift in, shift out," Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin said of the Bruins. "I think us as a young group have got to learn from a team like that. Their star players work as hard as their fourth line. It's a tough team to play against."

The Sabres, who have played a more aggressive, rigid style under Granato, consistently pulled up at the blue line when they had the puck.

"So many components just didn't look like us," Granato said. "And again, that's why I say every now and then you have a tough day and you look things and say, 'Why are we complicating what should be really simple?' And that was the entire game for us. We just kept making it hard on ourselves."

"Obviously, no discredit to our opposition. They played hard – very hard and a hell of a team. But we just couldn't, for whatever reason, get to a simple game. And the shot is a perfect example. We didn't get any pucks behind them. We passed on shots we could've taken. We were too easy to play against in that regard and it was self-inflicted, a very large part of that."

Toward the end of the teams' eighth and final meeting this season, tempers flared up. Bruins pest Brad Marchand wanted to fight Dahlin after the Swede cross-checked David Pastrnak almost eight minutes into the third period.

"That was a surge – probably the biggest surge of the game for us – through the lineup and through the group, which is good," Granato said. "I do like (Dahlin) being feisty on occasion. I don't like it taking him off his game. But I don't think anybody was on their game today. So if you're not on your game, you should probably be feisty and compensate some other way."

Rookie winger Arttu Ruotsalainen scored the Sabres' other goal.

Notes: Sabres center Casey Mittelstadt registered two assists and has compiled two goals and six points over a five-game point streak. ... Luukkonen made 26 saves. ... The Sabres finished the season 1-6-1 against the Bruins. ... The Sabres allowed 46 shots and have allowed 40 or more shots in three straight games. ... The Sabres, who host the New York Islanders on Monday, have today off.

## **Sabres goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen leaves game injured**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

May 1, 2021

Buffalo Sabres goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen left this afternoon's game injured after his left skate got stuck on the goal post.

Luukkonen, 22, was injured as he moved across the crease in the waning seconds of the second period against the Boston Bruins. After the rookie caught his skate on the post, he fell backwards and appeared to grab his left knee.

The Finn was helped off the TD Garden ice. Dustin Tokarski has replaced him in net.

Update: Interim Sabres coach Don Granato did not have an update on Luukkonen following the game.

Luukkonen was playing his fourth NHL game.

The Sabres are already missing injured goalies Carter Hutton and Linus Ullmark.

Stay tuned for updates. Michael Houser, who has spent much of the season on the taxi squad, is the only other goalie in the organization on an NHL contract.

## **Drake Caggiula excited for opportunity with Sabres, moving up lineup**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

May 1, 2021

Having played for four teams in three seasons, Buffalo Sabres winger Drake Caggiula understands how fleeting opportunities can be in the NHL.

Caggiula, a prized college free agent in 2016, has bounced around since the Edmonton Oilers traded him in December 2018, playing for the Chicago Blackhawks and Arizona Coyotes before the Sabres claimed him off waivers April 9.

The North Dakota product lasted only 27 games with the Coyotes after signing a one-year contract.

Prior to Friday's practice at Warrior Ice Arena in Boston, interim Sabres coach Don Granato could see how Caggiula, 26, was enjoying his fresh chance and new teammates' company.

"He's excited in general just to have an opportunity to keep playing the game," Granato said on a Zoom call after the Sabres prepared for this afternoon's game against the Bruins. "He has a deep passion for the game and for competing. And so he's a guy that when given an opportunity, he cherishes it. He realizes every moment's an opportunity to play in the National Hockey League, to jump over the boards and be on the ice and have a jersey on. He brings that passion into every shift."

That passion has been evident in the last few contests. The 5-foot-10, 176-pound Caggiula recorded a game-high five hits while playing a season-high 15 minutes, 48 seconds in Thursday's 5-2 loss to the Bruins.

He has recorded zero points and seven shots on goal in six outings with the Sabres.

"I've been getting better and better as the games have gone on," Caggiula said following Thursday's contest. "I'm feeling confident and enjoying coming to the rink again. I think that's a big thing for me is loving what I do and playing the game with passion. It's been a good reset for me. I've been happy with the way I've been playing."

"I'd like a few more bounces and maybe a couple goals here or there, but the opportunities are there, it's just a matter of time before it goes in the net for me."

After playing on the fourth line for five games, Granato promoted Caggiula to right wing beside center Dylan Cozens and Anders Bjork on Thursday.

"He's not on the big side but he's feisty and finished a lot of hits last night," said Granato, who coached Caggiula with Chicago. "It impacted – they knew who he was, the other team."

Granato said he likes how Cozens and Bjork "are progressively gaining chemistry, a rhythm together." Caggiula, Granato said, offers his linemates "some fiery competitiveness."

"It's a good fit," he said. "We know Dylan is an ultra competitor, and to give him a partner in that regard is something we wanted to look at. We liked it last night, but yet it's a progression. But I think they can keep getting better. They looked better today in practice."

After the Sabres claimed Caggiula, he flew commercial to Buffalo, meaning he had to follow NHL COVID-19 protocols and quarantine. He played his first game April 20 having only skated on his own and participated in one morning skate.

"There was no easing into it, really," Caggiula said. "I had a couple skates by myself after quarantine was done and hopped right into games."

Moving Caggiula up forced Granato to put Tage Thompson, who had been playing right wing with center Casey Mittelstadt and Rasmus Asplund, beside fourth-line center Riley Sheahan and Tobias Rieder.

Thompson, 23, played a season-low 7 minutes, 42 seconds Thursday. Granato kept him on the second power-play unit.

"I think he's dialed in there and is effective there and can impact that power play," Granato said. "But Caggiula jumped into that spot and unfortunately for Tague he went to a spot with fewer minutes."

Thompson has compiled zero goals, one assist and a minus-6 rating in his last seven games. His late cross-checking penalty in Tuesday's 3-1 to the New York Rangers irked his coach. Granato, however, said he did not demote Thompson because of that infraction.

—

Granato said goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen will likely start this afternoon's game at TD Garden, his third straight nod.

In his first three NHL outings, Luukkonen, 22, has compiled 1-2-0 record with a 3.74 goals-against average and a .908 save percentage.

## **Bruins dominate Sabres, hand Buffalo fourth straight loss**

By Adam Unger

WKBW

May 1, 2021

BOSTON (WKBW) — The Buffalo Sabres dropped their fourth straight contest on Saturday. They were outplayed from start to finish by the Boston Bruins in a 6-2 loss.

The lopsided tally was a product of the shot chart: the Bruins had 43 shots on goal. Craig Smith contributed a hat trick for Boston.

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen left in the third period. Dustin Tokarski made 9 saves on 11 shots to close out the game.

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Local mental health professionals say the stigma around seeking help is a problem in communities of color  
The Sabres lost seven of their eight meetings with the Bruins. They return home to face the New York Islanders on Monday.

## **Hamilton: Ryan Miller's love for Buffalo endures long after his time with Sabres**

By Paul Hamilton

WGRZ

April 30, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — After 11 seasons in Buffalo, it was hard to imagine a Sabres team without Ryan Miller and Thomas Vanek.

Both players loved the City of Buffalo and the fans that came to cheer them on, but they both heard Darcy Regier talk about the pain the organization was going to have to endure to rebuild and both were at an age where they couldn't waste years of their careers.

Miller got traded in February of 2014. It was a season where the Sabres only had 52 points going 21-51-10. Miller would've preferred to stay in Buffalo and play for a team poised to win the Stanley Cup, but the Sabres were the worst team in the NHL and Miller was smart enough to see where this was all going. Here we are in 2021 and the Sabres are still the worst team in the NHL.

Miller announced his retirement on Thursday and spoke about how Buffalo will always be in his heart. He talked about growing up here and learning about life on your own. He spoke about the fans so many times and how he and his teammates drew energy from their support.

The fire always raged in Miller to be the best, and it's pretty surprising that in his first two full seasons in the NHL, he played in 18 playoff games and 16 playoff games. In the 14 years after that, he played in 23 playoff games combined.

There's so much to remember about Ryan Miller. I can remember seeing him on stage at Kleinhans Music Hall grabbing his guitar and playing with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. I can remember him dressing up to different themes and walking the runway with his teammates like models for his Steadfast Foundation.

But the memory I will never, ever forget is when I returned to practice after my wife had passed away. Ryan Miller saw me, and with tears in his eyes, he gave me a huge hug. This man was a person first, and there is nothing fake about him.

On the ice I remember his first NHL game against the New Jersey Devils. Miller lost the game, giving up four goals and was so upset about it.

I remember how good he was taking the Sabres to the Eastern Conference Finals against the Carolina Hurricanes. The Sabres don't get there without his stellar goaltending, and even with all the injuries, he almost helped them pull out Game 7 in Raleigh, which would've advanced them to the Stanley Cup Finals against the Edmonton Oilers.

Could Miller be difficult? Absolutely, he cared, and losses were unacceptable to him. He also could be the guy that you could stand at his locker and have a conversation about almost anything. He is very intelligent and knows what's going on in our world. This man cared about his teammates and he cares about people.

I remember him standing in the locker room in Boston after Milan Lucic took a cheap shot at him in the faceoff circle. Miller had to leave the game after having his mask knocked clear off, and he ripped into Lucic like I've never seen before. Don't forget, I'm live in the locker room on the Postgame and Miller went berserk.

It's totally unacceptable that the Sabres Hall of Fame no longer exists. The committee that used to make the selections is gone and the organization doesn't seem to care. That means Miller, Rob Ray, Vanek, Jason Pominville, Danny Briere and Chris Drury will never get into the team's Hall of Fame until the relationship with alumni improves.

Miller hasn't forgotten about Buffalo, and he plans on bringing his son here, to see where his dad started his career. It's a place he cares for very much.

## **Bruins defeat Sabres, strengthen hold in East Division**

By Matt Kalman

NHL.com

May 1, 2021

BOSTON -- The Boston Bruins strengthened their hold on a Stanley Cup Playoff position in the MassMutual East Division with a 6-2 win against the Buffalo Sabres at TD Garden on Saturday.

The Bruins (30-14-6) are eight points in front of the fifth-place New York Rangers for the last of four berths in the eight-team division.

Craig Smith scored a hat trick, Jeremy Swayman made 17 saves, and David Krejci had three assists for Boston, which won its third straight game and ninth in its past 11.

"It's that time of year where you're focusing internally and where your game is at," Smith said. "I think the halfway mark ... is kind of a report card, and I thought everybody kind of made a good switch. If you didn't like where you were, didn't like how you were playing, I think there were some changes that you could make. And I think that we've done that."

Sabres goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen allowed three goals on 29 shots through two periods before leaving with an injury.

Dustin Tokarski made 11 saves in relief for the Sabres (13-32-7), who have lost four consecutive games, including 5-2 here Thursday. They were outshot 43-19, 17-4 in the first period, and lost to Boston for the seventh time in eight games this season.

"It's added on to the tough day," Buffalo coach Don Granato said. "That's obviously a big one. This is a great opportunity for him to get some minutes and now that's in question. Every now and then you have a really tough day. Everybody had a really tough day today. His [injury] was the finish, but he battled extremely well up to that point."

Smith gave the Bruins a 1-0 lead with a tap-in from the top of the crease at 1:21 of the first. Riley Sheahan's shorthanded goal at 12:35 tied it 1-1.

Sean Kuraly put Boston ahead 2-1 at 16:38 when he scored his first goal in 31 games, since Feb. 5.

"It feels good," Kuraly said. "That's the name of the game, I guess. There's a lot of other things you try to take pride in, but at the end of the day, putting the puck in the net feels pretty good."

Patrice Bergeron scored at 5:36 of the second period to give the Bruins a 3-1 lead. Nick Ritchie made it 4-1 at 3:18 of the third period, and Smith extended it to 5-1 at 5:31.

"We didn't play our game, really," Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin said. "They came out really hard, they needed these points and they [played] a really good game. They don't give us anything, so I think a little bit of frustration came through and we slipped away from our game."

Arttu Ruotsalainen scored for Buffalo at 7:02 to make it 5-2.

Smith completed his second NHL hat trick during a power play at 14:05 with a redirection of Krejci's pass for a 6-2 Bruins lead.

"It was great," Smith said. "Krejci told me before our shift, he goes, 'Just get your stick down, I'm going to try to shoot it at you every time.' It just happened to be the first one he shot, so I was just laughing with him the whole time. It was cool seeing the hats fly, I don't get to see it very often for myself."

NOTES: Buffalo forward Casey Mittelstadt had two assists to extend his point streak to five games (two goals, four assists). ... Sheahan's goal was the fifth shorthanded by the Sabres this season and sixth allowed by the Bruins. ... Boston forwards Karson Kuhlman and Jake DeBrusk replaced Chris Wagner (undisclosed) and Trent

Frederic (healthy scratch). Kuhlman had a game-high six shots on goal. ... The Pittsburgh Penguins, Washington Capitals and New York Islanders have clinched berths in the East Division.

## 'He was just Ryan' | Miller's impact at Roswell still felt 7 years later

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

May 2, 2021

Robin Nusbaum grew accustomed to receiving spur-of-the-moment texts from Ryan Miller during his tenure in Buffalo. Nusbaum coordinated events for the Courage of Carly Fund (then known as Carly's Club), the pediatric program at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center.

Miller, at the time as much a household name as any in Western New York, would text Nusbaum on the occasional day off and ask to come visit the hospital. The relationship worked both ways. Nusbaum could reach out to Miller for any of Carly's Club's weekly events to gauge his availability.

"He never told me this, but I think he always felt bad if he couldn't do it," Nusbaum said. "He felt so upset when he had a conflict or couldn't provide when we may have said, 'Oh, we've got so and so here on this day,' and he couldn't make it to the hospital. I think he felt really bad.

"He wanted to be there all the time if he could have been."

The partnership between Miller's Steadfast Foundation and Carly's Club was no secret during his tenure in Buffalo. He donated a suite to patients from Roswell for every Sabres home game and was recognized with the NHL Foundation Player Award in 2010.

But the extent of Miller's involvement goes beyond the public sphere. Nusbaum recalls a quiet, somewhat introverted goaltender who first reached out to her during his early days in Buffalo evolving into a regular presence who could show himself around the hospital without her assistance.

"He was just Ryan," she said. "He was so down to Earth, and he would just chat like a normal guy to all of the kids and all their parents. They started to get to know him more as Ryan the person rather than Ryan the goalie or Ryan the hockey player. It was really unique to see that because they had personal stories, they had personal relationships. They had a unique connection that a lot of people maybe weren't privy to.

"He was just a really cool guy that wanted to come by and visit the hospital. In a way, he just happened to be a really awesome hockey player."

The relationships formed during his 12 years continue to resonate more than seven years after his final game with the Sabres. Jack Frost Jr. arrived home Thursday and quickly learned from his son, Jack III, that Miller had announced he would retire from the NHL at the end of this season.

Jack III and his sister, Sydney, both received bone marrow transplants at Roswell around the time they met Miller in the Sabres dressing room late in his tenure with the team. When Jack Jr. estimates they met the goaltender a half dozen times, Jack III corrects him: "It was seven."

"When they're at their lowest point and they're sick and they've had everything that they've been through, to see one of their heroes and meet them meant the world to these kids," Jack Jr. said. "It picked up their spirits. They were laughing, they were giggling.

"It took them back to a time when they weren't sick. For that hour or two, they weren't sick anymore. They were just normal kids with a great guy."

Jack Jr. recalled one visit to the hospital from Miller and his wife, Noureen DeWulf. Jack III and Sydney followed Miller to every room in the pediatric wing. Their father apologized afterward.

"He goes, 'No problem, I enjoyed it,'" Jack Jr. said. "After that he sat down and played NHL with my son on Xbox."

Monica Szafranski estimates her son, Jimmy, had over a hundred interactions with Miller between his diagnosis with osteosarcoma in 2007 and his passing in January 2011. The first conversation was one-on-one and lasted 45

minutes. Jimmy teased Miller about his and the Sabres' recent performance, setting a precedent for their interactions over the coming years.

How'd I do last night? I did good? Oh, OK Jimmy, thanks for the approval.

"It was pretty amazing actually only because if you didn't know who Ryan was, you would think he was just a normal person," Szafranski said. "He didn't have a persona around him that he was trying to impress somebody or just do it because it was part of the status quo of his job. He took the time for each individual child."

Jimmy Szafranski wears a Ryan Miller jersey to drop the puck at Hockey Fights Cancer Night in 2010. Bill Wippert

Szafranski says she could build a shrine with all the memorabilia Jimmy was gifted over the years: items from Michigan State, game-worn jerseys, and signed gear from the Olympics and the Winter Classic included. Miller donated his suite exclusively to Jimmy and his family for his 16th birthday, including a visit from his father, Dean. Szafranski said she remains in touch with Dean Miller to this day.

Miller said Thursday that he felt like he owed something to the people of Buffalo during his time with the Sabres. The time he gave and relationships he formed were in part a way to reciprocate the energy and opportunity the city had given him. He wished for Buffalo to capture that playoff-type energy again in the near future.

Those he impacted in Western New York have wishes for him, too.

"Just keep doing what you're doing because it means the world to the kids," Frost said. "And it means a lot to the parents too, to see their kids let loose and get back to just being normal kids and not have to worry about being sick. Just stuff like that that he does. I hope he never quits doing that because it's people like him that restores your faith in humanity."

"Just always stay true to himself like he has been since we've known him," added Szafranski. "He's an amazing man and he's very much appreciated for everything he did for us both at and away from the hospital. I don't know that I can ever thank him enough for the memories that I was able to have with Jimmy because of their thoughtfulness."

## 5 Takeaways | Sabres face 'tough day all around' in road loss to Bruins

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

May 1, 2021

Buffalo Sabres goaltender Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen left Saturday afternoon's game against the Boston Bruins after the second period with what appeared to be a lower-body injury.

Luukkonen had made 26 saves on 29 shots to that point, but the Bruins came on strong in the third period to win 6-2 at TD Garden.

Sabres interim coach Don Granato said he wouldn't have an update on Luukkonen's status until the team returns to Buffalo.

Craig Smith recorded a hat trick for Boston. Sean Kuraly, Patrice Bergeron and Nick Ritchie also scored for the Bruins. Jeremy Swayman made 17 saves.

Riley Sheahan scored shorthanded for Buffalo and Arttu Ruotsalainen scored the fifth goal of his career.

"A lot of goals came from self-inflicted mistakes and we weren't on our game," Sheahan said. "They were bearing down. Just the little battles and little things that you do to win games, we weren't doing. I guess we got it handed to us."

Buffalo closes out their season series with Boston with a record of 1-6-1.

Here are a few takeaways from the game:

### 1. Luukkonen's injury adds to tough day overall

Granato said after Thursday's game that development will be a major focus for the rest of the season. In net, the organization was giving Luukkonen a great chance to gain NHL experience.

The 22-year-old rookie made his NHL debut on April 23 and had started four of Buffalo's five games since.

That plan may now be derailed because of the injury.

"That's added on to the tough day," Granato said. "It was a tough day all around and that's obviously a big one because this is a great opportunity for him to get some minutes and now that's in question. He battled tonight. Like I said, every now and then you have a really tough day. Everybody had a really tough day today."

Dustin Tokarski came in to start the third period and stopped 11 of 14 shots.

### 2. Early pressure from Boston leads to early deficit

Boston got off to a fast start and had the Sabres on their heels early. Smith's goal at the 1:21 mark of the first period set the tone and then they closed out the period with a goal from Kuraly.

"They played a real simple game and we struggled to play, to simplify anything today," Granato said.

"...That's why I say every now and then, you have a tough day and you just look at things. It's like, 'Why are we complicating what should be really simple?' And that was the entire game for us. We just kept making it hard on ourselves. "

Up 3-1 heading into the third, the Bruins wasted no time in challenging Tokarski. They scored twice on seven shots in the first 5:31 of the final period.

"They were working so hard shift in and shift out," defenseman Rasmus Dahlin said. "As a young group, we've gotta learn from a team like that. Their star players work as hard as their fourth line. It's a tough team to play against and definitely something to learn about."

The Bruins outshot Buffalo 17-4 in the first 20 minutes and 43-19 overall.

"No discredit to our opposition, they played hard - very hard and a hell of a team, but we just couldn't, for whatever reason get to a simple game," Granato said.

"The shot [total] is a perfect example. We didn't get any pucks behind them. We passed on shots we could have taken. We were too easy to play against in that regard. And it was self-inflicted, a very large part of that."

### 3. Sheahan's shorty is one for the highlight reel

The timing was just right for the Sabres to score their fifth shorthanded goal of the season. With 1 second remaining on a penalty to Sheahan, the Sabres committed another penalty when Mattias Samuelsson was called for tripping.

On the ensuing faceoff in the Buffalo zone, Casey Mittelstadt won the draw and defenseman Jacob Bryson sent the puck up the ice to Sheahan, who had just stepped out of the box. Sheahan then skated in on a breakaway to net his fourth goal of the year.

### 4. Dahlin's 'feistiness' is welcome

The game got pretty chippy at times, specifically at the midway point of the third period.

With 12:29 left in regulation, David Pastrnak crashed into the net after taking a hit from Dahlin. The collision sent Tokarski into the back of the net.

On the next shift they faced each other, Dahlin hit Pastrnak behind the net, drew the attention of Brad Marchand and everyone then paired up. Although gloves were dropped, no real punches were thrown and the Sabres ended up with a power play.

Dahlin wound up in the box for cross checking while Marchand and Pastrnak were each called for roughing.

"It's always a physical game," Dahlin said. "They're good team so they don't give us a lot. You know, it's, it's kind of frustrating, but they're good team for sure."

Dahlin stepping up in those situations is a welcome sight for Granato.

"I do like him being feisty on occasion," he said. "I don't like it to take them off their game, but I don't think anybody was on their game today. So if you're not on your game, you should probably be feisty and compensate some other ways so that was fine with me."

### 5. Final homestand coming up

The Sabres will now head home to prepare for the last week of the season. Buffalo will play host to the New York Islanders on Monday and Tuesday at KeyBank Center for the final home games of 2020-21.

Buffalo will close out the campaign on the road against Pittsburgh on Thursday and Saturday.

Bonus: Donate today to Bald For Bucks

Dan Dunleavy, Martin Biron and Rochester Americans assistant coach Mike Weber went "Bald For Bucks" during Saturday's broadcast on MSG.

Donate \$50 or more from now until May 2 to receive a limited-edition Buffalo Sabres Bald for Bucks T-shirt. Click [here](#) for full details.

## **At The Final Horn: Sabres 2 - Bruins 6**

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

May 1, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres were outscored 3-1 in the third period Saturday afternoon in their 6-2 loss to the Boston Bruins at TD Garden.

Craig Smith scored twice for Boston in the third to complete a hat trick. Sean Kuraly, Patrice Bergeron and Nick Ritchie also scored for the Bruins.

Riley Sheahan and Arttu Ruotsalainen tallied for Buffalo.

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen made 26 saves on 29 shots through two periods.

In the final 15 seconds of the second period, while tracking the play on the penalty kill, Luukkonen sustained a lower-body injury and had to be assisted off the ice when the horn sounded.

Dustin Tokarski replaced him in net and stopped 11 of the 14 shots he faced.

Jeremy Swayman made 17 saves to earn the win for the Bruins.

Buffalo's power play finished the game 0-for-2 while the penalty kill was 3-for-4. Sheahan's goal came while shorthanded.

What happened

Boston took an early lead just 1:21 into the game. After some quick puck movement, David Krejci sent the puck to the front of the net and Smith redirected the pass in to open the scoring.

Stepping out of the penalty box with Buffalo still on the penalty kill with 7:25 remaining in the first, Sheahan collected a clearing effort and skated in on a breakaway. He buried the shot for Buffalo's fifth shorthanded goal of 2020-21.

Boston regained the lead with 3:22 left in the opening period when Kuraly knocked in a rebound in tight.

Then at the 5:36 mark of the second, after stopping an initial shot, Luukkonen couldn't find the rebound and Bergeron, parked right in front, put the puck in to make it 3-1.

Tokarski came in for the third period and Boston scored on their second shot of the period. Gr's slap shot from the top of the left faceoff circle at the 3:18 mark was deflected by Ritchie and extended Boston's lead to three.

Smith, uncovered in front, scored again 5:31 into the third when he took a quick shot off a feed from Mike Reilly.

Ruotsalainen cut Boston's lead to three at the 7:02 mark when he was able to jam in a loose puck in front under Swayman's pad for his fifth goal this year.

And with 5:55 left, Smith completed the hat trick with a deflection in front while on the power play to make it 6-2.

Roll the highlight film

Here's Sheahan's shorthanded marker, the fourth such goal of his career:

Worth mentioning

Dan Dunleavy, Martin Biron and Rochester Americans assistant coach Mike Weber went "Bald For Bucks" during Saturday's broadcast on MSG.

Donate \$50 or more from now until May 2 to receive a limited-edition Buffalo Sabres Bald for Bucks T-shirt. Click here for full details.

### Coming up

Buffalo will return home for the final two home games of the season. They'll play the New York Islanders on Monday and Tuesday.

Faceoff from KeyBank Center on Monday is set for 7 p.m. on MSG and WGR 550. Pregame coverage on MSG begins at 6:30.

## Morning Skate Report | Sabres, Bruins face off at 1 p.m.

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

May 1, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres are set to face the Boston Bruins for the final time of the 2020-21 season this afternoon.

Here's how the team lined up for practice on Friday, which matched what Sabres interim coach Don Granato drew up during Thursday's game against the Bruins:

53 Jeff Skinner - 23 Sam Reinhart - 68 Victor Olofsson  
74 Rasmus Asplund - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 25 Arttu Ruotsalainen  
96 Anders Bjork - 24 Dylan Cozens - 91 Drake Caggiula  
13 Tobias Rieder - 15 Riley Sheahan - 72 Tage Thompson

26 Rasmus Dahlin - 10 Henri Jokiharju  
54 Mattias Samuelsson - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen  
78 Jacob Bryson - 3 William Borgen  
44 Matt Irwin / 88 Brandon Davidson - 33 Colin Miller

1 Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen  
31 Dustin Tokarski

Thursday marked the first time Caggiula skated on a line with Bjork and Cozens. Ruotsalainen had previously been on the line. The new trio combined for six shots on goal and seven hits.

"Dylan and Anders are progressively gaining chemistry, or rhythm, together," Granato said Friday. "...Drake gives them some fiery competitiveness. It's a potential for real good chemistry as well.

"...I think it's a good fit. We know Dylan is an ultra competitor so to give him a partner in that regard is something we wanted to look at. We liked it. We liked it [Thursday] night. Again it's a progression, but I think they'll keep getting better, and they looked better [Friday] in practice even."

Cozens has seven assists in 11 games dating back to April 11, which ranks second among rookies during that span. His three assists in six contests against Boston lead the team.

Faceoff is set for 1 p.m. on MSG and WGR 550 with pregame coverage starting at 12:30 on MSG.

Luukkonen expected back between the pipes  
Granato said Friday that he was "leaning toward" starting Luukkonen against the Bruins this afternoon. Luukkonen has started three of Buffalo's last four games since making his NHL debut on April 23.

He's 1-2-0 with a 3.74 goals-against average and a .908 save percentage to start his career.

Reinhart looks to stay hot in May

Sam Reinhart finished the month of April with 15 points (10+5) in 16 games, leading the team in both goals and points.

He tied for fifth in the NHL with 10 goals during the month of April and was tied for 21st in the NHL in points over the course of the month. Brad Marchand and Artemi Panarin each had 24 points to lead the league.

Over the last four games, Reinhart is on a four-game goal streak and he has scored six of Buffalo's 12 total goals in that time, including a hat trick against the Bruins on April 23.

Marty and Dan going Bald For Bucks

The Sabres are once again partnering with Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center and their Bald For Bucks initiative to raise funds for critical cancer research and patient-care programs.

During today's broadcast, Dan Dunleavy and Martin Biron will have their heads shaved in support of the initiative. Amerks assistant coach Mike Weber, who was one of the first Sabres players to participate in Bald For Bucks, is having his head shaved as well.

Donate \$50 or more from now until May 2 to receive a limited-edition Buffalo Sabres Bald for Bucks T-shirt. [Click here for full details and to donate.](#)

## **Samuelsson attributes mature game to NHL upbringing**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

April 30, 2021

Mattias Samuelsson still gets a call from his father, Kjell, after games with pointers on how he played. It's a unique perspective considering Kjell's resume, which includes nearly 1,000 NHL games between the regular season and playoffs along with two decades of professional coaching.

Sabres interim coach Don Granato believes it's contributed to the mature game exhibited by the 21-year-old defenseman.

"He has a calm to him that's way beyond his years, but if you knew his father you would understand why," Granato said. "He's a player that benefitted from having a father that was a very good NHL player. Also has stayed in the business, he's a scout for Philadelphia currently. I know that helps.

"He's been around the game since he was a kid. He's been in elite-level conversations since he was a kid. This is, you can see, it's pretty second nature for him because he does have a really nice calm to him in the context of a pretty competitive environment."

Granato has given Samuelsson a chance to acclimate his steady, physical game to the NHL with consistent ice time during this final stretch of the season. Samuelsson skated 22:16 against the Bruins on Thursday, his highest total through seven NHL games and second highest on the team behind fellow 21-year-old Rasmus Dahlin (23:33).

Samuelsson has been a quick learner at various levels to this point. He was selected to wear a letter as a sophomore at Western Michigan University, a rare distinction. He progressed steadily this season as a rookie in Rochester to earn the recall to Buffalo.

Part of it, he says, can be attributed to his upbringing. Kjell has worked in the Philadelphia Flyers organization grew up for all of Mattias' life, giving him chance to share the ice with pro players throughout his development.

"I think that was a huge help, too," Samuelsson said. "My dad's taught me a lot."

A learning moment for Dahlin, Jokiharju

Dahlin and Henri Jokiharju have been given top-pair responsibilities during the past month both in terms of ice time and matchups. With the Sabres' schedule, that has meant seeing the likes of Sidney Crosby, Alex Ovechkin, or Patrice Bergeron on an every-other-day basis.

The young duo has handled it admirably. Dahlin is tied for 10th among NHL defensemen with 10 points since April 1 and leads the Sabres in even-strength ice time per game in that span (19:36). They had a teaching moment Thursday, however, on a late goal by Taylor Hall.

With the Sabres trailing by one goal and less than four minutes to play, David Krejci deked by Dahlin on a rush as the defenseman stepped up at the blue line. Jokiharju stepped across and took a diving swipe at the puck, but Krejci pulled it back and delivered a pass to Hall for an easy tap-in.

"Both Dahls and Joki made desperation plays which were uncharacteristic for them through the first 56 minutes," Granato said. "But with four minutes left, they felt a different type of pressure late down a goal and they were just too desperate to defend. They were too aggressive to defend and they lost calm, they lost patience. ... They know that."

Granato "leaning toward" Luukkonen for Saturday

Granato said he expects rookie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen to start in goal against the Bruins on Saturday afternoon. Luukkonen has started three of Buffalo's last four games.

Friday's practice

Here's how the Sabres lined up in Boston:

53 Jeff Skinner - 23 Sam Reinhart - 68 Victor Olofsson  
74 Rasmus Asplund - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 25 Arttu Ruotsalainen  
96 Anders Bjork - 24 Dylan Cozens - 91 Drake Caggiula  
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