



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Sabres stalling with second-period slides

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

March 18, 2013

MONTREAL — It's a cliché every hockey coach uses: Get your team to play a full 60 minutes. The teams that do it, like the Montreal Canadiens, rocket to the top of the standings.

The ones that don't (see Sabres, Buffalo) get their coach fired, and show little improvement under the replacement with just two regulation wins in his 12 games.

But if you think interim coach Ron Rolston is completely stoic in the face of trouble, you didn't see the timeout he called Sunday night in Washington or the clenched jaw he showed to reporters after a 5-3 defeat that dropped Buffalo to 14th in the Eastern Conference and 29th in the NHL.

For the second straight day, the Sabres gave up three goals in the second period — extending their NHL-leading total to 40. All three came in less than six minutes and the last two came in 43 seconds. Rolston called a timeout and aired out his club in full view of others for the first time since he took over Feb. 21.

Following the game, Rolston bristled when asked if he considered a timeout even sooner.

“There's some times in the game where the guys have to collect themselves,” Rolston said. “We've got to have a team that can do that in a hockey game. If I had to call a timeout every time something went bad, I wouldn't have enough. There's times that guys have to compose themselves and you've got to be able to throw guys over the boards and be able to go out there and settle the game down and get the momentum back.”

The Sabres don't do that at all. They had plenty to ponder Monday as they took a CBA-mandated day off in advance of their game against the Habs here tonight in Bell Centre.

Buffalo has given up three or more goals in eight its last nine games. After struggling in starts when Rolston took over, they've reverted back to their under-Lindy-Ruff pattern of falling apart in the middle 20 minutes. The Sabres' game is fits and starts. A good period here, a good one there. Rarely two in a row.

When things go bad, panic sets in and is hard to stop.

“It's an emotional game and sometimes you get caught up in the emotion,” said Jason Pominville. “Again, our second period. We give up a goal and we give up another goal in 45 seconds, basically the same shift. Talk about momentum switch. It just can't happen.”

Pominville certainly bears responsibility as well. He skated right by Alexander Ovechkin and allowed the Capitals sniper to score after 19 seconds and put the Sabres in an early hole.

“It’s tough,” Pominville said. “Van [Thomas Vanek] tries to go in the lane. I tried to hop behind and get my stick in there. We lost the draw and in a moment it was in the back of our net. Everyone wanted to do good things but it just happened so quick there’s not much you can do.”

“We didn’t execute on the play,” Rolston said pointedly. “First of all, you can’t lose the draw that clean. And secondly we didn’t have the execution we need to on the play.”

Whether it’s a lack of a forecheck from forwards not skating hard, poor work out of the defensive zone thanks to bad passes by defensemen or forwards creating too great a gap, or poor goaltending of late by Ryan Miller, the Sabres have found new ways to give away points.

Now, in an odd quirk of the schedule, they play here twice in three games. They return to Bell Centre for a game Saturday night after hosting Toronto on Thursday. Meeting the Canadiens right now is terrible timing.

Montreal is 19-5-4 overall, including 9-3-2 at home. The Habs have won five straight games and are a stunning 13-1-3 in their last 17. From 15th in the East last year, they’ve rocketed to second.

The Sabres still insist they’re close, as evidenced by 11 one-goal losses. But the margin is thin almost every night in the NHL and that stat simply proves they’re not good enough. Tiny lapses almost every night make the difference.

“Again a second period put us behind the 8-ball,” Pominville said. “As much as I want to say we battled back and gave ourselves a chance at the end, it’s frustrating to say that every night and end up on the losing side of things.”

...

The Sabres announced the March 31 game against Boston and the April 7 game against New Jersey, both in First Niagara Center, have been moved from 7 p.m. to 7:30 to accommodate the NBC Sports Network. The Boston game still will be televised locally by MSG, while the visit by the Devils will not.

The Sabres need new eyes

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 18, 2013

Montreal, QC (WGR 550) -- With the Sabres taking the day off mandated by the Collective Bargaining Agreement, today would be a good day to discuss where I feel this franchise needs to go as we approach the April 3rd trade deadline.

The Sabres are the second worst team in the National Hockey League and quite frankly they're there on merit. The play like it and deserve to be there.

Many higher ups in the organization are pawning this season off as a fluke. They look at this team, think it's very talented and should and will be better. If that thinking doesn't change it's a HUGE MISTAKE!

When Chris Drury and Daniel Briere were allowed to leave to organization it vaulted players like Jason Pominville, Paul Gaustad and Derek Roy into positions that they weren't good enough to fill.

Pominville is the Sabres number one on right winger. At best he should be a number two. The only first line player this team has or has had since those departures is Thomas Vanek.

Both Cody Hodgson and Tyler Ennis I look at as number two or three centers, with potential to be better.

Drew Stafford is a second line winger that plays like a fourth line winger on most nights.

Steve Ott, even with as much heart as he shows would be a solid third line choice. Ville Leino is a third liner, Marcus Foligno is a third liner with potential to move up.

Brian Flynn to me is a young Jason Pominville. I don't know where his potential lies. He's a great find by this organization out of Maine. He's always working and plays a very smart game. He scored 16 goals in Rochester and in the early going has shown a touch here. I think he could be a top six forward in this league, but let's see where it goes.

Kevin Porter is an AHL player who can fill in at the NHL level. One of the reasons I feel this organization needs fresh eyes is this issue.

In the beginning of the season the third center position was addressed publically like this, maybe Leino or Ott could move to center or maybe Grigorenko can play at 18. Woops, that's not looking good so let's bring back a guy who's been washed up for at least three years in Jochen Hecht. It's still not working so now we'll turn to a guy who belongs in the AHL.

To me, this right here tells me it's time for Darcy Regier to move on. This organization is begging for a hockey man that has complete control. A man who can say yes he wants to keep this player and no he doesn't want this one. In his career here Regier gets married to his players and it's not the way to win a championship.

The first move between now and the trading deadline is to trade Pominville. He has always been a good scorer and responsible on defense. He's not a rah, rah guy and is not what I would want in a captain, but this season by far has been his worst as a Sabre. His defense has been way below average and he's often caught standing around. On the Caps first goal off a faceoff by Ovechkin, he skated right by him and then said after the game that the play happened to fast to defense it. I will steal this from the Bulldog, Pominville looks like he's checked out. I'm not saying he doesn't care and I don't think his on ice play is intentional. I just think he doesn't know what to do or what to say anymore. He's the captain and he knows he has no answers to how to get his teammates going. In my opinion, his replacement may already be here in Flynn so let him go at the deadline.

As bad as this team is, nothing should be off the table. I'm not thrilled with trading the kids because I think some good ones are on their way, but if a team wants to talk Miller, Vanek, Leopold, Regehr or Leino, I'm in.

A Vanek trade would have to bring me supreme value because goal scorers don't grow on trees, but if you want to make a great offer fine, let's go.

I like much of what I've seen from Ron Rolston. It's obvious nobody can coach this team as is. The new eyes has to hire the coach. If it's Rolston fine, if it's his guy, fine, but the trade deadline to me means very little without new hockey eyes on this organization.

Sabres' Myers hoping defense-first philosophy will turn around season

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 19, 2013

BUFFALO – The Sabres' coaching staff recently conveyed a straightforward message to Tyler Myers, their struggling franchise defenseman.

“They don't care if I only get one more point the whole year,” Myers said Friday. “As long as my defensive game is good and where it needs to be, then they'll be happy. Obviously, I know I can bring more to the table. It's just a matter of doing the right things first and then finding that balance.”

My, times have changed.

Myers compiled 11 goals and 48 points three years ago during a dynamic rookie campaign. Back then, the slick youngster was a world-class puck-rusher and strong in his own end.

Twenty goals and 60 or even 70 points, gold standards for a superstar defenseman, seemed likely someday. So did a Norris Trophy.

These days, however, Myers is simply trying to climb out of a season-long slump. For now, offense has mostly taken a backseat as he's concentrating on cleaning up his defensive play beside new partner Christian Ehrhoff.

Clearly, the 23-year-old Myers has taken the staff's words to heart. Myers has a career-long nine-game point drought entering tonight's contest in Montreal against the Canadiens.

But Myers, a minus-7, believes he's improving, saying Friday he's “pretty close, if not there in most part.” Slowly, his confidence looks to be returning.

Myers, who has only three goals and four points in 27 games, is no longer a tire fire in his own zone. He's settling down, playing a calmer style than in January and early February, when he was scratched twice. He has played more than 20 minutes eight times during his point drought.

“I've really focused on my defensive game,” Myers said Friday. “I've put all my thought process and preparation into the D-zone. Even coming off when I sat, I feel like the D-zone has really been my biggest improvement throughout the last few weeks here. So it's just a matter of staying consistent with that.”

When Myers is fully comfortable, he'll begin rushing the puck more frequently. Then perhaps his offense will reappear.

He pinched twice from the point late in Sunday's 5-3 loss in Washington. The first drew a penalty. The other nearly created the tying goal.

"I feel like I've started to learn when to make my jumps again," Myers said. "It's been a lot better. It's just a matter of making sure I keep improving. ... It's just mental preparation."

He added: "It's just a matter of finding the moment to go and not taking that unnecessary risk that might get us in trouble."

Interim Sabres coach Ron Rolston said Friday he wants Myers to "make the game easy on himself" and "put himself in good positions both to help us defensively and offensively."

"From that he can just continue to build on his confidence, and I think you're seeing that with the puck," Rolston said. "He's making strong plays with the puck now. His offensive blue line work is getting there."

Myers said about Rolston: "He's been really positive with me. We haven't had too many in-depth conversations as of late. I think as long as I keep focusing on my defense he'll be happy."

Incredibly, Myers has started the last three seasons wretchedly, something he's cognizant must stop.

Myers was probably the NHL's worst defenseman early in 2010-11, accumulating a stunning minus-15 rating at one point. The pressure to duplicate his Calder Trophy season overwhelmed him. He climbed out of his massive rut slowly, though, reaching his rookie form by late in the season.

He was scratched once in November last season and up-and-down throughout.

This season, the first year in a seven-year, \$38.5 million contract, former coach Lindy Ruff benched him twice when he was a minus-9 in a six-game stretch.

"It's something I have to address," Myers said about his poor starts. "I think the biggest thing and the reasoning behind it is I want to do so much coming into a season, that I want to help the team so much that I end up taking a lot more risks than I should."

"I think mentally I have to look at just relaxing coming into a year, making sure I'm ready physically with my strength and conditioning working with our strength guy here. It's going to help me that much more."

"I think just coming in with the mental side of not putting too much pressure on myself is going to help me in the future."

Notes: The Sabres had Monday off in Montreal. ... Home games on March 31 against Boston and April 7 against New Jersey – both Sundays – have been moved to 7:30 p.m. from 7 p.m. for NBC Sports Network. The Boston tilt will still be televised locally on MSG.

Top Shelf: Sabres' Kaleta not done behaving badly

By Dan Di Sciullo
The Sports Network
March 18, 2013

Philadelphia, PA (Sports Network) - For the Buffalo Sabres, things are about as bad as they can be right now, but Patrick Kaleta certainly has a knack for making things worse.

The Sabres are in the midst of a season so trying that not even Lindy Ruff could survive it. The franchise let go of Ruff, the Sabres' head coach for 15- plus seasons before getting the axe last month, and that firing has barely moved the dial in terms of the team's performance.

Flash forward to the present and Buffalo is still sitting 14th out of 15 teams in the East and has lost six of its last seven games.

Yet, through all that's transpired in Western New York this season, Kaleta apparently still thinks it's all about him.

The physical forward was suspended five games by the league for a careless and dangerous hit he levied against Brad Richards of the New York Rangers on March 3. Kaleta was eligible to return to action in Sunday's game at Washington, but interim head coach Ron Rolston opted to make him a healthy scratch instead.

That perceived slight led Kaleta to sound off about how "pissed off" he was at not being in the lineup. It was a blatant display of selfishness and the rant could wind up being Kaleta's second-worst decision of the season, behind sending a defenseless Richards into the boards earlier this month.

"I'm pissed off. I want to play," an angry Kaleta said. "And especially after watching some things, sitting there watching the game, I want to play. I guess they don't need me right now I guess. I've been pissed off watching for the past couple weeks. No matter if you're a fan, a player, you guys know what's going on. You should be pissed off. You should play with a little piss and vinegar. You shouldn't be happy. We're not in position we want to be in. We have to work harder, come in and do something about it."

It almost seems like Kaleta caught himself midway through his speech and altered the tone of his comments to reflect that he was mad about the Sabres' current situation and not about his own playing time, but by then it's too late. With sound bites like "I'm pissed off. I want to play" and "I guess they don't need me right now" it's pretty clear to determine the source of Kaleta's anger.

Thankfully, Sabres goaltender Ryan Miller, the emotional leader of his club, lined up Kaleta's comments and shot them down following Buffalo's 5-3 loss to the Capitals on Sunday. Prompted by a question from Mike Harrington of the Buffalo News, Miller put Kaleta's earlier remarks in their proper context.

"That's just drama and he needs to just grow up if he's gonna say that to you guys," Miller fumed.

"You know what? He had a stupid play in a game. He sat, he was punished. He has to get over it and move on. We handled it. He doesn't have to go to you guys and say that stuff. There: I'm addressing it now and I'll go and talk to him about it. There's no reason to say that."

Nice job by Miller to take on the role of locker room sheriff because Kaleta's me-first attitude needed to be dealt with then and there. It'd be easy to say something safe like "we'd rather keep that stuff in-house" but Miller chose the right path by dismissing Kaleta's comments out of hand.

Also, kudos to the Sabres for making Miller's response readily available on the front page of the team's website. It wouldn't have been at all surprising if Buffalo had opted to have Miller's retort stricken from the record, but the club chose to display it proudly instead.

After all, Buffalo doesn't owe Kaleta any favors even if it has only picked up one win while he sat out the team's last six contests. The problems plaguing the Sabres are a whole lot bigger than Kaleta and what's ailing the club isn't going to be cured by a checking forward who is big on heart and short on just about everything else.

Hopefully, the public shaming can lead to some positive changes for Kaleta. If a guy who has zero points in 18 games this season can't figure out how complaining about his playing time may not be the best course of action then he probably needed the situation spelled out for him in clearer terms.

Maybe being told to "grow up" by a former Vezina Trophy winner and U.S. Olympic hero will help Kaleta see the error of his ways. If not, Kaleta could find out just how expendable a self-centered grinder like himself is when the trade deadline rolls around in a matter of weeks.

Nobody in Buffalo is happy about how poorly this season has gone, but if Kaleta wants to help make things better he should probably stop being so good at making them worse.

SABRES PROSPECTS REPORT

By Kris Baker

Sabres.com

March 18, 2013

Mikhail Grigorenko (2012, first round) made a triumphant return to the QMJHL Sunday, dictating the game's offensive pace with a goal and three assists as Quebec closed the regular season with a 5-3 victory over Rimouski. The win locks the Remparts into fifth place in the final QMJHL standings, setting up a first-round playoff series against Chicoutimi.

Cheered loudly by the Quebec City faithful upon taking the ice, Grigorenko wasted little time getting on the score sheet with a pair of helpers in the opening period. The creative Russian resumed his production in the third, setting up the game winning goal with a slick backhand pass from behind the net before capping the scoring with a wrist shot for his team-leading 30th goal of the year.

With their dangerous distributor back in the fold, Quebec immediately becomes a legitimate contender in the QMJHL playoffs.

OHL

Dan Catenacci (2011, third round) added two goals and an assist to his season haul Thursday as Owen Sound hammered Windsor 6-0. The speedy centerman, who was given a rest as the Attack capped the regular season on Saturday, finishes with a team-best 38 goals and 79 points in 67 games. The third-seeded Attack begins the playoffs Thursday when they host Sault Ste. Marie.

Justin Kea (2012, third round) was unable to score as Saginaw wrapped up the regular season schedule with a 3-2 overtime loss to London. The power forward prospect, who earlier in the week was voted third-best on faceoffs in the Western Conference coaches poll, ends the year with 22 goals and 48 points while centering Saginaw's second line. The Spirit opens the best-of-seven playoff round on Friday at top-seeded London.

Brady Austin (2012, seventh round) scored a goal and an assist in the week's two games to help Belleville finish the season with a five-game winning streak. The big, mobile defender gathered 23 points (8+15) and a plus-16 rating in 64 games as part of a stingy Bulls defense that allowed the fewest goals in the league. The top seed in the Eastern Conference, Belleville begins their championship chase Friday versus Mississauga.

Alex Lepkowski (2011, fifth round) picked up an assist Saturday as Barrie closed the regular season with a 3-2 win over Niagara. The West Seneca, NY native posted nine assists, a plus-10 rating, and 78 PIM in 60 games this season. The Colts face Mississauga in an Eastern Conference quarterfinal starting Thursday.

WHL

Logan Nelson (2012, fifth round) scored the game-tying goal with under three minutes to play, and then set up the overtime winner as Victoria completed the regular season

Saturday with a 4-3 victory over Everett. Nelson enters the Royals' playoff series versus Kamloops with the momentum of six goals and 11 points in his final 10 games.

Saskatoon goaltender Andrey Makarov made 39 saves Tuesday to guide the Blades to a 3-2 shootout victory over Edmonton. The 6-foot-1 backstop posted a 37-17-2-3 record, 2.62 GAA, and .919 save% en route to guiding the Blades to the East Division title and a second-place conference finish. The Blades begin the post-season at home on Thursday versus Medicine Hat.

Colin Jacobs (2011, fourth round) saw his season come to an end Saturday as Prince George was throttled by Kamloops 7-0. Prior to the contest, the gritty 6-foot-2 forward was named the Cougars' Player of the Year after setting personal bests with 25 goals and 53 points in 66 games. The Cougars finish the season ninth in the Western Conference standings, seven points shy of the final post-season spot.

NCAA

Christian Isackson (2010, seventh round) assisted on the overtime game winner as Minnesota opened the WCHA playoffs with a 4-3 win over Bemidji State on Friday. The sophomore winger gathered a faceoff win and kicked the puck back to the point, where the shot was deflected to a waiting Kyle Rau for the finish. Isackson remained among the top-line forwards Saturday as the Gophers closed out the Beavers with a 4-3 victory. The Gophers move on to the WCHA Final Five where they'll play in a Friday night semifinal against the winner of North Dakota/Colorado College.

In Saturday action, Jake McCabe (2012, second round) left the game in the second period and did not return as Wisconsin knocked off Minnesota-Duluth 4-1 to sweep the first round series and advance to the Final Five. McCabe, who earlier in the week was named to the All-WCHA Third Team, assisted on an empty-net goal the night before in the Badgers' 3-1 victory. Brad Navin maintained his checking line role for the Badgers, who next travel to St. Paul, Minn. on Thursday for a semifinal battle with Minnesota State.

European Leagues

Linus Ullmark (2012, sixth round) made 25 saves Tuesday as MODO J20 opened their best-of-three playoff series versus Brynas IF with a 2-1 overtime victory. On Saturday, Ullmark returned to the SEL squad to serve as backup as MODO was put on the brink of elimination with a 2-1 loss to Farjestads BK. MODO trails the series 3-0 entering Monday's game four.

In Finland, Joel Armia (2011, first round) sat out Tuesday's season finale with a fever as Assat Pori defeated TPS Turku 2-1 to finish in fourth place in the SM-Liiga standings. Armia ends the regular season with a career-best 19 goals and 33 points for the Aces, whose late season surge included wins in 15 of their last 16 games. Assat begins the playoffs Wednesday at home versus KalPa.

Spectators take notice of arena area work

By James Fink
Business First
March 18, 2013

Last week, Tom Dee thought there would be a new spectator sport in downtown Buffalo.

He was spot on.

Dee, Erie Canal Harbor Development Corp. president, predicted several major construction projects inside the Canalside footprint would be major downtown attractions.

Saturday afternoon as crowds made their way to the Buffalo Sabres-Ottawa Senators game at First Niagara Center, people stopped and began gawking at the earliest construction phase of the \$172 million HarborCenter project on the city's Webster Block, which just happens to be right across the street from the Sabres home arena.

While some pre-construction work started earlier this month, Saturday's game was the first time many saw the project as "works in progress."

HarborCenter, which is scheduled to open in September 2014, is anchored by a pair of hockey rinks, a 200-room, full service hotel, sports bar, training center and other amenities. It is viewed as a transformative project not only for Canalside and downtown Buffalo, but for the entire region.

Sabres officials predict HarborCenter will attract more than 500,000 through its doors annually.

That is all in the future.

For many, now, is the construction phase.

As fans descended from the NFTA Metro Rail or made their way, walking, down Washington Street, they stopped and took in what has evolved into a fast track construction project.

"Look at that, wow," said Charlie Hennessey, who was attending the game with four friends. "It's really happening. I can't believe this is happening in Buffalo."

Hennessey was not alone.

Others had the same comments and sentiments.

Taken in context with the neighboring \$30 million One Canalside Building and the \$23 million construction of the replica Erie Canal waterways, the lower Main Street area that comprises the heart of Canalside is transforming right before people's eyes.

"This is soooo cool," Hennessey said.

Sabres-Canadiens Preview

By Jeff Bartl
Associated Press
March 18, 2013

One of the hottest NHL teams outside of Pittsburgh has been the surging Montreal Canadiens, who are getting solid contributions from seemingly everyone who puts on the sweater.

They're still not taking the disappointing Buffalo Sabres lightly, though.

Montreal looks to extend its winning streak while dealing Buffalo a sixth consecutive road loss Tuesday night in the first of two meetings at the Bell Centre this week.

The Canadiens (19-5-4) trail the Eastern Conference-leading Penguins by two points with a pair of games in hand. They've won five straight during Pittsburgh's nine-game run that began with a wild 7-6 overtime win March 2 at the Bell Centre.

Montreal, which also hosts Buffalo on Saturday, has earned at least one point in 16 of its last 17 games (13-1-3).

"It's not any one particular line," said Colby Armstrong, who scored his first goal of the season in Saturday's 2-1 victory at New Jersey. "When you get goals from everyone it certainly helps out."

Tomas Plekanec has four scores and three assists over his last seven after netting the game-winning goal in the third period, with defenseman Jarred Tinordi getting the assist in his NHL debut.

"We've got great depth, balanced scoring and you get different guys pitch in on different nights," captain Brian Gionta said. "That's what you need to be successful."

Though plenty is going well for the Canadiens, they're aware struggling Buffalo (10-15-4) still poses a threat despite its record.

"You've got a team that might be at the bottom of the standings, but on a given night they're going to win a game," Gionta said.

That hasn't happened very often for the Sabres, who dropped to 1-3-3 since March 3 with Sunday's 5-3 loss at Washington.

Ryan Miller fell to 0-3-1 with a 3.98 goals-against average over his last four starts, and said Buffalo, which is 0-3-2 on the road in March, needs to begin playing better if it hopes to make a push for the postseason.

"It's frustrating where we're at, but we need to keep things in perspective," Miller said. "There's points to be had. To make the playoffs we're going to have to play a lot of good games and get a lot of wins."

Miller put himself at the center of controversy for critical comments made after Sunday's game regarding teammate Patrick Kaleta, saying the winger needs to "grow up" after expressing negative feelings about being a healthy scratch despite being eligible to return from a five-game suspension.

Miller, though, said the two have patched things up and took responsibility for any problems he may have caused.

"I think everyone's prone to say stupid things over the course of the season," Miller said. "I apologized to Patty. I felt like what I was told he said and what he actually said were two different things. He just wants to come back and play as soon as possible. We're going to try and move on from that."

The team's focus has shifted to facing Montreal. The Canadiens ended a five-game home losing streak to Buffalo with a 6-1 victory Feb. 2 before the Sabres earned a 5-4 shootout win Feb. 7.

Miller allowed four goals in each meeting, but he's still 7-1-1 with a 1.81 GAA in his last nine starts in the series.

"Montreal has been going good," Miller said. "It's a challenge for us and we're going to have to play a smart game."

Carey Price, who has a 2.21 GAA in four starts during the Canadiens' winning streak, could be in net Tuesday. He has a 1.70 GAA in his last 15 starts versus the Sabres.

Desperate Sabres need win at Montreal

By Arpon Basu

NHL.com

March 18, 2013

SABRES (10-15-4) at CANADIENS (19-5-4)

TV: RDS, TSN, MSG-Buffalo

Last 10: Buffalo 4-3-3; Montreal 7-1-2

Season series: This is the third of five meetings this season between the Northeast Division rivals, and the first of two this week between the clubs in Montreal. The Canadiens beat the Sabres 6-1 at Bell Centre on Feb. 2 and lost 5-4 in a shootout in Buffalo on Feb. 7, a game in which the Sabres erased a 4-2 third-period deficit.

Big story: With the trade deadline just over two weeks away, the Sabres sit 14th in the Eastern Conference with just five wins in their last 17 games. If they're going to make a playoff push, Buffalo will have to start immediately or risk winding up a seller at the trade deadline.

Team Scope:

Buffalo: The level of frustration on the Sabres appears to be reaching a boiling point, with the latest episode featuring Patrick Kaleta complaining publicly about being a healthy scratch for his first game following the completion of a five-game suspension for a boarding incident involving Brad Richards of the New York Rangers.

Kaleta said prior to Sunday's 5-3 loss in Washington that he was angry he wouldn't be playing. When told of Kaleta's comments following the game, goaltender Ryan Miller told the Buffalo News that Kaleta was "being dramatic" and that he "needs to just grow up if he's going to say that."

Interim coach Ron Rolston appeared to suggest Kaleta was being sent a message by being scratched, telling the Buffalo News, "it's a situation where he understands that sitting out five games for him wasn't a good thing and it wasn't a good thing for our team."

The Sabres went 1-2-2 in Kaleta's absence.

Canadiens: Things are going so well for the Canadiens that anyone who gets inserted into the lineup appears to do so very smoothly. In recent weeks American Hockey League call-ups Greg Pateryn on defense and Gabriel Dumont at forward were able to fill in for injured players and not hurt the team. The latest examples came Saturday night in New Jersey, when Mike Blunden made his season debut at forward and rookie defenseman Jarred Tinordi played the first game of his NHL career, earning an assist on the game winning goal in the third period.

"For his first game, I thought he played a solid game," coach Michel Therrien said Monday.

The Canadiens fell to second place in the Eastern Conference over the weekend after the Pittsburgh Penguins beat the Boston Bruins, but Montreal has two games in hand on the Penguins and trails by just two points. With the season hitting its final stretch, it is starting to become clearer that the Canadiens, who have lost just once in regulation in their past 17 games, are not going anywhere.

"It's our depth," center David Desharnais explained Monday. "Everyone has a role, everyone plays their role and everyone takes their role to heart. We all put the team first."

Who's hot: For the Sabres, center Cody Hodgson had his second two-goal game in his past six games Sunday in Washington, Jason Pominville has three assists in his past three games, Steve Ott has seven assists in 10 games. ... For the Canadiens, center Tomas Plekanec is on a four-game point streak, with two goals and three assists in that span, and defenseman P.K. Subban has a goal and four assists in his last three games.

Injury report: The Sabres are without defenseman Alexander Sulzer (knee); he's expected to be out the rest of the season...The Canadiens are missing defensemen Raphael Diaz (concussion) and defenseman Yannick Weber (knee), left wing Rene Bourque (concussion) and left wing Brandon Prust (shoulder).