



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Sabres-Jets Preview

By Tom Castro
Associated Press
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It may not be too late for the Buffalo Sabres, whose three-game winning streak has them unexpectedly thinking about making the playoffs.

The Winnipeg Jets are doing the same after finally stopping a long losing streak that has threatened to sink their season.

The Sabres look to continue their roll and end a four-game skid against the Jets as they visit Winnipeg on Tuesday night in a crucial matchup for both teams.

Though Buffalo (16-17-6) appeared headed for a second straight season without a playoff appearance after a four-game losing streak - and the trading away of top players Jason Pominville, Robyn Regehr and Jordan Leopold before the deadline - the Sabres are surprisingly making a late push. The three consecutive victories have them in 11th place in the Eastern Conference, just four points out of eighth.

The Sabres defeated New Jersey 3-2 in a shootout Sunday, picking up the critical extra point when the Devils failed to score on any of their three attempts in the tiebreaker against Ryan Miller. Buffalo's goalie stopped 37 shots through overtime and three more in the shootout, including a victory-clinching glove save on Travis Zajac.

"We survived and got two points. Not pretty, but it's two," Miller said. "When you win hockey games, there's a certain belief. And we're just trying to do it one game at a time."

Steve Ott extended his goal streak to three games for Buffalo, which won despite getting outshot 18-8 through 32 minutes and 39-26 overall.

"We're a resilient group," said forward Patrick Kaleta, who opened the scoring in the first period and also provided several big hits. "We're taking it game by game right now. It's a whole new season."

The Jets are hoping a 4-1 win over Philadelphia on Saturday signals the same for them. Winnipeg (19-19-2) had lost five in a row to drop out of first place in the Southeast Division before stopping the slide with a desperate effort.

"They played like they wanted it the last 40 minutes," Flyers forward Scott Hartnell said.

The Jets scored four times in a 6:28 span of the second period after being outshot 13-4 in the first, and Ondrej Pavelec was outstanding with 30 saves after allowing 15 goals in his previous four starts. Winnipeg was outscored 21-10 during its losing streak, but got its six-game homestand off to a strong start.

"Our top players have to be hot and get our team going, and I thought we did a good job of that," said forward Evander Kane, who snapped a five-game goal drought and added an assist. "We had to win this game to give ourselves a shot to even make the playoffs. Our season is on the line right now."

Andrew Ladd, tied with Kane and Blake Wheeler for the team lead with 14 goals, has gone 13 games without one. However, he's recorded a goal in each of his last three matchups with the Sabres.

Wheeler is mired in a 10-game goal drought.

Ladd and his teammates have given the Sabres plenty of problems of late, allowing one goal in each of their four consecutive victories in the series - all with Pavelec in net. Winnipeg took the first matchup of the season 2-1 at Buffalo on Feb. 29 behind Pavelec's 29 saves.

After this contest, the Jets' next three games on the homestand are against the bottom three teams in the East - division rivals Florida, Tampa Bay and Carolina.

Miller steps up for Sabres with time winding down

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

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WINNIPEG, Manitoba — The Buffalo Sabres are suddenly trying to make a late playoff push and Ryan Miller is getting hot. Those two facts pretty much go hand in hand.

Miller made 37 saves through regulation and overtime and stopped all three shootout attempts Sunday as the Sabres pulled out a 3-2 win over New Jersey, their third straight. Miller will almost certainly be in goal again tonight when the Sabres meet the skidding Winnipeg Jets in MTS Centre and try to win four in a row for the first time since a five-game run 13 months ago.

The backdrop to this streak, however, is these could be Miller's last games in Buffalo. There were plenty of rumors about him at the trade deadline and speculation is rife the Sabres are looking to unload him during the offseason, likely before the NHL Draft June 30 in Newark, N.J.

That speculation was only heightened when one of the pieces that came back from Minnesota for Jason Pominville was a prospect goalie, 23-year-old Matt Hackett.

While Miller was stoning the Devils on Sunday, Hackett was doing likewise in his debut for Rochester against Albany with almost similar numbers – 39 saves, all three in a shootout and a 3-2 win.

“You try to be professional and prepared,” Miller said over the weekend. “What I was trying to do was put everything aside. Everything else can wait. Just try and be right here, right now. Play some hockey and see how it goes.

“You just put it away, compartmentalize it and address it later. In this case there's not much to address until the end of the season.”

Last year, Miller was visibly angry on an off day in Anaheim the day after close friend Paul Gaustad was traded to Nashville. But Miller channeled the anger into back-to-back shutouts in Anaheim and San Jose to start the Sabres on an 11-2-2 binge that nearly produced a playoff berth.

“I just want to show up and play good hockey,” Miller said. “I've been wanting to do that for a while. It parallels the season last year where things weren't going well early and you try to get things going. I learned from that experience from Paul. It is what it is. I try not to be as vocal about it. It's part of the business.”

Miller has stopped 91 of 96 shots in the last three games, posting a .948 save percentage and 1.62 goals-against average as the Sabres have sneaked within four points of the final playoff spot.

Prior to this stretch, Miller was in a 2-5-4 slump, with ugly numbers of 3.01 and .902. With backup Jhonas Enroth playing well and giving Miller some rest, the Buffalo starter seems to be rejuvenated down the stretch.

“He’s been pretty solid for us here this last stretch,” said interim coach Ron Rolston. “Like Jhonas is doing, he’s starting to feel confident in going out and making a difference for us.”

Miller has been very good all season in 5-on-5 play, posting a .930 save percentage – actually ahead of the mark of .928 he posted during his Vezina Trophy season three years ago. He has suffered, as has the team as a whole, in special teams situations, posting an .859 save percentage while the Sabres are short-handed and .840 when they have the power play; he’s been burned for four short-handed goals.

Miller got plenty of help Sunday. The Sabres played a physical brand of hockey with 44 hits and defenseman Mike Weber, their strongest blue-liner in recent games, had another monster outing with eight hits and seven blocked shots in 21 minutes.

“We had some ups and downs in the game obviously,” said Steve Ott. “Some young mistakes and all of us are guilty of mistakes too, but Millsy was phenomenal again for us. When we have a goaltender like that backstopping us, it makes everybody a little more confident on the ice.”

The Sabres were off Monday and flew here to prepare for tonight’s game.

Winnipeg has spent much of the season in first in the weak Southeast Division and thus third in the Eastern Conference. It earned a 2-1 win in Buffalo on Feb. 19 that turned into Lindy Ruff’s final game as coach.

But the Jets have fallen on hard times and are only two points ahead of the Sabres, with Buffalo owning a game in hand. Winnipeg is just 9-9-0 at home, where it should have a huge advantage in the NHL’s smallest building and in front of some of its most passionate fans.

The Jets snapped a five-game losing streak with Saturday’s 4-1 win over Philadelphia here but had lost seven of nine prior to that game. The slump started with home losses to Washington on back-to-back nights in which Winnipeg was outscored, 10-1, catapulting the Caps back into the race and two points ahead of the Jets atop the Southeast Division.

Sabres put win streak on the line vs. Jets

By Matt Mankiewicz

NHL.com

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SABRES (16-17-6) at JETS (19-19-2)

TV: MSG-B, TSN-JETS

Last 10: Buffalo 6-2-2, Winnipeg 3-7-0

Season Series: This is the second of three meetings, and the only one at MTS Centre. The initial showdown, a 2-1 Jets' win on Feb. 19, was Winnipeg's fourth in a row against Buffalo.

Big Story: A three-game winning streak has perked up hopes in Buffalo, while the Jets staved off a potentially season-breaking five-game slide with a 4-1 win against the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday. Both are well-positioned to pounce should any of the current playoff teams slip up, as the Jets play the second of six games at home, only two points behind the Capitals for the Southeast Division lead. The Sabres were four points out of eighth place entering Monday's action and make the short stopover in Winnipeg before returning home for three tough games versus Montreal, Philadelphia and Tampa Bay.

Team Scope:

Sabres: Whatever the front office master plan is, rebuilding is not foremost in the minds of the Sabres' players. Winning is, and making the playoffs as a result. They've won three in a row since the team shipped out Jason Pominville, Robyn Regehr and Jordan Leopold, and aren't giving up yet.

"Our main focus is still to win," forward Nathan Gerbe, who scored the shootout winner in the Sabres' 3-2 victory against the New Jersey Devils on Sunday, told the Buffalo News. "Obviously, we're not cashing in this season. We're within reach of playoffs. We know that as a group, and we have guys here that can get it done."

"The organization itself wants to turn around. It doesn't mean we can't win. It doesn't mean they don't want us to win. Teams aren't going to take us lightly because we're turning things around. We've still got guys in here that want to win and obviously make the playoffs."

Jets: Every team this season has had to deal with limits on practice time due to the compressed 48-game schedule, but the Jets managed to squeeze in a full 55-minute session Monday morning.

"We haven't practiced in ... I can't remember the last time we had a practice," coach Claude Noel told the Winnipeg Free Press. "Today we worked on some things we hadn't worked on in a long, long time. Just rush attacks and D-zone coverage and stuff. It gives you an opportunity to do some things and to get better with a lot of different things. It's good to get back to that and as we're moving forward through the month it's going to continue like that."

Who's hot: Steve Ott has a three-game goal-scoring streak going for the Sabres. ... Jets captain Andrew Ladd has gone 13 games without a goal, but has one in each of his past three games

versus the Sabres. Ondrej Pavelec, righted himself with a solid performance on Sunday, but he has also allowed only one goal in each of the Jets' four consecutive wins against Buffalo.

Injury report: Thomas Vanek (upper body) has been out for six games so far and remains questionable for Tuesday. ... Jets forward Nik Antropov (lower body) is out at least another week. Forwards James Wright (upper body), Jim Slater (hand) and Anthony Peluso (hand) remain on injured reserve.

Goalie prospect Hackett upbeat about future with Sabres

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
April 8, 2013

BUFFALO – Matt Hackett figured the Minnesota Wild would eventually trade a goaltending prospect. The team possessed two similar youngsters in the 23-year-old Hackett and Darcy Kuemper.

With Niklas Backstrom entrenched as the upstart Wild's No. 1 goalie, there simply wasn't room for everyone.

Still, when the Wild yanked him from the ice during the team's morning skate Wednesday, Hackett "was pretty shocked," he said.

"It just caught me off guard, I guess," Hackett said by phone Monday.

The Wild had dealt Hackett to the Sabres with forward prospect Johann Larsson and two draft picks for captain Jason Pominville, arguably the deadline's biggest trade.

"For me, it's nice," said Hackett, a London, Ont., native. "I'm closer to home. My family can come watch more games. It's a fresh start, and hopefully it's good for me."

But Hackett has left one crowded crease for another.

Ryan Miller and Jhonas Enroth have been the Sabres' two goalies for almost two full seasons.

In Rochester, Hackett, who played 159 total AHL games with Houston in the last three seasons, is now the backup behind Williamsville native David Leggio, one of the league's best.

"I think we probably have two of the best goalies in the American League down there now," interim Sabres coach Ron Rolston said last week.

The two goalies have spoken briefly.

"He's been very supportive," Hackett said about Leggio.

Clearly, if Leggio falters, Hackett offers the Amerks a terrific option.

Hackett, 6-foot-3 and 173 pounds, dazzled in his Amerks debut Sunday, stopping 39 shots in a 3-2 shootout win in Albany.

"I wanted to show the team they had made the right choice to pick me up," said Hackett, who acknowledged he was nervous. "It was just a fun experience."

Hackett has plenty of professional experience, including 13 NHL games.

"When I was up there, I felt like I belonged, and I felt like I kept getting better," Hackett said.

He played 24 times as a rookie during Houston's run to the 2011 Calder Cup final.

“The next year I felt more comfortable with my game in the AHL,” Hackett said.

Prior to joining Rochester, he was 19-20-3 with a 2.66 goals-against average and .907 save percentage in 43 games with the Aeros.

“I’ve played a lot of games in the last three years,” Hackett said. “I feel like I’ve adjusted pretty well to this league and proven myself a little bit.”

Hackett began proving himself against professional competition years ago, when he would spell his uncle, former NHL goalie Jeff Hackett, on the ice during summer training sessions.

“When he’d need a breather, I’d jump in there and take shots from the pro guys,” Matt Hackett said. “So it was good for me.”

Jeff Hackett, who played 500 NHL games over 16 seasons, still teaches his nephew. They get together for sessions about 10 times each August.

“It’ll be just one-on-one,” said Matt Hackett, who lived in one of his uncle’s houses last summer. “He’s always looking at parts of my game that I can improve. It’s not always big things and more. But there’s always something that I can work on, and he’s always giving me a hard time about that stuff.”

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The Sabres, who face the Jets tonight in Winnipeg, had Monday off.

Sabres Prospects Report

By Kris Baker

Sabres.com

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Joel Armia (2011, first round) scored a goal and an assist Friday as Assat Pori took a commanding three-game lead in the SM-Liiga semifinals with a 4-1 win over defending league champion JYP Jyvaskyla. The game's number two star, Armia has yielded three goals and six points through nine post-season games for the Aces, who squandered their chance for the sweep with a 2-1 loss on Saturday. Game Five takes place Monday with Assat looking to advance to the league championship for a date with Tappara Tampere.

OHL

Dan Catenacci (2011, third round) maintained his point-per-game playoff pace over the weekend by rounding up two assists as Owen Sound opened the Western Conference semifinal with a road split at Plymouth. Catenacci's helpers give him eight points (2+6) through eight postseason tilts. The series will shift back to Owen Sound for Tuesday's Game Three with the teams deadlocked at one game apiece.

Belleville defenseman Brady Austin (2012, seventh round) finished plus-one Monday as Belleville skated to a 3-1 victory over Mississauga to close out the first-round series in six games. The steady rearguard continued to operate on cruise control as the top-seeded Bulls shot out to a two-game lead on Sudbury in the Eastern Conference semifinal. Austin has gathered four assists and a plus-10 rating through the first eight games of the post-season. Game Three is set for Tuesday in Sudbury.

Alex Lepkowski (2011, fifth round) continued his tough defensive play as Barrie took control of their Eastern Conference semifinal series with three straight victories over Oshawa. The Colts will go for the sweep of the Generals on Tuesday in Oshawa.

QMJHL

Mikhail Grigorenko (2012, first round) went without a point for the second straight game Saturday as Quebec downed Rouyn-Noranda 4-2 to even the second round series at one game apiece. Despite the two-game lull, the creative pivot has amassed three goals and 12 points through eight postseason contests. Grigorenko will look to avoid his first three-game point drought of the year when the Remparts take the ice for Tuesday's Game Three.

WHL

Logan Nelson (2012, fifth round) finished with a minus-one rating as Victoria was eliminated from the playoffs with a 6-2 loss to Kamloops. The big forward registered two goals and six points in the six-game series loss following a 43-point (14+29) regular season.

USHL

Judd Peterson (2012, seventh round) posted a minus-one rating Friday as Cedar Rapids was defeated in overtime by Chicago 2-1. The St. Cloud State commit has notched 10 goals and 25

points in 44 games this season for the RoughRiders, who finish the regular season next weekend at home versus Team USA.

European Leagues

In Monday action, Linus Ullmark (2012, sixth round) made 27 saves as MODO J20 fell in the SuperElit championship game 4-3 to HV71. Ullmark ends the junior league playoffs with a 4-1 record, while posting a 1.39 GAA and a .947 save%. Following the game, the 19-year old stopper joined Sweden's national team, where he made his debut Wednesday with 23 saves in a 6-1 exhibition victory over Slovakia. Team Sweden continues their World Championship preparation this week with a tune-up against Latvia.

