



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Lightning-Sabres preview

By Staff Report

Associated Press

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The Tampa Bay Lightning feature the league's highest scoring team, and their power play has been rolling during a four-game win streak.

The Buffalo Sabres are last in the league in goals per game and power-play percentage, though they have been playing better lately.

These Atlantic Division rivals meet for the first time Tuesday night when they begin a home-and-home set in Buffalo.

Tampa Bay (17-6-2) opened this two-game trip by winning 6-3 over the New York Rangers on Monday. Brett Connolly and Tyler Johnson each scored twice for the Lightning, who boosted their league-best average to 3.60 goals.

"This was special for me, to get two here. My first two-goal game," Connolly said. "We didn't have our best, but we found a way in the third period."

The Lightning prevailed despite getting just one point from their top line of Ryan Callahan, Steven Stamkos and Alex Killorn. Stamkos' assist gave him seven points in a five-game run and 29 for the year, with Johnson second with 26.

Tampa Bay is 5 for 15 on the power play during this win streak and at 24.1 percent on the season.

Buffalo (8-14-2) could have trouble keeping up if Tampa Bay gets on another scoring roll. The Sabres average 1.67 goals with a power play that is connecting at just 7.2 percent.

There are positive signs in a 5-1-0 stretch capped by a home-and-home sweep of Montreal, 2-1 on Friday and 4-3 in a shootout the next night.

"Right now, the guys are feeling good about themselves," coach Ted Nolan said. "They're putting in time. They're putting in the effort. We're getting some breaks and we're getting some wins."

The Sabres may receive a boost to their offense. Cody McCormick may be back from a three-game absence due to an undisclosed injury while fellow forward Drew Stafford may return after sitting out Saturday with a lower-body injury.

The defense will be healthier with the return of Josh Gorges, who has missed the last seven games with a knee injury. He leads the NHL with 3.5 blocks per game.

That is critical for Buffalo, which is allowing an NHL-worst 36.5 shots on goal per game.

"Everybody comes at our team, they do the same thing, they just throw the pucks at the net," Nolan said.

The Lightning average 29.4 shots to rank in the league's bottom third, and coach Jon Cooper would like to see more attempts after his club was outshot 35-21 on Monday.

"Our biggest issue was that we didn't shoot," Cooper said. "We were talking about it, we almost want to pass the puck into the net at times sometimes."

This is the Lightning's sixth set of back-to-back games, and they have yet to give Ben Bishop starts in both ends. Bishop made 32 saves Monday and will likely give way to Evgeni Nabokov, who has a 3.71 goals-against average in his five starts.

Jhonas Enroth is the likely starter for Buffalo. He is 3-0-1 with a 1.74 GAA in four starts versus Tampa Bay.

The Lightning went 3-1-0 in the 2013-14 season series, twice rallying from third-period deficits for overtime wins in Buffalo. These teams play Thursday in Florida.

Sabres' confidence has spiked

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

December 1, 2014

The Buffalo Sabres have quickly built confidence in the spectacular goaltending of Jhonas Enroth in recent games and the often solid work of Michal Neuvirth prior to Enroth's run.

While the Sabres are not nearly under pressure in their defensive zone during their current 5-1 stretch like they were early in the season, their goalies are still overworked.

Steven Stamkos and the Tampa Bay Lightning, the NHL's highest-scoring team, are in town tonight. The Sabres know the shot count better come down fast.

Twice in the last four games, the Sabres have given up 44 shots on goal. But they've won behind Enroth both times, Nov. 22 at Washington and Saturday night's 4-3 shootout win in Montreal. The Sabres gave up a staggering 90 shot attempts in that game but survived thanks to 30 blocks and Enroth's 41 saves.

"We'd like to limit the amount we're getting outshot and it starts with just getting the puck a little more," winger Brian Flynn said after practice Monday in First Niagara Center. "We've been doing a better job getting it out of our end and breaking out more cleanly. Keep at that, limit second- and third-shot opportunities and those numbers will come down."

The Sabres are last in the league in shots on goal against (36.5) and have been outshot by nearly 11 per game in their last six. Although the Lightning entered Monday's game in New York averaging only 29.8, they were averaging a league-high 3.5 goals per game.

"Jhonas is giving us confidence and a real chance to win every night," said defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen. "That's a good thing about a goalie, that he can do that. But those numbers are too much. Our goalie can't be forced to do that every night. We have to keep working hard to play better 'D', to have the puck more."

The Sabres have to do better in the faceoff circle, where they lost 92 of 132 draws in the back-to-back games against Montreal, and are hoping the return of defenseman Josh Gorges will also help with puck possession and the shot counts. Coach Ted Nolan revealed after practice that Gorges, the NHL's leader in blocks when he hurt his knee Nov. 11 in St. Louis, will be in the lineup tonight. He was supposed to be out 4-6 weeks and nearly returned during the home-and-home against the Habs, his former team.

Elsewhere on defense, Tyler Myers did not practice Monday for what Nolan termed a maintenance day. Myers briefly went to the dressing room Saturday night and then returned, clearly testing some sort of leg or hip ailment by making some fast circles on the ice during a TV timeout.

"He should be ready to go and he probably could have practiced if we really needed him to," Nolan said.

Nolan is not as concerned about the numbers as you might think. He believes some of them are rooted in circumstance.

"We can't do too much when teams are coming across the blue line and shooting at the net," Nolan said. "Everybody comes at our team and they do the same thing, throw pucks at the net. ... We have to cut down on those primary shots, those big ones from the slot, for sure. "You have to give the other team some credit. They're looking at our defense and saying, "get the puck in" and I would do the same things. It's a young, inexperienced defense back there, what are you going to do? You're going to throw the pucks in, pucks at the net and battle away at them."

Winger Marcus Foligno, whose pair of blocks in the last three games has produced breakaway goals for Chris Stewart, also agreed with Nolan.

"It's coming down to just being positionally better," Foligno said. "Jhonas and Neuvirth have been amazing for us. We know they can handle a load of shots. Do we want them to have that many? No, but that's the way it goes sometimes. Teams get point shots through, but I do feel like we've been limiting the time in our defensive zone and getting out quicker."

Stamkos entered Monday's game third in the NHL with 15 goals. He has 10 goals and 22 points in 23 career games against Buffalo.

"You have to be so careful with him, try to stay close to him and hopefully he can't shoot too much," Ristolainen said.

"You won't completely take a guy like that out of the game," Flynn said. "Just limit the quality chances, try to force the shots from the outside and then do the job around the net."

Sabres notebook: Reinhart likely to captain Team Canada

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

December 1, 2014

There's a pretty good chance Sam Reinhart will be spending the Christmas and New Year's weeks known as Captain Canada.

As expected, the Buffalo Sabres' top pick in the June draft was named to Team Canada's selection camp roster Monday for the World Junior Championships that will begin later this month in Montreal and Toronto.

Canada will select 22 of the 29 players it named for the tournament via a camp that opens Dec. 11 in Toronto. The list include Erie Otters star Connor McDavid, who may not make the camp due to the broken bone in his hand he suffered in a fight during a recent game but will certainly have a roster spot held for him.

Many observers figure Reinhart, one of seven players who played for Canada last year in Malmo, Sweden, will be named captain of this group after being selected No. 2 in the draft and opening the season with the Sabres. It will be a major showcase for Reinhart and a tall task given the pressure of the tournament being on home soil – and the fact that Canada has not won a gold medal since 2009 in Ottawa.

That team had a roster that included current Sabres Tyler Myers, Tyler Ennis and Cody Hodgson and also had big star power in John Tavares (New York Islanders), P.K. Subban (Montreal), Alex Pietrangelo (St. Louis), Evander Kane (Winnipeg) and Jordan Eberle (Edmonton).

Reinhart, of course, was sent back to the Kootenay Ice of the Western League after his unsuccessful nine-game tryout with the Sabres. Reinhart, who turned 19 Nov. 6, had just one assist in the nine NHL games after averaging 95 points the last two years in Kootenay.

Reinhart is again tearing up the WHL this season with 23 points (six goals, 17 assists) in 11 games. His team has gone 9-2 after starting the season 4-13 without him.

Also named to the Team Canada roster was Erie winger and Sabres prospect Nick Baptiste, who has played three games with the Otters after a trade from Sudbury. Baptiste, Buffalo's third-round pick in 2013, had 45 goals and 89 points last year in Sudbury and had 11 points in 12 games there this year before the deal to Erie. He has not scored in his first three games with the Otters.

The Team USA selection camp roster, featuring Boston University's Jack Eichel, will be announced today. Sabres prospects Hudson Fasching (University of Minnesota) and J.T. Compher (University of Michigan) are expected to be named.

Other Sabres draftees in the running are Williamsville native Justin Bailey of the OHL's Kitchener Rangers and defenseman Anthony Florentino of Providence College.

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Winger Cody McCormick practiced fully Monday and then left for doctor's approval of final concussion protocol before he can return to play tonight against Tampa Bay. Drew Stafford skated some and then left practice early, although coach Ted Nolan did not rule him out.

Nolan revealed that defenseman Andrej Meszaros, who was injured Friday against Montreal and did not play in the rematch with the Habs on Saturday, is now undergoing concussion protocol. So he will miss a few games.

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With two other goalies posting outstanding numbers, Buffalo's Jhonas Enroth did not earn one of the NHL's Three Stars of the Week awards Monday despite his stellar performances over three games. Enroth went 2-1 with a 1.97 goals-against average and .941 save percentage, stopping 95 of 101 shots.

The league's No. 1 star was the New York Islanders' Jaroslav Halak, who went 3-0, 0.95, .964. The No. 3 star was Calgary's Karri Ramo, who stopped all 58 shots he faced in shotouts of San Jose and Arizona. Tampa Bay winger Ryan Callahan was the No. 2 star after collecting five points in two games.

Sabres look to thwart Lightning's top ranked offense

By Dan Rosen

NHL.com

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LIGHTNING (17-6-2) at SABRES (8-14-2)

TV: NBCSN

Season series: This is the first of five games between the Tampa Bay Lightning and Buffalo Sabres this season. It's the first of two games this week as the Sabres and Lightning will play again Thursday at Amalie Arena in Tampa Bay. The Lightning won three of four games against Buffalo in 2013-14, including two in overtime at First Niagara Center.

Lightning team scope: The Lightning won their fourth straight game Monday with a 6-3 victory against the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden. It was their third regulation win against the Rangers in 15 days. They lead the NHL with 16 regulation/overtime wins and have 36 points through 25 games. Brett Connolly and Tyler Johnson scored two goals and Victor Hedman had three assists to pace the offense against New York. The Lightning lead the NHL with 90 goals (3.60 per game). They have 11 more goals than the second-place Pittsburgh Penguins. They have scored 16 goals on their four-game winning streak and three or more goals in 15 of their 25 games this season, including in 12 of their past 18 games.

Sabres team scope: The Sabres have won two in a row and five of their past six. The big key to their improved play has been the play of goaltender Jhonas Enroth, who is 4-1 with eight goals allowed in his past five starts. Enroth made 41 saves in a 4-3 shootout win against the Montreal Canadiens on Saturday at Bell Centre. That came one day after he made 30 saves in a 2-1 win against the Canadiens at First Niagara Center. In addition, Enroth made a season-high 43 saves in a 2-1 win against the Washington Capitals on Nov. 22. Enroth was 1-8-1 with 38 goals allowed in his first 10 starts of the season.

Buffalo Sabres: Does this string of wins signal the end of the tank?

By Matt Clouden

Bleacher Report

December 1, 2014

So this was unexpected.

Coming off of two straight wins against the Montreal Canadiens, the Buffalo Sabres have now won five of their last six contests and have climbed from the basement of the NHL to 27th.

In those five wins, the Sabres defeated the Canadiens, currently in a four-way tie for first in the Eastern Conference, twice, the San Jose Sharks, the Washington Capitals and the Toronto Maple Leafs.

All five are solid wins against solid opponents. Ignoring an uninspired performance against the Winnipeg Jets, one might surmise that the Sabres are likely out of the basement for good.

Well, maybe not.

The Sabres' Fenwick-for percentage is still solidly last in the NHL at 37.49 percent on the season. The Colorado Avalanche, the 29th-place team, sit at 45.43 percent. To put that disparity in perspective, the Avs are less than 11 percentage points away from being in second place in the NHL. If not for a truly dominant Chicago Blackhawks squad, they would likely be closer to first than the Sabres.

And if you think the last six games have improved upon that Fenwick-for percentage by much you would be very wrong.

In this six-game stretch, the Sabres' best Fenwick-for is 43.75 percent, and that was in the loss to Winnipeg. In their last five wins, the Sabres have had a Fenwick-for percentage under 40 percent, and the highest total came during the 6-2 win against Toronto at 41.96 percent.

Yes, you read that correctly. In a six-goal game, the Sabres were still only able to hit about 42 percent on the Fenwick-for chart.

And many who are not accustomed to or a fan of advanced stats may laugh and say these numbers don't matter and that it's just the performance on the ice that means anything at the end of the day. But these numbers do say something.

What they tell Sabres fans is the Sabres are still woefully bad in terms of puck possession and that they are giving up a hilariously high number of scoring chances every game.

So how have they been able to come up on top then? Stellar netminding from Jhonas Enroth and Michal Neuvirth.

Enroth has played in five of the six games due to a lower-body injury Neuvirth suffered Nov. 18 against San Jose, and he has played spectacularly. In his five appearances, Enroth stopped 157 of 165 shots for a save percentage of .951. It doesn't need explaining that that number is well over the league average and almost 20 points better than Pekka Rinne's .933.

Needless to say, that level of netminding is unsustainable in long stretches. If Enroth were to have played at Rinne's league-best level (Jets backup Michael Hutchinson has only played in eight games this season) during that stretch, he would have allowed three more goals, enough to arguably lose the Sabres two of those games.

To take it a step further and use Enroth's career average save percentage of .913, the Sabres probably would've lost all those games, as they would have allowed about seven more goals.

This is obviously not to take away from the performances Enroth has had—it's just to say that it is next to impossible for him to maintain this level of play for much longer, let alone the entire season. And if the Sabres are going to be outshot close to a 2-1 margin every game, he needs to play like this for them to have a shot.

But on a more positive note, the Sabres look to have something special in both Tyler Ennis and Zemgus Girgensons. In this stretch, Ennis has two goals and seven points, and Girgensons has three goals and five points. Both have stood out and showed they will be a big part of turning this Buffalo team around in the future.

So with everything that's been discussed above, where does that leave the Sabres?

All the signs point to a pretty significant regression from the current production in the wins column, especially with some pretty tough contests against some excellent possession teams coming up.

Tampa Bay and Los Angeles are good and getting better as the season goes. Florida is in the middle of the pack possession-wise, but the Panthers always seem to give the Sabres fits with their speed and size down the middle. Calgary is the only poor possession team coming up in the next five games, but the Flames are still almost 10 percent better than the Sabres on the season.

These next five games will go a long way to showing where the Sabres actually are this season. The hope for the playoffs is dim at best; so will they be a middling team, or will they find themselves back where they started the season?

Sabres fans will soon find out.

Surging Sabres have quickly turned around season

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 1, 2014

BUFFALO – Forget about last place. How far can the surging Sabres climb up the NHL standings?

The once-hapless club has quickly morphed from an also-ran destined to become one of the NHL's worst teams ever into a formidable outfit, winning five of the last six games.

Following a weekend sweep of the Montreal Canadiens, the Sabres are enjoying perhaps their best stretch in years entering tonight's game against the Tampa Bay Lightning inside the First Niagara Center.

Hey, maybe these guys aren't so bad after all. The Sabres finished November 6-6-1. Their wretched 2-8-1 October is starting to feel like a distant memory.

They rank 27th overall.

What has changed?

"I think just our swagger, the way we approach the game, I think it's been way different lately," Sabres winger Chris Stewart said Monday. "I think we come before games knowing we can win games, as opposed to earlier in the year we weren't really sure what team effort we were going to get for the night.

"I think, to a man, it's been 60 minutes of compete. The boys battle. You can see it's a total different life and energy in our game. I think that's the big difference so far."

Sabres coach Ted Nolan has preached patience from the get-go, repeatedly saying the rebuilding club won't change overnight.

"We're coming," Nolan said. "It takes a while. ... It's not going to be built in five or six games. It's going to take a while to change the culture. It takes a while to change the belief. It's going to take a while to change all those type of things.

"We're slowing pecking at it, and now, all of a sudden, you start seeing it. Can we get better? I certainly believe we can."

The Sabres can certainly play much better. They still rank 30th in shots against at 36.5 shots a game and shots for at 23.3 shots, almost three fewer than New Jersey.

But there are signs of progress. The Sabres, having just gone 14 periods without allowing an even-strength goal, are playing tighter defensively. They scored 28 goals and allowed 39 in 13 November games. That's hardly impressive, but considering they scored 12 and allowed 36 in 11 October contests, it shows progress.

Strong goaltending from Jhonas Enroth has buoyed the Sabres. The Swede is 4-1 with a 1.70 goals-against average and .952 save percentage in the last five games.

"He's been great," Sabres winger Tyler Ennis said about Enroth. "He's had some highlight-reel saves. He's kept us in when we needed him. He's made those big saves to turn the game around and then we can jump on offense and put it in."

Ennis added: "When he goes in net, he's just got that confidence to know he's going to make a save, and he's playing with that swagger. He's having fun just like the rest of us."

Enroth dazzled throughout Saturday's 4-3 shootout triumph in Montreal, arguably the Sabres' most significant victory in years. Against a top team in one of the league's loudest and toughest arenas, the Sabres, despite getting outshot 44-26, rallied late and eked out an unlikely win.

"I think early in the season we probably lose that game," said Sabres winger Brian Flynn, who scored a goal and the shootout winner.

Clearly, Nolan's tinkering has paid off. For more than a month, he switched lines, moving players all over. Eight forwards have already played center and wing.

"We were switching lines all the time for a while, but rightfully so," said Flynn, who has settled on the left wing beside center Torrey Mitchell and Brian Gionta. "We couldn't find a way to put the puck in the net. I think we still obviously need to score some more goals."

The Sabres have scored 21 goals in the last seven games. Three goals a game has become a gold standard in the modern NHL.

"We're starting to find that chemistry and build off each other," Stewart, who has two goals in three games, said about winning. "Once that chemistry is there, things just start clicking and happening out there."

Earlier this season, when the Sabres hit rock bottom, the belief they could turn things around never vanished.

"I think it was more frustrating than anything," Ennis said. "I think there's always a learning curve. I think we're learning and we're adjusting and we're playing much better."

Nolan added: "I've never in my life ever went into a game thinking I couldn't win. I think that's the attitude you've got to have. If you have the right belief factor combined with the right preparation and the right work and the determination – all those type of things – good things usually happen."

Sabres notes: Zemgus Girgensons leading NHL All-Star Game voting

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 1, 2014

BUFFALO – The No. 1 vote-getter for the 2015 NHL All-Star Game has 15 career goals, hasn't hit the 100-game mark yet and plays for one of the league's worst teams.

As of late Monday, Sabres center Zemgus Girgensons led *all NHL players* in fan voting. If Latvians keep clicking for the 20-year-old, their favorite player will be in Columbus on Jan. 25.

"I just think it's kind of funny," Girgensons said Monday inside the First Niagara Center. "It's just fans back home. Nothing, really."

The only current Latvian NHL player is wildly popular at home. Fans watch Sabres games late at night or early in the morning, Girgensons said. His goals are featured on the news. A Latvian TV crew spent a week in town last month shooting a documentary on Girgensons.

"The fans back home have always been all about hockey," he said. "They're just kind of crazy."

Sabres coach Ted Nolan, Latvia's national team coach, has seen the fandom up close.

"He's a very popular man over in Latvia," Nolan said. "I think from the Sochi Olympics he got his name out there a little bit more. Playing the way he's playing in Buffalo the first couple years, he's getting his name out. He's going to hopefully be a household name over here in North America as he is in Latvia. Good for him. He deserves everything he's getting."

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Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges, out the last seven games with a knee injury, will play tonight against the Tampa Bay Lightning, Nolan said.

Gorges' return could give the Sabres three strong pairings: Tyler Myers and Tyson Strachan, Rasmus Ristolainen and Nikita Zadorov and Mike Weber and Gorges.

The Sabres, winners of five of the last six contests, could have more healthy bodies back up front, too.

Center Cody McCormick, out the last three games with a possible concussion, needed clearance from the doctor Monday to return.

Meanwhile, winger Drew Stafford could play tonight after a lower-body injury sidelined him for Saturday's 4-3 shootout win in Montreal. Stafford practiced briefly Monday before leaving the session. He will skate this morning.

"If he's good, then he'll be back in," Nolan said.

Nolan said the banged-up Myers had a maintenance day Monday and should be OK to face the Lightning. Myers briefly left Saturday's game after his leg got tangled with Max Pacioretty. He could have practiced if he needed to, Nolan said.

In other injury news, Nolan said defenseman Andrej Meszaros suffered a "little bang" and is undergoing concussion protocol. Meszaros has missed one game.

Notes: Nolan moved Marcus Foligno, a regular winger, to center Monday beside Nick Deslauriers and Chris Stewart. Nolan wants to get Foligno on one of the top three lines. "Marcus is really coming," Nolan said. ... Sabres prospects Sam Reinhart and Nick Baptiste have been invited to Team Canada's world junior camp. Reinhart, the No. 2 pick in June, could be named captain. The 19-year-old played nine NHL games earlier this year.

What has gotten into the Sabres?

By Howard Simon

WGR 550

December 1, 2014

What in the name of winning hockey is going on with the Sabres? How do you explain a team that was 3-13-2, winning 5 of its last 6 games? In short, they have a hot line, a very good, young defense pairing and a hot goalie.

The line that is carrying the Sabres offense is Tyler Ennis, Zemgus Girgensons and Matt Moulson. Ennis has 4 goals and 13 points in his last 14 games. Girgensons has 5 goals and 10 points in his last 12 games and is an eye popping plus 8 over that stretch. Moulson, who didn't score a single goal and had just 2 assists in his first 14 games, has 4 goals and 9 points in his last 10 contests.

The young defense pairing of Rasmus Ristolainen and Nikita Zadorov are the best pairing on the team. Zadorov is averaging just over 17 minutes of ice time a game and is a plus 5. Zadorov, Girgensons and Brian Flynn are the only plus players right now. Ristolainen is minus 8 for the season but he is even since Zadorov became a regular in the lineup. Ristolainen is averaging about 19 and a half minutes of ice time but he's been above the 20 minute mark in 11 of the last 13 games.

The hot goalie is Jhonas Enroth whose perseverance is now being rewarded. Enroth won just one game in his first 10 starts but it was hardly his fault. The Sabres scored a total of 12 goals in those 10 games and were shutout 4 times. While he is getting better offensive support, Enroth has also been lights out. He's won 4 of his last 5 starts and has a sparkling 1.69 goals against average and .952 save percentage. Enroth has stopped 157 of the 165 shots he has faced in those 5 games.

I don't mean to rain on the parade here but the shot numbers head up a list of stats that still don't look good for the Sabres. Even in the 5-1 stretch, they've been outshot in all but 1 game and the 6 game total is 183-126. For the season, the Sabres have outshot their opponent only 2 times in 24 games.

The power play has yet to come around, connecting at a rate of 7%(5-69). The Sabres have scored 1 power play goal in road games this season(1-27).

Buffalo has yet to win a game when the opposing team scores first. Their record in those games is 0-12-1. The Sabres are 0-9 when trailing after the first period and 0-11 when down after 2 periods.

Red hot Sabres host Tampa Bay Tuesday

By Staff Report

WGRZ

December 1, 2014

BUFFALO, N.Y.-Tuesday night the red hot Buffalo Sabres will host the Tampa Bay Lightning at the First Niagara Center. The Sabres have won five of their last six games and swept first place Montreal over the weekend.

Head coach Ted Nolan said Monday that veteran defenseman and alternate captain Josh Gorges will return to the lineup against the Lightning. He's been on injured reserve since suffering a knee injury November 11th.

Nolan said forwards Cody McCormick and Drew Stafford may also be available. Stafford is third on the team in scoring. Stafford missed Saturday's game with an upper body injury. McCormick is going through concussion protocol but if his evaluation with team doctors went well he could return to the lineup as well. McCormick has been out since November 29th.

Defenseman Andrej Meszaros is out. He suffered a head injury Friday night against Montreal.

Face off against Tampa Bay is scheduled for 7:30 pm.

Gorges back for Tuesday, McCormick and Stafford may be available

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

December 1, 2014

The Buffalo Sabres have found success on the ice while dealing with some key injuries. When they go for their sixth win in seven games Tuesday night, it looks like they'll have some healthy bodies back in the lineup.

Sabres coach Ted Nolan said after Monday's practice at First Niagara Center that alternate captain Josh Gorges, who has been on injured reserve since sustaining a knee injury on Nov. 11, will return to the ice for Buffalo's home game on Tuesday against the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Injured forwards Cody McCormick, a key penalty killer, and Drew Stafford, who is third on the team in scoring, may also be available.

In Gorges' absence, Tyson Strachan has been given more responsibility. He's been paired with Tyler Myers and played a career-high 30:39 on Saturday in Montreal.

"Any time you get to play big minutes and get counted on in those situations, it always feels great," Strachan said. "It's a vote of confidence out of the coaches. Especially in a big win like that and the big weekend we had, it's not like we lost two games. We played the minutes and got two big wins."

Nolan has obviously liked what he's seen from Strachan and noted that he hasn't changed his style just because he's playing more. He's remained consistent and is playing within himself.

"He's just doing the basic things and when you do basic things – simplicity is the ultimate sophistication, I believe," Nolan said. "The simpler you do things, the more efficient you are."

After missing one game due to a lower-body injury, Myers has logged a ton of ice time in the past two contests as well. He played a team-high 27:28 on Friday and recorded a regular-season career-high of 31:34 on Saturday to lead all skaters.

Myers was given a maintenance day on Monday and Nolan said he should be ready to go on Tuesday.

HEALING FACTORS

McCormick continues to go through concussion protocol and Nolan said that if his evaluation with team doctors goes well on Monday, he should be available for Tuesday as well. He's been out since Nov. 29.

Stafford practiced with the fourth line for a few minutes before leaving practice early. Nolan is hopeful he'll return to the lineup on Tuesday after missing Saturday night's game with a lower-body injury.

"He tried to skate today on his own and did OK so we pulled him off," Nolan said. "He'll try again tomorrow morning and if he's good then he'll be back in."

However, defenseman Andrej Meszaros is going through concussion protocol procedures after he sustained a head injury Friday night. He'll miss Tuesday night's game.

FEELING GOOD

The team has won five of its past six games and is coming off back-to-back wins against the first-place Montreal Canadiens.

"If you have the right belief factor combined with the right preparation and the right work and determination – all those types of things – good things usually happen," Nolan said. "Right now, the guys are feeling good about themselves. They're putting in time. They're putting in the effort. We've had some breaks and we're getting some wins."

Strachan said that the team has shown more consistency lately. Buffalo was 2-8-1 in the month of October, but was 6-6-1 in November thanks in large part to their current run.

"You win one, you might be happy and say, 'Hey, maybe we're good.' But you start putting a couple together, all of a sudden, you're saying, 'OK. We can do this on a consistent basis,'" Strachan said. "That's what we weren't doing at the beginning of the year. We weren't playing 60-minute games."

"We were seeing spots of how well we could play. The last little bit, it's been a lot of games in a row where we've been in games and finding ways to win games."

O CANADA

Hockey Canada on Monday unveiled **its 29-man selection camp roster** for the 2015 IIHF World Junior Championship on Monday and two Sabres prospects have made the cut.

Center Sam Reinhart, Buffalo's top pick in 2014 (second overall) and right wing Nick Baptiste a third-round pick (69th overall) in 2013, have been invited to Canada's final camp before the tournament. Canada's camp opens on Dec. 11 in Toronto and the tournament will begin on Dec. 26.

The only 2015 draft-eligible prospects in Canada's camp are center Connor McDavid of the Ontario Hockey League's Erie Otters and Kingston Frontenacs left wing Lawson Crouse.

USA Hockey is expected to release its preliminary roster on Tuesday at 11 a.m. J.T. Compher, Hudson Fasching, Justin Bailey and Anthony Florentino are among Sabres prospects that could be named to the final camp roster.

FROM LATVIA WITH LOVE

Sabres center Zemgus Girgensons leapt to the top of the leaderboard for **All-Star fan voting** over the weekend. As the only Latvian player currently in the NHL, he thinks he's been getting a lot of support from his home country.

Latvia is seven hours ahead of Buffalo so that means fans watching Sabres games live in Latvia could be up until 4:30 a.m. local time.

"The fans back home have always been all about hockey. They're just kind of crazy," Girgensons said. "They stay up late to watch my games, even early morning you could call it. We just have big hockey fans back home."

MONDAY'S PRACTICE

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51 Nikita Zadorov – 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
6 Mike Weber – 61 Andre Benoit

1 Jhonas Enroth
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Did Not Skate: 31 Matt Hackett (injured reserve, knee), 41 Andrej Meszaros (concussion protocol), 57 Tyler Myers (maintenance day)

Sabres prospect report

By Kris Baker

Sabres.com

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Green Bay forward Christopher Brown (2014, sixth round) continued his strong play last week with goals in all three games and five total points to guide the Gamblers to a 2-1 mark in United States Hockey League action.

Brown kicked the week off on Wednesday with a goal and two assists in the Gamblers' 4-3 loss at Madison. He picked up a marker in Friday's 5-2 win in Sioux Falls, and then connected again on Saturday as Green Bay earned a 3-2 victory over the Stampede.

The productive week completes a successful month of November for the Boston College commit, who has now gotten on the scoresheet in 10 of his last 11 appearances to extend his team-leading point total to 18 (8+10) through 19 games.

WHL

Sam Reinhart (2014, first round) saw his 10-game point streak snapped on Sunday as Kootenay closed a Western states road trip with a 4-3 overtime win at Everett. Prior to the blanking, Reinhart recorded a power-play marker in Friday's loss at Portland, and then another power-play goal and an assist in a 5-2 victory at Seattle on Saturday. The playmaking captain has amassed six goals and 22 points to lead the ICE to a 9-2 mark since his return from Buffalo. Reinhart also earned an invite to Canada's World Junior Team Camp that gets underway on Dec. 11 in Toronto.

Brycen Martin (2014, third round) recorded one assist last week as Swift Current went 0-3 in their run through Alberta with losses in Edmonton, Calgary and Red Deer. Martin enters December with 11 assists and a minus-one rating through 29 games.

OMJHL

Vaclav Karabacek (2014, second round) produced a power-play goal Friday as Gatineau dropped a 3-1 decision to Quebec. Karabacek lit the lamp again on Saturday as Gatineau doubled up Shawinigan 4-2. After scoring just four times in his first 17 outings, Karabacek has erupted for goals in four straight games and six in his last eight. The Czech World Junior candidate sits with an even 20 points (10+10) at the 25-game mark.

OHL

Brendan Lemieux (2014, second round) scored a pair of goals Monday as Barrie was defeated by Ottawa 5-2. On Saturday, Lemieux saw his four-game point streak come to an end in the Colts' overtime triumph over Sudbury. He was blanked again in a 5-3 loss to Oshawa on Sunday. The fiery winger has 14 goals in 21 games this season, including nine on the power play, two game-winners and one shorthanded.

Justin Bailey (2013, second round) ended a recent dry spell Sunday with his 15th goal of the season as Kitchener doubled Ottawa 4-2. Bailey had gone without a goal in his previous five games and without a point in his previous four. The big winger has gathered an even 30 points through 24 games, while his 15 goals rank 11th on the OHL leaderboard entering December.

In Saturday action, newly-minted Sabre Jean Dupuy scored just 1:13 into the opening period as Sault Ste. Marie dominated Guelph 5-1. Dupuy, who went without a point in Sunday's 2-1 loss to Sudbury, has notched a career-best 20 points through 21 games.

Eric Cornel (2014, second round) snapped a three-game drought with a goal and an assist Saturday as Peterborough pulled away late to earn a 7-3 victory over Ottawa. The two-point night boosts Cornel to eight goals and 15 assists through 24 games.

After finishing without a point in his Erie debut on Thursday, Nicholas Baptiste (2013, third round) notched an assist and a shootout marker Friday as the Otters squeaked past London 3-2. Baptiste was again shut out on Saturday in a 3-1 loss to Belleville to finish the month with six goals and 12 points in his first 15 contests. Baptiste was one of the 29 players invited to Team Canada's Junior Camp in Toronto, joining Reinhart and his new teammate Connor McDavid.

NCAA

One night after going without a point for the sixth time this season in a 3-2 win over RPI, Michigan forward J.T. Compher (2013, second round) broke into the zone with speed and finished with patience for his third goal of the year in a 6-0 drubbing of the Engineers. The even-strength marker puts Compher at 10 points (3+7) through 13 games. Michigan hosts Ohio State next Friday in a nationally televised game on the Big Ten Network.

Senior co-captain Brad Navin (2011, seventh round) assisted on the game-winning goal Saturday as Wisconsin earned their first victory of the year, 5-3 over Ferris State. Navin, who was held pointless in Friday's 1-1 tie with the Bulldogs, has netted two points (1+1) at the 10-game mark. The Badgers remain on home ice next weekend when they open the Big Ten schedule against Penn State.

Freshman goaltender Cal Petersen (2013, fifth round) earned the start on Saturday following a four-game stint as backup, stopping 23 of 28 shots as Notre Dame was bested 5-1 by Ohio State in the third-place game at the 2014 Shillelagh Tournament. The loss drops Petersen to 3-5 with a 2.98 GAA and .906 save%.

Freshman forward Connor Hurley (2013, second round) contributed two shots on goal Friday as Notre Dame coughed up a two-goal lead in suffering a 3-2 overtime loss to Union. Hurley returned to work on Saturday, logging a season-low minus-three rating in Notre Dame's loss to Ohio State. The Fighting Irish hit the road next weekend for a set with Massachusetts.

Sophomore winger Hudson Fasching went without a point for the fourth consecutive game Saturday as No. 3 Minnesota was upended 3-1 at Northeastern. Fasching, who the night before posted a plus-one rating in 6-2 win over No. 11/12 Boston College, is stuck on five goals and seven points after his first dozen games.

Minnesota forward Christian Isackson (2010, seventh round) notched one assist Friday as the Gophers bounced Boston College. The senior centerman added one shot on goal in Saturday's loss to Northeastern. Minnesota returns to conference action Friday at Michigan State.

Max Willman (2014, fifth round) finished with a plus-one rating Saturday as Brown ended their six-game skid with a 1-0 win over Connecticut. The freshman winger produced two shots on goal Sunday as the Bears were blanked by Holy Cross 5-0. Willman has gathered one goal and one assist in his first nine collegiate contests. He hasn't scored since Halloween night in the Bears' season opening victory over Army. The Bears are back in action Friday versus Union.

Judd Peterson (2012, seventh round) was unable to produce from the top line right wing spot as St. Cloud State split a pair of games with in-state rival Bemidji State. The freshman forward finished with a plus-one rating and one shot on goal in the Huskies' 6-3 win on Friday, and logged another plus-one on Saturday in a 4-1 defeat. The Huskies get a week off before resuming the schedule with a set at Nebraska-Omaha.

Anthony Florentino (2013, fifth round) returned to action Tuesday following a one-game absence, contributing three shots on goal as Providence blanked Army 3-0. The sophomore defender added another three shots to his stat line on Saturday as the Friars edged No. 10/11 Boston College 1-0. Florentino has earned big minutes en route to collecting four assists in 12 games for the Friars.

Providence defenseman Mark Adams (2009, fifth round) earned his first point of the year with an assist in the Friars' 3-0 shutout of Army. The fifth-year senior contributed two shots on goal in Saturday's victory over Boston College. Providence is back at it on Wednesday when they visit Northeastern.

Sean Malone (2013, sixth round) remained out of the lineup Tuesday as Harvard kept 2015 draft stud Jack Eichel off the scoresheet for the first time in his NCAA career in earning a 3-2 overtime victory over No. 1 Boston University. The sophomore sat again on Saturday as the Crimson doubled No. 4 UMass Lowell 4-2. Malone has missed all 10 of Harvard's games this season while recovering from an undisclosed injury. Harvard visits Ivy League rival Princeton on Friday.

Sweden

Goaltender Linus Ullmark (2012, sixth round) went 1-1 last week while starting two of MODO's three games. The big netminder stopped 27 of 30 shots on Wednesday in a 4-1 loss to Brynas IF. After a day off on Thursday, Ullmark turned in a 25-save performance in a 4-1 victory over Lulea HF. Ullmark, who has started 10 of MODO's last 11 contests, has compiled a 7-10 record with a 3.42 GAA, while his recent excellence has elevated his save percentage to a season-high .902.

Gustav Possler (2013, fifth round) was shutout in his first two games of the week, but notched one assist on Saturday as MODO skated to a 4-1 victory over Lulea HF. Possler helped get MODO on the board late in the opening frame when he entered the zone, cut to the middle, and turned his body to drop the puck off to a streaking Nichlas Torp for the finish. The helper gives the 20-year-old winger 12 points (6+6) through 24 games.

Victor Olofsson (2014, seventh round) was blanked in the week's three games but did log a career-high 17:11 of work on Thursday as MODO dropped a 3-2 shootout decision to HV 71. The 19-year-old sniper has eight goals (t-2nd on team) and 14 points in 26 games.

Jonas Johansson (2014, third round) made his second start of the season for Brynas IF on Thursday, allowing six goals on 32 shots in a 6-1 loss to league front-runner Frolunda HC. The performance drops Johansson to 0-2 with a 6.30 GAA and .843 save% in top league action this season.