



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

December 20, 2014

Avalanche-Sabres Preview

By Jeff Mezydlo

Associated Press

December 19, 2014

Though the Buffalo Sabres' longest winning streak of the season has ended, their confidence remains high.

Eagerly looking to get back on track, the Sabres try to end their struggles against the visiting Colorado Avalanche on Saturday night.

Buffalo (13-17-2) totaled 14 goals during a four-game winning streak but showed little offensive punch in Tuesday's 5-1 loss at Winnipeg.

"You never like to lose but it's almost a reminder that you have to be at your best, have to be sharp," said defenseman Josh Gorges, who hopes to return Saturday after missing the last two games with an apparent finger injury.

"We'll be ready for the next one."

The defeat was only the fourth in 14 games for the Sabres, who believe it's just a blip on the screen.

"Confidence is a major thing in sports, and in general," forward Patrick Kaleta said. "Confidence is big for us. The older guys have to put it in the minds of the younger guys that it's just a speed bump and everything is all right.

"You come together as a team and you don't dwell on it. Learn from the game, move on and get better."

The Sabres need to shore up defensively after allowing 15 goals in four games and at least three for the sixth time in the last seven.

Nikita Zadorov's power-play goal late in the first period opened the scoring, but was all Buffalo could muster on 28 shots.

"We looked a little sluggish out there, we didn't do a lot of the little things we had been doing to have our success," Gorges said. "Win or lose, the next day is a new day."

Buffalo hasn't had much success during an 0-3-4 stretch against Colorado that dates to a 6-4 victory Dec. 4, 2005.

The Avalanche (10-13-8) are 1-3-3 this month but have earned at least a point in three straight contests while dropping the last two in overtime.

Calvin Pickard made 47 saves before Blake Comeau's goal 2:24 into the extra session sent Colorado to a 1-0 loss at Pittsburgh on Thursday.

While coach Patrick Roy was pleased with Pickard's effort, concern remains after the Avalanche were shut out for the second time in four games and their forwards failed to score in back-to-back contests.

"The players know," Roy told the Avalanche's official website. "They know they have to generate more offense, and we have to be better around their net.

"Just need to learn to play those games, and be better in our decision making, especially at both blue lines. Breaking out is very important. And same thing in our entry, we're forcing plays that aren't there."

Near the bottom of the league converting 12.7 percent of its power-play chances, Colorado is 5 for 58 in the last 19 games.

The Avalanche went 3 for 9 with the man advantage while outscoring the Sabres 11-3 in two games last season. Defenseman Erik Johnson, who has scored Colorado's last two goals, had four assists in those games.

Teammate Gabriel Landeskog has four goals and two assists in three contests versus Buffalo, but is in the midst of a seven-game stretch without a score.

Buffalo's Tyler Ennis saw his four-game point streak end Tuesday, but he has four assists in four contests against the Avalanche.

Sabres' Flynn is getting his points across

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

December 19, 2014

Brian Flynn was a scorer in college.

During his four-year hockey career at Maine, he netted 69 goals, finishing with 156 points for a 1.02 points-per-game average.

He knew that would change once he entered the pro hockey world and his focus became working on whatever he could to add value to his game.

Faceoffs? Sure. Penalty kill? You bet.

He broke into the lineup as a reliable forward with good vision and as a steady defender. Now in his second full NHL season with the Buffalo Sabres, Flynn is starting to see some rewards on the offensive end.

Entering Saturday's game against the Colorado Avalanche in First Niagara Center (7 p.m., MSG, Radio 550 AM), Flynn has four goals, three assists and seven points.

Consider that in 79 games last year he had six goals and 13 points.

"It's evolving, no question about that," coach Ted Nolan said about Flynn's role. "Some players take a little bit of time. You don't pigeonhole someone when they're 22 or 23 and some people take a little bit longer and it seems like he's just starting to come into his own.

"He has tremendous insight into the game. He has good vision. He studies the game. He's very strong positionally."

Flynn was a standout forward at Maine from 2008-12. When the Black Bears' season ended his senior year, Flynn joined the Rochester Americans for his pro hockey debut.

In the 2012-13 season, he scored 16 goals in 45 games with the Amerks, playing 26 games with Buffalo.

He transitioned his game to the pro level, understanding where he could fit in and embracing the opportunities.

"At Maine I penalty killed and did all that, too," Flynn said. "When I was going to become a pro I knew that's what I would most likely have to do. It's really hard to be a top-six forward in this league and consistently produce. You want to do as many things as you can to add value to your own game.

"If you're good at faceoffs or good at penalty kill, that just adds a couple more minutes to your ice time every night and gives you some more chances and makes you more valuable to your team."

His ice time over the past two seasons has remained rather consistent – averaging around 14:30 with about 2:15 of that coming in short-handed situations.

But Nolan noted Flynn is starting to get some power play time, not a lot, but some. And every bit of ice time is an opportunity for Flynn.

He's been playing on the second line, finding a comfortable groove with veterans Brian Gionta and Torrey Mitchell. A lower body injury to Mitchell means some juggling – likely putting Flynn at center with Drew Stafford at the other wing.

"Center you expend a lot more energy," Flynn said. "You have to be more aware defensively, not that you're not as a winger, but center is a lot more skating and you really have to make sure you're taking care of your own end and hopefully moving pucks up to your wingers in good spots."

The more Flynn plays, the more confidence he gets and the better he becomes at reading the situation and creating opportunities in the offensive zone.

"I think the more you play you just gain confidence in the league and the pace of play," Flynn said. "I feel like I can make more plays out there. I think recently I've had a little more confidence to do that. As long as you're not doing it in areas like your own blue line and things like that I think Teddy's pretty good about it if you want to try and make some plays down low in the offensive zone you kind of have the green light to do that as long as you're taking care of your own end."

Sabres notebook: Power-play units stress puck movement

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

December 19, 2014

The power play continues to be a work in progress. And the Buffalo Sabres continue to work on it in practice. Every day.

The Sabres still have the worst power play in the league, clicking at just 8.8 percent with eight goals in 91 attempts. They're better at home – six of those power play goals have come at First Niagara Center.

"I think a lot of it is quick puck movement," defenseman Tyler Myers said. "Get the puck moving around and taking what's given to you. Take the simple play whether it's a shot from the half wall, shot from the point. We create the most havoc when we get the puck to the net. Quick puck movement to each other then when the opportunity is there to take it and not try to make the pretty play."

Myers, a heavy right shot, has been playing the point on the power play along with forward Drew Stafford.

Stafford has "been manning the left side," Myers said. "We've been trying to communicate with each other outside of practice on how we can be most effective. I feel like it's been going really well. The Winnipeg game, we got a good goal from the other unit but the time we were out, to be honest I thought it was our best power play game of the year."

The Sabres went 1 for 4 on the power play in Winnipeg on Tuesday, getting a goal from Nikita Zadorov.

"That first period power play I thought was tremendous the way we moved the puck," coach Ted Nolan said. "And I think we had two or three empty nets and just fumbled the puck at the last second. ... It's just a matter of time before those things start going in on a regular basis."

Buffalo's penalty killing has been comparatively much better. The Sabres rank 20th in the NHL, killing off 79.5 percent of their short-handed situations. And lately the unit has taken a hit with veteran penalty killers Mike Weber, Josh Gorges, Cody McCormick and Torrey Mitchell out with injury.

"Those guys are mainstays on the penalty kill," Nolan said. "When you lose those, it's tough. Brian Gionta stepped up and started killing some penalties. Nic Deslauriers, we wanted to get him more ice time and he's really taken it to another level, too. Patrick Kaleta, all of a sudden he has a chance at a little more."

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Weber practiced with the Sabres on Friday, a sign that he will soon return to the lineup. Weber was placed on the injured reserve Dec. 13 after having knee surgery. He is not expected to play Saturday against the Colorado Avalanche at First Niagara Center.

"He's healing. He's a quick healer," Nolan said. "He's feeling good. He even had aspirations of playing this Saturday but I think he's more enthusiastic than ready. But it was a good sign. He's really close. Just a clean-up type of thing he had to get done. No major damage so maybe."

Tyson Strachan missed his second practice on Friday with another "maintenance day" while Gorges skated with the team and is eager to go after missing two games with a finger injury.

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Colorado comes to Buffalo having lost its last two games in overtime. The Avalanche are 3-4-3 in their last 10 and their 28 points have them in 12th place in the Western Conference.

This is the second of a three-game road trip for the Avs. They lost 1-0 in overtime at Pittsburgh on Thursday and play at Detroit on Sunday.

Former Sabres captain Daniel Briere has six goals and seven points in 24 games with Colorado.

Well-rested Sabres host struggling Avalanche

By Evan Sporer

NHL.com

December 19, 2014

AVALANCHE (10-13-8) AT SABRES (13-17-2)

TV: ALT2, MSG-B

Season series: The Colorado Avalanche won their two games against the Buffalo Sabres last season by a combined score of 11-3. Matt Duchene had a goal and two assists, Gabriel Landeskog had three goals and an assist, and Ryan O'Reilly had a goal and three assists to lead Colorado.

Avalanche team scope: Colorado has lost six of its past seven games (1-3-3), and lost 1-0 in overtime to the Pittsburgh Penguins on Thursday in the opener of a three-game road trip. Rookie goalie Calvin Pickard made 47 saves before Blake Comeau scored the only goal of the game. "He was our star player, without a doubt," coach Patrick Roy said after the game, according to Colorado's website. "A point is a point. There's a lot of positives in our game, I would say. Tonight, obviously we're a little disappointed because we were one shot away to win the hockey game despite the fact that we might not have played our best game."

Sabres team scope: A 5-1 road loss to the Winnipeg Jets on Tuesday snapped a season-long four-game winning streak for the Sabres, who were glad for a three-day break after playing 11 games in 21 days. Buffalo has won 10 of its past 14 games after starting the season 3-13-2. The Sabres were down a forward at practice Friday but are expected to recall one before the game. It could be Mikhail Grigorenko, who made his season debut against Winnipeg but was returned to the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League after the game. Defenseman Mike Weber returned to practice on Friday for the first time since undergoing minor knee surgery on Dec. 12. "He's a quick healer," Nolan said. "He's feeling good. He even had aspirations of playing this Saturday, but I think he's more enthusiastic than ready." Defenseman Josh Gorges, who missed two games with a finger injury, practiced Friday and Nolan said he's likely to play against the Avalanche.

Sabres goalie Jhonas Enroth thriving with increased workload

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 19, 2014

BUFFALO – Following a one-game rest, Sabres goalie Jhonas Enroth will likely start tonight against the Colorado Avalanche, his 11th nod in the last 13 contests and 22nd appearance overall this season.

At his current pace, the 26-year-old would play 52 times. But given the frequency of his recent action, it's not crazy to think the diminutive Swede, one of the NHL's smallest netminders at 5-foot-10 and 166 pounds, could hit the prestigious 60-game mark.

Enroth has never played more than 28 games in an NHL season.

"I've only been playing 20-plus games all my years here," Enroth said Friday inside HarborCenter. "So it's definitely a lot higher pace with games. That's what we work for. I'm enjoying it."

To Enroth, who wrestled the No. 1 job away from friend Michal Neuvirth last month, these games have a special meaning. As a starting NHL goalie, he's living a dream.

"I feel like I'm getting a bigger role on the team, and I'm starting to feel like I belong here more than I did before when I'd just been backing up Ryan (Miller)," Enroth said. "So it's definitely a good feeling."

He added: "I mean, I love it. It's nice to ... play more games and get to play against the great teams pretty much every night. It's a lot of fun."

Enroth's calm, focused style has been fun to watch most nights during the Sabres' recent resurgence. He hasn't made many spectacular saves because he's so in tune and reading plays so well he often makes saves look easy.

Playing so regularly has given Enroth a rhythm and allowed him to find a groove.

"When you play a couple games in a row, you start thinking less when you're out there, and that's what you're striving to do, don't think too much, trust your instincts," Enroth said. "When you're having a good stretch and playing well, that's usually what the key is, where you don't think too much."

Overall, Enroth is 10-10-1 with a 2.96 goals-against average and .916 save percentage. His even-strength save percentage is a strong .930, the same number as Montreal's Carey Price and two points higher than his idol, the New York Rangers' Henrik Lundqvist.

Since taking over for an injured Neuvirth on Nov. 18, Enroth's numbers – 9-1, 2.21 and .935 – are spectacular. He has won every game during the Sabres' six-game home winning streak at the First Niagara Center.

He finally has some goal support, too. In recent seasons, the Sabres' feeble offense has often made Enroth the hard-luck loser.

But the Sabres have scored some goals recently. They have rallied late in five of their last six wins. They won 4-3 twice last week and 5-4 on Monday, helping Enroth earn victories on nights he wasn't at his best.

"It's definitely been taking some pressure off it," Enroth said after a brief laugh. "Obviously ... the last game I gave up four goals, it wasn't a great game but we still won. When we win there's really no problems."

Still, Enroth made key stops those nights.

"He's played well almost every game he's been in," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. "Even games he let in more, he didn't let ... that fourth one in to beat us. When we see them tie it up, he shut the door for us, and particularly in the shootouts, he's been really, really good and given us a chance to get points. So no complaints as far as his play whatsoever."

For now, Nolan will keep riding Enroth. Having played a career-high 58 times as an AHL rookie in 2008-09 with Portland, Enroth believes he can handle a heavy workload and play 60 or so games.

"I played pretty much every game when I was down in Portland," he said. "I felt pretty good those years, and I think I'm in better shape now than I was a couple of years ago, so I think I can do it."

Enroth said he grew up "a little bit more and started taking care of myself" by improving his eating and sleeping habits and "practicing smarter."

"So I think I'm just a little bit more mature now than I used to be," he said.

Meanwhile, Neuvirth, who played regularly for almost a month, must wait for his opportunity. He lost 5-1 Tuesday in Winnipeg. The 26-year-old has played well in some losses and has a .915 save percentage.

"It is tough, but it's a goalie life," Neuvirth said. "Only one guy can play. Jhony's been unbelievable lately. So I've been in this situation before. I got to stay positive and keep working hard. Good things will happen."

Nolan said Neuvirth must "do extra" when he plays "to get another moment."

"I feel it'll make him stronger and better in the long run," he said.

Sabres prepare for Avs on Saturday

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

December 19, 2014

The Buffalo Sabres are 8-1-0 in their past nine games at First Niagara Center with wins in their past four at home. They'll look to keep that going when the Colorado Avalanche visit Saturday night.

After the game, the Sabres will travel to Boston for a game Sunday night and then head to Detroit for a contest on Tuesday.

Overall, Buffalo is 10-4-0 in their past 14 games.

"I think our efforts on the road as of late have been just as good as they are it home," defenseman Tyler Myers said after practice Friday at HARBORCENTER. "It looks good because we have more home games and we're winning more. We're going to have more road games coming up and we're going to have to bring the same effort."

Buffalo will likely start Jhonas Enroth against the Avalanche. In his last 11 games, he's 9-2-0 with a .935 save percentage and a 2.20 goals-against average. In shootouts this season, he's 4-0 and has stopped 17 or 18 shooters (.944 percent).

"He's played well almost every game he's been in. Even games that he let in four, he didn't let that fifth one in to beat us or the fourth one to beat us," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. "When we see them tie it up, he's shut the door for us – particularly in the shootouts. He's been really, really good and giving us a chance to get points. So no complaints as far as his play whatsoever."

BACK AT IT

Mike Weber skated with the team for the first time since undergoing minor knee surgery on Dec. 12. While he likely won't be ready for this weekend's pair of games, there's a chance he could play Tuesday in Detroit. The initial prognosis had him out until after Christmas.

"He's a quick healer so he's feeling good," Nolan said. "He even had aspirations of playing this Saturday, but we'll slow him down a little bit. He's more enthusiastic than ready, but it was a good sign."

For the second-straight day, Tyson Strachan did not skate with the team. He had missed four games with a lower-body injury before playing in the previous two games. Nolan said they'll determine his status for the game against Colorado based on how he feels on Saturday.

Josh Gorges is slated to return to the lineup after missing the past two games with a finger injury. After another full practice on Friday, Nolan said Gorges will probably be back in against Colorado.

THE BIG UNIT

Buffalo's first power-play unit logged a majority of the Sabres' time on the man advantage against Winnipeg on Tuesday. Of their 5:53 on the power play, Myers, Drew Stafford, Tyler Ennis and Matt Moulson each logged over five minutes.

While the second unit scored their one power-play goal, that first unit was able to create a lot of movement and momentum. Myers thought it was the team's best effort on special teams yet this season.

"I think a lot of it is quick puck movement and not dusting it off too much. Getting the puck moving around and really taking what's given to you," he said. "Take the simple play, whether it's a shot from the halfwall, a shot from the point. We create the most havoc when we get the puck to the net."

FRIDAY'S PRACTICE

26 Matt Moulson – 28 Zemgus Girgensons – 63 Tyler Ennis
21 Drew Stafford – 65 Brian Flynn – 12 Brian Gionta
44 Nicolas Deslauriers – 82 Marcus Foligno – 36 Patrick Kaleta
80 Chris Stewart – 19 Cody Hodgson

4 Josh Gorges – 57 Tyler Myers
51 Nikita Zadorov – 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
61 Andre Benoit – 41 Andrej Meszaros
6 Mike Weber

1 Jhonas Enroth
34 Michal Neuvirth

Did Not Skate: 8 Cody McCormick (lower-body injury), 17 Torrey Mitchell (lower-body injury), 24 Tyson Strachan (lower-body injury)

Goaltender Matt Hackett skated on his own once again after practice.

POWER PLAY

First Unit

Moulson-Girgensons-Ennis
Stafford-Myers

Second Unit

Foligno-Flynn-Gionta
Ristolainen-Zadorov

FORWARD PROGRESS

With McCormick and Mitchell each at least away from returning, the Sabres will likely have to call up a forward from the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League. The Amerks host Adirondack on Friday and play Milwaukee on Saturday at The Blue Cross Arena.

In Mitchell's absence Brian Flynn, a third-year pro at age 26, moved back to center for practice on Thursday and remained there on Friday, between Drew Stafford – on his off-wing – and captain Brian Gionta.

Nolan has seen Flynn's role on the team really grow in the time he's been with the team.

"It's evolving, no question about that. Some players take a little bit of time," Nolan said. "You don't pigeonhole someone when they're 22, 23 and some people take a little bit longer. He seems like he's just starting to come into his own.

"He has tremendous insight to the game. He has good vision. He studies the game. He's very strong positionally and now he's even getting some power-play time so he's really coming into his own."