



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

December 29, 2014

Sabres rally to beat Islanders 4-3 in SO

By Nick Mendola

Associated Press

December 27, 2014

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Nicolas Deslauriers didn't even see his goal that ignited Buffalo's comeback victory over the New York Islanders on Saturday night.

With Buffalo down 3-0 early in the third period, Deslauriers' wrist from the slot sailed through three Islanders before beating goalie Kevin Poulin.

"I heard it hit the post," Deslauriers said. "But I saw (Drew) Stafford and (Brian) Flynn putting their hands up, so I put mine up."

The goal was the first of three third-period goals in just over 5 minutes for Buffalo, and Tyler Ennis scored in a shootout to give the Sabres a 4-3 victory and snap a four-game skid.

It was Deslauriers' fourth goal of the season, and his second in two games. He also added an assist on Zemgus Girgensons' short-handed goal.

"I'm just putting the puck on net and getting lucky odd bounces," Deslauriers said. "I'm not a guy who looks at my stats like that. It's more about finishing my hits and if I get a chance to bury one, I'll do my best."

Chris Stewart also scored, and Jhonas Enroth made 17 of his 33 saves in the third period and overtime.

"I thought their goalie obviously elevated," Islanders coach Jack Capuano said. "I mean he was good tonight, but he made some big saves when he had to and that's what you need to do when you win hockey games."

John Tavares scored twice, and Nick Leddy added a goal for the Islanders.

Poulin was recalled from Bridgeport of the American Hockey League on Tuesday after Jaroslav Halak sustained a lower-body injury.

"I thought he gave us a chance to win," Capuano said about Poulin.

Buffalo overcame a 3-0, third-period deficit for just the second time in franchise history, and posted its first three-goal comeback since a 6-5 overtime win against Toronto on April 3, 2012.

The Islanders scored on their second shot of the game when Leddy's slap shot from the left point beat a partially-screened Enroth.

Tavares made it 2-0 at the 11:56 mark with his 14th of the season. The New York captain stole the puck at the left circle and caught Enroth deep in the goal with a high backhand flip.

Tavares added his 15th on a cross-crease pass from Josh Bailey at 15:05.

Poulin made a right pad save on Cody Hodgson's open one-time shot from the slot a minute later to keep the score 3-0.

Patrick Kaleta took a diving shot about 5 minutes into the third period, but Poulin was able to push it wide with his blocker.

That's when things starting clicking for Buffalo.

"A couple guys just turned it up a little bit more," Sabres head coach Ted Nolan said. "Girgensons went to the next level, and can't forget about Stewart."

Deslauriers ruined Poulin's shutout bid with his shot through traffic with 6:39 gone in the third.

Then, with Stafford in the penalty box on a goaltender-interference call, Girgensons scored his 10th of the season to make it 3-2.

The Buffalo center took a long pass from Deslauriers and held off Johnny Boychuk with his backside before wristing a shot past Poulin for a short-handed goal at 10:01.

"After the second we told ourselves in the locker room it was time to step up, pick it up and come back in the third," Girgensons said.

Stewart picked up a pass from Stafford 1:51 later, slipping the puck between Poulin's legs to tie it a 3. The fans reaction after his goal was "for sure" the loudest Stewart's heard them.

"They were fired up," he said. "As soon as we got that short-handed goal they were really fired up in the building and they really gave us a boost tonight."

NOTES: Halak was placed on injured reserve, retroactive to Dec. 20. ... Sabres D Rasmus Ristolainen left the game with an illness just a minute into the second period. ... Grigorenko was recalled from Rochester before the game.

Coming from behind, Sabres waylay Islanders

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

December 27, 2014

The Sabres and their sellout crowd were dead quiet and going through the motions as the clock ticked toward what seemed like an inevitable loss. Buffalo had no momentum, no jump and 3-0 third-period deficit.

When the Sabres tied the game with 8:09 left Saturday, the fans went nuts. When overtime ended with the game still tied, the First Niagara Center crowd of 19,070 delivered a lengthy standing ovation.

The Sabres earned one more when Jhonas Enroth stoned John Tavares in the shootout to secure an improbable 4-3 victory.

"It was a really fun game to play in," Sabres center Brian Flynn said. "You just get a little momentum and it can really take you a long way."

Buffalo ended its four-game winless streak by erasing a three-goal, third-period deficit for only the second time in franchise history. The other late rally came against Atlanta on April 2, 2003, according to Elias Sports Bureau.

The Sabres entered the night 0-16-0 this season when trailing after 40 minutes.

"We said going into the third period, you just never know," coach Ted Nolan said. "Throw some pucks on net, and if you luck out on that first one, maybe they tighten up a bit and you get that second one.

"For us to say it was going to happen was a different story."

Even the most ardent diehard would have been hard-pressed to see this one coming.

The Sabres started their rally with 13:21 to go when Nicolas Deslauriers scored from the slot. It was the first goal in two nights allowed by Islanders goaltender Kevin Poulin, who had a shutout for New York's minor-league club Friday and was making his season debut.

"We just needed that first goal to get a fresh start," center Zemgus Girgensons said. "D-lo got it, and it got us back on our feet."

The Sabres' second goal flustered Poulin and his teammates. Deslauriers set up Girgensons for a partial breakaway, and the darling of the All-Star voting put a stoppable short-handed shot past Poulin with 9:59 remaining. It gave a shot of adrenaline to the Sabres and their fourth sellout crowd of the year.

"Two quick goals like that, you know a goalie gets shaky," Deslauriers said. "We just needed to keep going."

New York called a timeout after the goal, but it failed to change anything. After Drew Stafford stepped out of the penalty box, he set up Chris Stewart for a drive along the goal line. When Stewart crossed in front and put a shot through Poulin's pads, the crowd erupted to celebrate the 3-3 tie.

"They were fired up, and it was great to see," said Stewart, who extended his points streak to four games. "As soon as we got that short-handed goal, you could really feel the energy in the building. They gave us a boost."

Tyler Ennis scored the lone goal in the shootout. Tavares, who scored twice in the second period, had a chance to extend it but was stymied by Jhonas Enroth. The Buffalo goaltender improved to 5-0 in the breakaway challenge and has stopped 20 of 21 shots.

Enroth stopped 33 of 36 shots during the game. Poulin faced 26 shots, including only six during the three-goal third period.

"They scored the first one, and you could feel they regained life," Poulin said. "We should have closed the door."

The Sabres got healthier before the game with the return of Matt Moulson, Mike Weber and Cody McCormick, but they still had five regulars out. Brian Gionta (upper body), Tyler Myers, Torrey Mitchell, Tyson Strachan (all lower body) and Marcus Foligno (hand) were absent.

"Marcus Foligno had surgery a couple days ago, so he'll be out for at least a month or two," Nolan said. "Tyler Myers is kind of like that week-to-week. Gionta's still going to be out for a little bit."

Defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen departed with flu-like symptoms after playing the opening shift of the second period. The Sabres overcame his absence and their uninspired play through 40 minutes.

"After the second, we put the working boots on and it went well," Deslauriers said.

The Sabres' next game is Monday night in Ottawa. They host Tampa Bay at 6 p.m. New Year's Eve for Tux and Pucks Night. Fans who have a ticket can rent a tuxedo at Tuxedo Junction for \$20.15. The team is also offering a package of two 300 Level tickets and one tux rental for \$149.95.

The Sabres showed Saturday night that anyone attending their games should stick around until the end.

"We were very appreciative of the standing ovation at the end of the game," Nolan said. "I think they're the greatest fans in the league, and they just want a hockey game every time they come to the arena. We gave them a good one."

Fun-loving Zadorov developing steadily

By Bucky Gleason

Buffalo News

December 27, 2014

A few days ago, out of the blue, rookie defenseman Nikita Zadorov pulled Rob Ray to the side for a little discussion.

"Bring your skates in," Zadorov said. "We're going to center ice, and I'm going to kick the living ..." and, well, you know the rest.

Ray laughed, of course.

"It caught me off guard," Ray said Saturday before the Sabres rallied for a 4-3 victory over the Islanders in a shootout. "But that's just the way he is. I told him, 'Yeah, I'll bring them in. You just tell me the day. You want me to sell tickets to it? You want me to wait until the end of the year so I don't hurt you or embarrass you?'"

For weeks, the promising 19-year-old player and the 46-year-old enforcer-turned-commentator have had a running joke about going to toe-to-toe and settling things once and for all. Just for kicks, Zadorov has made snide comments to Ray during games while skating past him on his way to the Sabres' bench.

When asked about his relationship with Razor, Zadorov asked, "Who's Razor?"

You know, he was told, Rob Ray.

"Oh, him," Zadorov said. "I didn't know he had a nickname."

Ray can't get enough of the kid. Despite coming from different continents and playing different positions in different eras, they formed a fast friendship because they shared the same approach to the game. Zadorov is a character, like Ray, with his intensity on the ice and infectious personality everywhere else.

You can only hope the multibillion-dollar industry known as the NHL doesn't strip the 6-foot-5, 244-pound man-child of his youthful exuberance and sense of humor. Both have been lacking in the organization. Buffalo could have two top-end defensemen if he and Rasmus Ristolainen continue to evolve.

Zadorov is a graceful skater for a big man and has a great feel for the game. He possesses a rare combination of size and skill, weaved neatly into his fierce competitiveness, aggression and playfulness. It comes together because he follows hockey's basic instructions:

Work hard, have fun.

It's precisely what the Sabres did in the third period Saturday. They fell behind, 3-0, worked to get back into the game and had a blast while scoring three goals in the final period to force overtime. Zadorov played 25 minutes, 59 seconds, filling in for Ristolainen on the power play after he left with illness. Zadorov was on the ice for the final moments of OT before Tyler Ennis scored the only goal in the shootout.

Zadorov played a key role yet again and took another step toward establishing himself as a reliable young player in this league. Long gone are questions about his commitment after he reported to training camp out of shape. Remember, he watched 11 of the first 12 games before whipping himself into condition and returning a hungry, determined player.

He has since been one of the Sabres' best defensemen.

"Every player wants to play," Zadorov said. "Sometimes, it's hard not playing six or seven games, sitting in the box, eating popcorn and not helping your teammates. I was like, 'Come on, give me a chance.' I was just waiting for that chance. When I step on the ice, I want to play. I love the game."

You understand his appetite when you learn his backstory, how he often skipped school in Moscow to practice on his own, how he was spared discipline from his grade-school teachers who knew they couldn't stop him. He was obsessed with hockey while growing up in an upper middle-class family in post-Cold War Russia.

Determined to play in the NHL, he left home for London of the OHL when he was 17 and made a seamless transition to North America. He knew three English words when he arrived and taught himself the language in three months. He's fluent now with a few understandable, if not amusing, hiccups along the way.

Zadorov's reply when asked about his family joining him in Buffalo for Christmas: "In Russia, we celebrate the Happy New Year. The Christmas is for the Cath-o-lics, right? We're not from there."

How do you not love this kid?

Nolan smiled Saturday at the mere mention of his name. His teammates react much the same. He shows up for practice every day with a smile on his face. He shares an apartment in Buffalo with his girlfriend, is playing in the best league in the world and is getting paid a good buck.

He's also turning into a terrific young player.

Once he cracked the lineup, Nolan couldn't take him out. The Sabres are 11-10-2 with him playing a regular shift after going 3-9-1 in the first 13 games.

He's not the only reason for their improvement, but his emergence has been a key factor.

"You can't teach 6-5," veteran Josh Gorges said. "Then you add his ability to skate and move, his skill set, his shot and his hands. He plays with an edge. He's not afraid to get in the middle. He'll get dirty and play a physical game. He's got all the tools to be a fantastic defenseman for a lot of years."

That, folks, is the plan.

Zadorov has been a bright spot in a trying season, a building block who offers hope for the future. The game Saturday against the Islanders was a reminder about the importance of the draft. Zadorov, taken 16th overall in 2013, is evidence they need not wait for some No. 1 pick overall to rescue them.

The Sabres will benefit more from pushing forward this season, as they did Saturday, than holding back and hoping for a potential savior. Zadorov is growing before our eyes. He played so well during the first 24 games with Buffalo that the Sabres couldn't afford to release him to Russia for the world juniors.

"He's got a great personality, he really does," Nolan said.

"He has a great demeanor. He's one of those guys, in two or three years or whenever this team is going for championship games, and it's a pressure cooker, he's going to have a calm demeanor. There's no panic in his game whatsoever."

Zadorov is playing nearly 19 minutes per game. His minus-3 rating leads all Buffalo defensemen who played more than three games this season. He has been physical. He's been consistent considering he's a teenager still finding his way.

And he hasn't been overwhelmed against the game's best players. If anything, he looks like he's been in the NHL for years. He's playing with confidence, and he and his teammates are having fun.

In fact, it could be the biggest reason they have played better since he earned his spot. After all, as Ray often says, hockey really is just a game.

"It's the best life," Zadorov said. "When you're doing your favorite stuff, when you're playing hockey and you love it, and you're making money from it, it's a good deal."

Moulson happy not to be mumps patient

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

December 27, 2014

Who knew getting the flu could be good news?

Matt Moulson knows mumps is a trending word around the NHL as 21 players have contracted the disease. So when he got sick last weekend, his thoughts turned toward the worst.

The Sabres tested their first-line left winger for mumps, but the results showed plain old influenza in his system. Moulson missed three games with the illness but returned Saturday for Buffalo's shootout win against the New York Islanders.

"I think everyone's worried about what's going on throughout the league, but I had all the testing done for it and it was just the flu," Moulson said in First Niagara Center. "Obviously, some precautions around the NHL sent me home, but luckily it was just the flu."

Moulson bolted out of the arena a couple of hours before Buffalo hosted Colorado on Dec. 21. He felt well enough to return for Tuesday's game in Detroit, but his mumps tests hadn't come back yet.

"Luckily, they came back all good," he said.

Moulson's return to health allowed him to face his former team for the first time. New York sent the winger to Buffalo in October 2013, but he was traded to Minnesota before the Sabres and Isles faced each other.

He left behind good friends, including Kyle Okposo. Moulson and the Isles winger are godfathers to each other's children, and Moulson welcomed Okposo to his home during the Christmas break.

"We obviously keep up having good friends on the team," said Moulson, who turned into a three-time 30-goal scorer while skating with Isles captain John Tavares. "Obviously, I had a chance to play with great players. That definitely helps. But I think sometimes it's a confidence thing, and for whatever reason I had a lot of confidence when I was playing. I knew Johnny and obviously we had some chemistry. Things went well."

The Isles are playing well this season, but they went into a tailspin after Moulson departed. Losing someone who fit in so well was a stunner.

"I just think it's how close we were off the ice," Tavares said of the duo's success. "He was someone I could just lean on when I needed someone to talk to. I certainly miss him. I know he's enjoying his time here in Buffalo."

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Training camp is when optimism is at its peak. Every team is confident and eager for a fresh start. The Islanders were no different this fall. They felt great as puck drop neared for the regular season.

They felt even better when Johnny Boychuk and Nick Leddy walked into the dressing room during the final weekend of camp. The acquisition of two Stanley Cup-winning defensemen sent the morale meter off the charts.

"It was huge for our team," Okposo said in First Niagara Center. "It sent a message to us as a team, to our fan base and to everybody in our organization that we're here to win and we're going to do what it takes."

The Isles embraced the positive message from management. It's a big reason why New York started 16-6 and is still on a nice roll at 23-11-1.

"We're kind of finding our stride," forward Ryan Strome said. "I think the good start was important to get our confidence up, and we've been playing with that confidence all year."

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In addition to Moulson, the Sabres welcomed back center Cody McCormick and defenseman Mike Weber.

McCormick missed six games with a lower-body injury. He missed four games earlier in the season with a concussion.

"I feel a little fragile this year so far. Hopefully, I'm a little more durable going forward," McCormick said. "It's probably years of how I play, but I'm not going to change anything. That's what got me here and what keeps me around."

Weber was back after missing six games because of arthroscopic knee surgery. He skated alongside Andrej Meszaros.

"I was available for the last couple, but we erred on the side of caution," Weber said. "I was playing with it for about three weeks, and it just got to a point where we had to do something to eliminate some of the swelling and pain. We did that, and it's just getting her back, getting her strong and getting back on the ice."

Inside the NHL: Sabres future is nearing the 'now' phase

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

December 27, 2014

It's been 21 months since the Sabres began selling "the future." As tends to happen when months go by and calendars go out of date, the future eventually becomes the present.

That time is getting close in Buffalo.

With last week's promotion of Joel Armia, fans have seen all of the first-round prospects in the organization. In fact, they've seen more of the future than fans of any other NHL team.

The Sabres and Islanders have made the most first-round picks since 2010 with seven each. All seven of the Sabres' selections – Mark Pysyk (2010), Armia (2011), Mikhail Grigorenko and Zemgus Girgensons (2012), Rasmus Ristolainen and Nikita Zadorov (2013), and Sam Reinhart (2014) – have appeared in the NHL.

Only four of the Islanders' picks have made it to The Show. Other than the Sabres, the lone club to have all of its first-rounders since 2010 make it to the NHL is Edmonton. The Oilers have made six picks: Taylor Hall ('10), Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Oscar Klefbom ('11), Nail Yakupov ('12), Darnell Nurse ('13) and Leon Draisaitl ('14).

Though Reinhart is gone until at least next season, having the other first-rounders available is what Buffalo dreamed of when it shipped out Jordan Leopold, Robyn Regehr and Jason Pominville in a four-day span from March 30 to April 3, 2013. The Sabres are counting on their seven first-round selections (plus the three coming in June) to turn the team into a contender, either through the prospects' own play or by being bargaining chips in trades.

Now that fans have seen the first-rounders, here's an update on the rest of the prospects taken since the Sabres selected Pysyk with the 23rd overall pick:

2010: Aside from Pysyk, this draft belongs in the scrap heap. The defenseman is probably the only player taken in 2010 who will ever play in the NHL. It rivals the 1973, '76, '81, '93 and 2000 drafts as the worst in Sabres history.

2011: Sixth-round pick Nathan Lieuwen preceded Armia into the NHL. He's still in the mix as the Sabres' "goalie of the future," but he's struggling this season. Lieuwen is only 4-9 with an .883 save percentage and 3.29 goals-against average in Rochester.

Third-round pick Daniel Catenacci, who topped 30 goals twice in juniors, has three goals and no assists in 25 games with the Amerks. No one else appears to have a shot at the NHL.

2012: The Sabres and Washington are the only teams that have had three draft picks already reach the NHL. Girgensons has the making of a future captain. Grigorenko has first-round talent. Second-round selection Jake McCabe proved at the end of last season he can play at the top level.

Sixth-round pick Linus Ullmark has the chance to make this draft extremely special. The 6-foot-3, 220-pounder was the Goaltender of the Year in the Swedish elite league last season, with a .931 save percentage and 2.01 GAA. His numbers aren't nearly as good this season (.902, 3.36), but Ullmark's MoDo team makes the Sabres look like the stingiest defensive squad in the world. Ullmark recently had a stretch in which he faced 50-plus shots in three straight games.

2013: Just like the previous year, the Sabres are one of the few teams who have achieved early returns from this selection process. Ristolainen and Zadorov are already NHL regulars. Edmonton, Tampa Bay and Colorado are the only other organizations with two picks who've appeared in the league.

Second-round pick J.T. Compher has 11 points in 15 games with the University of Michigan and is representing the United States at the world junior championships. Williamsville native Justin Bailey, another second-rounder, has 18 goals and 36 points in 31 games with Kitchener of the Ontario Hockey League. Third-rounder Nick Baptiste, who like Bailey is already under contract, has nine goals and 18 points in 21 junior games after putting up 45 goals last season.

If any of those forwards (or second-rounder Connor Hurley, a Notre Dame freshman) shows as much promise as the two defensemen, this draft could be the Sabres' cornerstone. That's something to be determined in the future. As the arrival of the first-round picks has shown, the future can come pretty quickly.

Lockout talk already?

We're still 7½ seasons away from the expiration of the collective bargaining agreement, but there's already sparring between the league and the players' association. Yee haw!

NHLPA leader Donald Fehr, who probably hates salary caps more than anyone on the planet, is predicting the lockout cycle will continue after the 2021-22 season. He told the Hockey News that owners have nothing to lose by locking out players in a capped system.

NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly's response to Montreal reporter Renaud Lavoie termed Fehr's outlook as a "fairly naive and uneducated view of the situation."

The good news is they've got a long time to get on the same page. The bad news is they've got a long time to get further away.

Pegulas shuffle staff

Terry and Kim Pegula continue to build up Pegula Sports & Entertainment, the parent company for the Sabres, Bills and everything else owned by the couple. The organization lists five people as executive vice presidents after it moved Bruce Popko from the Bills.

Popko oversaw the football team's corporate partnership division and is now the executive VP of business development for Pegula Sports & Entertainment. PSE also has Chuck LaMattina (finance and business operations), Brent Rossi (marketing and brand strategy), Frank Cravotta (creative services) and Mark Preisler (media and content) as executive VPs. Kim Pegula is the chief executive officer and president.

On the fly

- Buffalo and Ottawa opened new arenas in 1996. Can you imagine replacing First Niagara Center already? Well, that's what is happening in Ottawa. The Senators will soon bid to build an arena closer to downtown. Canadian Tire Centre is 17 miles outside the city, but rush-hour traffic can lead to hour-plus commutes for games.
- The Rookie of the Year race will be fun to watch. Nashville's Filip Forsberg has 13 goals and 32 points in 33 games. Calgary's Johnny Gaudreau has 10 goals and 27 points in 35 games. Aaron Ekblad, this year's No. 1 overall pick, is tied for the team lead in Florida with 19 points.
- It's beyond rare for a player to ask for something to be written in the paper. One of the few times it happened to me was in January 2004 when the Sabres sent longtime minor-leaguer Chris Taylor back to Rochester. Chris Drury pulled me aside to tell me how much the veteran center meant to the team and that he should be publicly thanked for it. The Amerks will induct Taylor into their Hall of Fame next month, and I'm sure Drury (wherever he is) would be thrilled to hear of the well-deserved honor.

Deslauriers making presence felt with Sabres

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

December 28, 2014

Nicolas Deslauriers has been in the Buffalo Sabres organization for less than a year, so there's still a lot of learning going on for all involved.

One thing seems pretty certain: The Sabres have found a burly, on-the-edge winger who has some offensive skills.

Heading into tonight's game against the Ottawa Senators in Canadian Tire Centre, Deslauriers has a three-game point streak (two goals, two assists). He's coming off the best game of his NHL career in Saturday's shootout victory over the New York Islanders and was central to the Sabres' comeback from a 3-0 deficit.

Deslauriers scored his fourth goal of the season and added an assist via a perfect stretch pass on Zemgus Girgensons' short-handed goal. In posting his first multipoint game in the NHL, Deslauriers led the Sabres in both shots on goal (5) and hits (5) while playing a career-high 17 minutes, 51 seconds.

"I'm not a guy who sets goals. It's more about bringing momentum for teammates," Deslauriers said after practice Sunday in First Niagara Center. "Linemates are important. I know it's harder to get goals in the NHL than the AHL. My mentality is more finishing hits and if I have a chance to put one in, I'll try to do that."

Deslauriers, 23, is a converted defenseman who just became a full-time forward last year for Los Angeles' Manchester farm club in the AHL. He's listed at 6-foot-1 and 209 pounds, although he seems bigger than those figures in person and certainly plays bigger than them on the ice.

He joined the organization in March along with Hudson Fasching in a trade for Brayden McNabb. The 6-2 Fasching, currently playing for Team USA in the World Junior Championships, and Deslauriers are the kind of bulky forwards the Sabres have been lacking for many years.

Deslauriers collected 18 goals and 39 points last year for Manchester. He has four goals and 12 points in 36 games for the Sabres this season and is surprisingly fifth on the team in points. Coach Ted Nolan has been familiar with Deslauriers because his son, Jordan, was a teammate in Manchester.

What kind of offensive player can Deslauriers be? He's still trying to figure out his ceiling.

"It's a different game here for me," he said. "I was at over 20 minutes in the AHL some nights, playing the point on the power play. Goalies are way better and bigger here, the game is faster. I just want to capitalize on chances when I get them."

Playing on the third line with Brian Flynn and Drew Stafford, Deslauriers had a big bounceback game Saturday. He drew Nolan's ire for an after-the-whistle roughing penalty that seemed to turn momentum in Detroit's favor during Tuesday's 6-3 loss to the Red Wings, but Nolan didn't scratch him the next game. Instead, the coach went back to Deslauriers and got rewarded for the faith.

"I really believe that everybody makes mistakes and responds to it certain ways," Nolan said. "Deslauriers is one of those guys who seems to be able to forget about it and move on."

"I learned that in the AHL that when I had a bad shift or a bad game to not leave it in your mind too long," Deslauriers said. "Be ready for the next shift when it comes or the next day. It felt good to have a three-day break. ... I felt it was my 'A' game."

Deslauriers' goal was a quick snap shot from the slot that snaked through goaltender Kevin Poulin and gave him goals in back-to-back games. But he was really thrilled with his pass that sent away Girgensons for the goal that turned the game in Buffalo's favor.

"The crowd was absolutely roaring in here after that," he said. "It was awesome. I saw it open up and I just waited for him to really be in the spot where I gave him time to be between the two Ds. I made the pass and he outbattled their guy. Great effort.

"A lot of guys were saying I looked like a D-man out there. That's something I guess I have some ability to do with the long passes from playing on the back end."

Deslauriers has proved he can hit and throw punches as well as anyone on the team. But forwards on the bottom two lines also need to be able to play with the puck and produce offense in the changing NHL. His ability to do that seems to have him ticketed for a future spot on this roster.

"Championship teams are built with your third and fourth lines being able to contribute offensively and play a strong defensive game," Nolan said. "The one thing we've been doing with him is a little bit more penalty killing. The goals are nice obviously, but if he becomes that good, solid third-line or fourth-line guy for you that can contribute, it's a great find."

Sabres notebook: Enroth shows shootout mastery

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

December 28, 2014

Shootout struggles are a big topic in places where they're costing teams points. The Detroit Red Wings are 1-7 in them this year and the Philadelphia Flyers were an NHL-worst 0-5. The New Jersey Devils are 2-19 the last two seasons.

Then you have the Buffalo Sabres. They're 6-1 in shootouts, tied with the New York Islanders for the best record in the NHL. And they beat the Islanders in one here Saturday night as Tyler Ennis scored the only goal.

The Sabres' shootout strength is clearly in net, where Jhonas Enroth has become a runaway leader among NHL goalies who have participated in more than two this season.

Enroth stoned all three Islanders shooters Saturday and has stopped a remarkable 20 of 21 attempts overall this season. His shootout save percentage of .952 far outstrips second place Pekka Rinne of Nashville, who is 17 of 19 for an .895. Enroth's 5-0 record is the best in the league and tied with Florida's Roberto Luongo (5-3) for the lead in wins.

Enroth ended Saturday's shootout by stopping Islanders star John Tavares, who made about a dozen dekes with the puck while slowly coming down the ice hoping the Buffalo goaltender would crack. Enroth didn't.

"I kind of knew he was going to do something like that," Enroth said after practice Sunday in First Niagara Center. "I've seen him do similar stuff before. I just tried to stay patient and wait for his first move ... or his last move, I guess. I've seen him do that before and I was kind of waiting for it."

"One thing about Jhonas right now is he's full of confidence," said coach Ted Nolan. "He sees the puck real well, he's following it very well and knock on wood with the shootouts, they don't have too much to shoot when they come down on him, which means he's in great position."

Enroth has stopped 18 straight attempts in the shootout. He gave up a goal Oct. 14 to Carolina's Chris Terry but stopped six more that night as Buffalo got its first win of the season with an eight-round affair.

Since then, Enroth has gone 12 of 12 – including all eight shots he's faced at home.

"It's so much mental," he said. "I got a good start in shootouts this year down in Carolina and since then I've been taking off. It's definitely mental, preparation and try to stay patient. The top guys like to deke, and I'm just waiting for moves."

The Sabres are tied for third in the league in shootout goals with 10 and are ninth in shooting percentage at 37 percent (10 of 27). Ennis' goal Saturday was his team-high third of the year in six attempts. Zemgus Girgensons leads the team with two game-winners.

Based on opponent, might the Sabres consider taking the air out of an overtime game simply to take their chances in the shootout? Nolan wouldn't go that far but said the team has the right feeling when the game goes past OT.

"We feel comfortable with the way Jhonas is playing and our top four shooters," Nolan said, referring to Matt Moulson, Ennis, Girgensons and Brian Flynn. "Between Matty Moulson, Ennis and Girgensons, they're three pretty good shooters for us so we're feeling confident with that."

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There are lots of fluid parts on the Buffalo defense heading into tonight's game in Ottawa.

Tyler Myers (lower body), Rasmus Ristolainen (flu) and Andrej Meszaros (maintenance) all missed practice Sunday. Tyson Strachan, who has missed the last four games with a lower-body injury, practiced fully Sunday for the first time and said he's ready to go tonight.

Nolan said there's a possibility Strachan can play and is still awaiting definitive word on Ristolainen. The Sabres, however, are clearly planning not to have either Ristolainen or Meszaros tonight as they have recalled Mark Pysyk from Rochester and he practiced with the team Sunday.

Elsewhere on the injury front, Nolan said captain Brian Gionta is on a week-to-week timetable with the upper-body injury he suffered last week in Boston. Marcus Foligno's surgically repaired hand will keep him out around six more weeks.

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More notes on Saturday's big comeback against the Islanders:

- It was the first time the Sabres won a game after trailing by three goals since their 6-5 overtime home win over Toronto on April 3, 2012.
- It was just the second time in franchise history Buffalo has won when trailing, 3-0, in the third period. The only other time that happened was a 4-3 win here over Atlanta on April 2, 2003.
- The last time the Sabres reversed a three-goal deficit of any kind in the third period was their 7-4 win over Tampa Bay on March 19, 2008. Buffalo was trailing, 4-1, in that game before exploding for the final six goals.

Islanders blow lead, lose to Sabres in shootout

By Joe Yerdon

NHL.com

December 27, 2014

BUFFALO -- A three-goal lead in the third period wasn't enough for the New York Islanders on Saturday.

Tyler Ennis scored in the shootout and Jhonas Enroth stopped all three shooters to give the Buffalo Sabres a 4-3 win against the Islanders at First Niagara Center.

The Sabres (14-19-3) ended a four-game skid. Enroth stopped Kyle Okposo, Frans Nielsen, and John Tavares in the shootout to earn the victory.

"In this game, it's one thing we said going into the third period, you just never know," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. "Throw some pucks on net ... but for us to say it was going to happen was a different story. It was just a great third period."

The Islanders (23-11-1) jumped out to a 3-0 lead after two periods with a goal from Nick Leddy in the first period and two from Tavares in the second, but the Sabres scored three times in 5:12 in the third to tie the game.

Enroth made 33 saves through 65 minutes and improved to 5-0 in shootouts.

"I thought their goalie obviously elevated," Islanders coach Jack Capuano said. "I mean he was good tonight, but he made some big saves when he had to and that's what you need to do when you win hockey games. I thought their goalie played well and, we just, at that point, we had some quality chances ... we just couldn't get one by him."

According to Elias Sports, it was the second time in Sabres history they overcame a 3-0 deficit in the third period and won. They also accomplished the feat on April 2, 2003 in a 4-3 win against the Atlanta Thrashers. It was also the first time they overcame a three-goal deficit and won since April 3, 2012 against the Toronto Maple Leafs.

"It just goes to show you the type of character we have in this room and a no-quit attitude," Sabres forward Drew Stafford said. "Earlier on in the year, especially down 3-0, the way that they were kind of controlling the play, especially in the second period, we might've folded up shop. It's not so anymore. The type of grit, the type of determination we have in here ... what a gutsy win."

Nic Deslauriers made it 3-1 with 13:21 left in the third period with his fourth goal of the season and second in as many games. Deslauriers received a pass from Stafford in the high slot and took a wrist shot that beat Islanders goalie Kevin Poulin for his fourth goal of the season. The goal also extended Deslauriers point streak to three games.

"We always believed, but we got lucky," Deslauriers said. "The puck just popped out at me, I took a shot and it went in. From there we built momentum and [Zemgus] Girgensons buried a nice goal there."

Girgensons made it 3-2 with a shorthanded goal with 9:59 left. Girgensons took a pass from Deslauriers and broke in against Islanders defenseman Johnny Boychuk. Girgensons' wrist shot beat Poulin to the stick side for his 10th goal of the season.

"I think a couple guys just turned it up a little bit more," Nolan said. "Girgensons went to the next level, [you] can't forget about [Chris] Stewart. I think for the last couple of games he's really coming on. Stafford didn't play his two best periods at the beginning, but he had a good third period."

Stewart tied the game 3-3 with 8:09 remaining. Stewart took a pass from Stafford, deked and then beat Poulin with a backhand shot for his fifth goal of the season.

"It's pretty much about giving your best at the end, not getting frustrated being down 3-0," Girgensons said. "We just needed that first goal to get a fresh start. It got us back on our feet."

Poulin made his season debut after he was recalled from Bridgeport of the American Hockey League on Saturday morning. He is the third Islanders goaltender this season to see a 3-0 lead slip away, joining Jaroslav Halak and Chad Johnson.

"I thought he gave us a chance to win," Capuano said. "I think the first [goal], after he looks at it, maybe he'd like to tie that one up, I'm not sure, I'd have to look at that one again and the short-side goal. In the second period on their power play, even though our penalty kill was pretty good tonight, he made some big saves, especially the faceoff on [Andrej] Meszaros there with the one-timer. You know what? Coming in he played [Friday] night, back-to-back games, I thought he played pretty well."

Tavares' two goals gave him his first multi-point game since Nov. 22 against the Pittsburgh Penguins and gave him the team lead in goals with 15, one ahead of Brock Nelson. Tavares and linemates Josh Bailey and Kyle Okposo created quality chances for much of the game.

"I thought that line was good tonight," Capuano said. "They did a lot of good things. I thought all the lines contributed. Any time that your top line can, after the break, get off to a good start, because we're going to need that, [is good]. But they were big for us tonight."

Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen left the game early in the second period because of an illness and did not return. Ristolainen played 42 seconds of the opening shift of the second period and played 8:14. Nolan said they'll evaluate his health before they go on the road against the Ottawa Senators on Monday.

Sabres roar back from late 3-goal deficit, beat Isles in shootout

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 27, 2014

BUFFALO – Give 'em a nickname. The "Cardiac Sabres" sounds appropriate. Or perhaps the "Comeback Kids" is a little better? These days, no lead is safe inside the First Niagara Center, the site of a several stirring, late-game comebacks by the Sabres in recent weeks.

The Sabres roared back again Saturday, scoring three goals on four shots during a wild five minutes to erase a 3-0 deficit against the upstart New York Islanders.

"It just goes to show you the type of character that we have in this room and the no-quit attitude," winger Drew Stafford said after a 4-3 shootout win ended the Sabres' four-game losing streak. "Earlier on in the year, especially down 3-0, the way that they were kind of controlling the play, especially in the second period, (we) might've folded up shop, but it's not so anymore."

When Chris Stewart zoomed in and slid the puck between goalie Kevin Poulin's legs to tie it 11:51 into the third period, the capacity crowd of 19,070 fans erupted.

It sounded like it was 2006 or 2007 again.

"That was definitely the loudest I've ever heard it since I've been here," Stewart said.

Stafford, the longest-tenured Sabre, added: "That was a heck of a move by him. To come back like that, it's great to hear that sound in this building. It's been a long time since I've heard it that loud. It goes to show you the fans here, they still want a winning product on the ice. We're doing our best."

Nick Deslauriers' goal at 6:39 started the comeback. Then with the Sabres generating more offense, Stafford went off for a weak goalie infraction penalty. But Zemgus Girgensons fended off Isles defenseman Johnny Boychuk and scored short-handed at 10:01.

"Two quick goals like that you know a goalie gets shaky," Deslauriers said. "We just needed to keep going at them."

The Sabres then seized all of the momentum.

"I really think that short-handed goal by Gussy really fired up the bench," Stewart said. "You could feel it in the air after that, the energy. We were high-stepping after that."

Sabres coach Ted Nolan added: "We said going into the third period, 'You just never know, throw some pucks at the net.'"

Tyler Ennis scored the shootout's lone goal. Goalie Jhonas Enroth improved to 5-0 in shootouts this season.

How rare is a win like Saturday's? The Sabres overcame a 3-0 third-period deficit and won for just the second time in their 44-year history, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. It was the first time since a 4-3 triumph against Atlanta on April 2, 2003.

The Sabres erased a three-goal deficit in a win for the first time since beating Toronto 6-5 in overtime April 3, 2012.

The Isles' Nick Leddy opened the scoring 4:33 into the game. Superstar John Tavares scored twice in the second period. Poulin was recalled prior to the game to replace Jaroslav Halak.

The Sabres lost defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen to the flu, which has been running through the team. Nolan said they will recall a replacement.

Update: The Sabres have recalled defenseman Mark Pysyk.

Sabres' Matt Moulson ignited career besides Isles superstar John Tavares

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 27, 2014

BUFFALO – Five years ago, Matt Moulson, then a struggling winger on a two-way contract with the New York Islanders, was paired up with slick center John Tavares, the No. 1 pick months earlier.

The two immediately showcased dynamic chemistry together, becoming arguably the NHL's best duo.

Moulson, now one of the Sabres' top scorers, compiled seasons of 30, 31, 36 and 15 goals (in 48 games) with Tavares feeding him the puck.

How did Moulson, a former ninth-round pick, mesh so quickly on the left wing with Tavares, hockey's biggest prospect since Sidney Crosby? Moulson is seven years older than Tavares.

"I just think it's how close we were off the ice," Tavares said Saturday prior scoring twice in the Isles' 4-3 shootout loss inside the First Niagara Center. "Playing with him so young in my career ... he had been playing professional hockey for a while and been through a lot of training camps and whatnot. (He) understood ... what a lot of it was about. He was someone I could just really lean on when I needed to talk."

Moulson credits being in "the right place at the right time" for his career taking off on Long Island.

"I don't think I changed my game too differently," he said. "Obviously, I had a chance to play with great players. That definitely helps. I think sometimes it's a confidence thing. For whatever reason, I had a lot of confidence when I was playing there and knew Johnny. Obviously, we had some chemistry."

Despite all of the success, the Isles traded Moulson to the Sabres on Oct. 27, 2013.

Tavares' career has kept growing without Moulson. The 24-year-old had 24 goals and 66 points in 59 games last season and 15 goals and 31 points in 35 games this year.

Still, playing without Moulson is different.

"Yeah, I certainly miss him," Tavares said.

Moulson faced the Isles for the first time with the Sabres, although he played against them March 18 after Buffalo traded him to Minnesota, scoring two goals and three points in a 6-0 Wild win.

He returned from a three-game absence Saturday following a short bout with the flu. Luckily, it wasn't mumps, an illness that has spread throughout the NHL.

"I think everyone's worried about that, what's going on throughout the league, but I got all the testing done for it," Moulson said.

Slowly, the Sabres, a team riddled by injuries and illness, are getting back to full strength.

In addition to Moulson, center Cody McCormick and defenseman Mike Weber returned Saturday. Still, the Sabres had only 11 healthy forwards prior to the game, so they recalled center Mikhail Grigorenko from Rochester.

Weber missed six games following left knee surgery.

"I was available for the last couple, err on the side of caution," Weber said.

Weber said the recent breaks in the schedule provided a good time to have the surgery.

"It got to the point where it started locking up on me and a little bit too much swelling to the point where we couldn't control the swelling anymore," he said.

The hard-nosed McCormick missed six games with a lower-body injury. He also missed four games last month.

"I feel a little fragile this year so far," McCormick said. "Hopefully, a little more durable going forward."

He added: "I think it's probably years of how I play. I'm not going to change anything. That's what got me here and what keeps me here."

Other injury updates from Sabres coach Ted Nolan:

- Defenseman Tyler Myers (lower body) is still week-to-week.
- Captain Brian Gionta (upper body) is "still out for a little bit."
- Defenseman Tyson Strachan (lower body) is "pretty close." Strachan skated Saturday morning.
- Center Marcus Foligno underwent surgery on his hand and is out a month or two.

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Growing up in Mississauga, Ont., Tavares' father was a big Doug Flutie fan. So when the diminutive star bolted from the CFL to the Buffalo Bills in 1998, the elder Tavares kept watching Flutie play quarterback.

"That's kind of when I started watching football and saw Doug Flutie doing those great things for the Bills," Tavares said Saturday morning.

Tavares has been a Bills fan ever since Flutie's rollicking return to the NFL.

"That was a tough loss last week," he said about the Bills' embarrassing 26-24 loss to the hapless Oakland Raiders. "I think everyone was excited about their opportunity, but that's the way it goes sometimes. So hopefully next year's the year."

Is Tavares with the Bills through thick and thin?

"I think I'm kind of on the wagon, off the wagon a little bit," he said. "But certainly every Sunday I see how they're doing and check on them. I actually talk to Matt (Moulson) about how they're doing quite a little bit, especially since he's here now. So certainly they're my team."

Sabres goalie Jhonas Enroth becoming unbeatable in shootouts

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 28, 2014

BUFFALO – As John Tavares stickhandled toward the net, making move after move, Jhonas Enroth barely budged in his crease. When the slick New York Islanders superstar finally shot the puck, the composed goalie stuck his right pad out, securing the Sabres' 4-3 come-from-behind shootout win Saturday.

"You look at Jhonas and how he handled it, he wasn't even bothered by it," Sabres defenseman Mike Weber said Sunday inside the First Niagara Center. "A lot of goalies would've been moving side to side with him, and he just stayed right with him – calm, cool and collected."

Enroth has been almost unbeatable in shootouts this season, winning all five and stopping an incredible 20 of the 21 shooters he has faced. Right now, no NHL goalie is better in the one-on-one competition.

Only Carolina's Chris Terry, the second shooter Enroth faced Oct. 14, has beaten him.

"He's full of confidence and he sees the puck real well ... and knock on wood, the shootouts, they don't have too much to shoot on every time they come down on him, which means he's in a great position," coach Ted Nolan said after the Sabres prepared for tonight's game in Ottawa.

Almost halfway through the season, a victory feels imminent if the Sabres reach a shootout. The Sabres' 6-1 record is tied with the Isles for the league's top mark.

They can thank Enroth, whose shootout prowess could help him earn a new contract.

"Everybody's seen it," Sabres center Cody McCormick said about Enroth's play. "He's on top of his game in those. He's faced the best players in the league, and he's gone toe-to-toe with them. We have all the confidence in the world going into the shootouts with either of our goalies."

Enroth's save on Tavares, who scored twice during regulation, showcased his soaring confidence. The Swede said he told himself to stay patient and wait for the center's last move.

"I don't think it was that tough," he said. "I've seen him do that before, so I was kind of waiting for it."

Enroth's .952 shootout save percentage ranks No. 1. No one else is above .895. Florida goalie Roberto Luongo has also won five shootouts but has lost three and has a .776 save percentage.

"It's going to be hard for me to keep us this pace," Enroth acknowledged. "So I'm just trying to forget about this and keep playing the next game like it's a new game."

Enroth, who will likely start tonight against the Senators, doesn't prepare much for shootouts. Heck, these days, the Sabres rarely practice breakaways.

"I watch a little bit to see what they've been doing throughout the year, anything like that," Enroth said about the opponents' best shooters. "The main key is pretty much mentally. I've been stopping a couple shootouts in a row. I feel pretty confident with it, and (I'm) just trying to wait them out pretty much."

Enroth believes his style fits shootouts well. As one of the league's smallest netminders – he's listed at a generous 5-foot-10 and 166 pounds – the 26-year-old simply can't block shots with his frame. He must be agile, smart and read plays properly.

"I've always been a goalie that saves pucks," he said. "I haven't really been blocking a lot of shots, obviously. So maybe that's something that played out in my favor, I guess."

Enroth has performed well in shootouts before. He stopped 14 of 19 attempts in 2010-11 (.737) and 14 of 22 (.636) in 2011-12.

"Last couple years I've really been trying to bear down," Enroth said, "because there's a lot of extra wins."

Enroth has 11 wins overall this season.

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The Sabres practiced without defensemen Andrej Meszaros (maintenance day) and Rasmus Ristolainen (flu) Sunday. They have reinforcements for the blue line, however. Fresh off of a two-game recall last week, Mark Pysyk has been summoned again from Rochester.

"I'm very comfortable with him," Nolan said about Pysyk. "I think he's a very intelligent player. He's paid his dues down in the American League. He did very well when he was here."

Meanwhile, Tyson Strachan, out eight of the last 10 games with a lower-body injury, could possibly play tonight, Nolan said.

The Sabres will see how Ristolainen, who left Saturday's game, feels later.

In other news, Nolan said captain Brian Gionta, out since Boston's Matt Bartkowski hit him high last Sunday, is a "week-to-weeker" with an upper-body injury.

"At least another week before we talk about another week," he said.

Center Marcus Foligno, who fought Bartkowski, could be back within six weeks, Nolan said. Foligno recently had surgery for what appears to be a broken left hand. He has a large cast around it.

Sabres rally in 3rd, beat Isles in SO 4-3

By Dan Cave

WGR 550

December 27, 2014

Down 3-0 heading to the final period, the Sabres found the net on three straight shots in a span of just 5:12, before beating the Islanders 4-3 in a shootout.

Nicolas Deslauriers' two points helped spark Buffalo's comeback. Deslauriers got the scoring started at 6:39 of the final frame and provided a beautiful pass on Zemgus Girgenson's goal moments later. Chris Stewart scored just 1:50 later, tying the game 3-3 and marking the first time Buffalo completed a three-goal rally since April of 2012.

Nick Leddy's long shot from the blueline found the net just 4:33 into the game, giving the Islanders an early 1-0 lead. John Tavares made it 2-0 at 11:56 of the second period with his 14th goal of the season. Both Brian Flynn and Mike Weber had trouble handling the puck along the boards in the Buffalo zone. Tavares pounced on the Sabres' mistake, gaining possession and tucking a shot into the top corner.

Tavares notched his second of the evening just 3:09 later, tapping a cross-crease feed from Josh Bailey past Jhonas Enroth. Tavares was left all alone to the right of the net and Bailey slid the puck across for the easy tap-in, putting New York ahead 3-0.

Deslauriers sparked the rally in the final frame, snapping a shot past Kevin Poulin from the slot for Buffalo's first goal of the game. Moments later, with Drew Stafford in the penalty box, Deslauriers' long pass up ice hit Girgenson in stride. The Buffalo forward bulled his way to the net, holding off Johnny Boychuk and wringing the puck between Poulin's pads, making it 3-2.

Only 1:50 after Girgenson's goal, Chris Stewart completed the comeback with his fifth goal of the season, sending First Niagara Center into a frenzy. Neither side found the net in overtime and Tyler Ennis provided the only shootout goal, giving Buffalo the win and snapping a four-game losing streak.

According to the Sabres' official Public Relations Twitter account, and via the Elias Sports Bureau, the team pulled off only its second-ever 3-0 third period comeback. The other took place on April 2, 2003 against the Atlanta Thrashers.

Enroth turned aside 32 shots and stoned all three New York shooters, including Tavares. After scoring twice during regulation, Tavares was stuffed by Enroth's right pad on the game's final shootout attempt. The Sabres return to action at 7:30 p.m. on Monday at Ottawa. Hear the call on WGR 550 and the Buffalo Sabres Radio Network.

1st Period

Goals

4:33 - NYI - Nick Leddy (6) (Kyle Okposo, Josh Bailey)

Penalties

10:10 - BUF - Patrick Kaleta (2 min., roughing)

10:10 - NYI - Cal Clutterbuck (2 min., roughing)

20:00 - BUF - Chris Stewart (2 min., roughing)

2nd Period

Goals

11:56 - NYI - John Tavares (14) (Unassisted)

15:05 - NYI - John Tavares (15) (Josh Bailey, Kyle Okposo)

Penalties

3:46 - NYI - Kyle Okposo (2 min., slashing)

9:16 - NYI - Thomas Hickey (2 min., tripping)
15:28 - NYI - Calvin de Haan (2 min., roughing)

3rd Period

Goals

6:39 - BUF - Nicolas Deslauriers (4) (Drew Stafford, Josh Gorges)
10:01 - BUF - Zemgus Girgensons (10) (SH) (Nicolas Deslauriers, Josh Gorges)
11:51 - BUF - Chris Stewart (5) (Drew Stafford, Patrick Kaleta)

Penalties

9:39 - BUF - Drew Stafford (2 min., goaltender interference)
14:53 - NYI - Matt Martin (2 min., holding)
14:53 - BUF - Zemgus Girgensons (2 min., embellishment)

Overtime

Goals

None

Penalties

None

Shootout

BUF - Matt Moulson - MISS

NYI - Kyle Okposo - MISS

BUF - Tyler Ennis - GOAL

NYI - Frans Nielsen - MISS

BUF - Zemgus Girgensons - MISS

NYI - John Tavares - MISS

Goaltending

NYI - Kevin Poulin (22 saves, 25 shots)

BUF - Jhonas Enroth (32 saves, 35 shots)

Power Plays

NYI - 0 of 2

BUF - 0 of 3

Hamilton: The Sabres hope to turn things against the Isles

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 27, 2014

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Sabres didn't play a bad first period, but still trailed by a goal. Down by three heading to the third, Buffalo finally found its legs in a big comeback victory.

Kevin Poulin played in his first NHL game this season and had to make 10 saves during the first 20 minutes. He was tested on a close shot by Matt Moulson and later made a great save on Mikhail Grigorenko in the slot.

Tyler Ennis was stuffed on a 2-on-1 when he tried to force a pass through to Moulson, but Lubomir Visnovsky would have none of it, getting perfect position. The play there was to shoot, but while the opponents usually score lay-up goals against the Sabres on 2-on-1s, Buffalo usually doesn't.

The only goal of the period came from the left point when former Blackhawk Nick Leddy's shot hit Nikita Zadorov and went in.

Zadorov has really struggled since being broken up with Rasmus Ristolainen. He's minus nine in his last six games including tonight.

Jhonas Enroth made eight saves in the first period.

Buffalo took some really dumb penalties in Detroit and saw the Red Wings go 4-for-6 on the power play. As time ran out in the first period, Chris Stewart jacked an Islander for no reason so his team will have to start the second killing a penalty down a goal.

If I were the coach in that situation, Stewart wouldn't have seen the ice again until the third period. If they had scored, I might not have played him again the rest of the night. The Islanders didn't score on that power play and Stewart was not benched.

Buffalo got seven shots on Poulin in the second period, but only one was a decent scoring opportunity. Stewart found Cody Hodgson on a power play in the slot, but Poulin made a real nice save on the one-timer.

John Tavares scored two in that period to give him his first multiple point game since November 22. On the first of Tavares' goals, Brian Flynn gave the puck away along the wall and then Mike Weber gave it away on a sweep check right to Tavares who walked in on a bad angle. He made a gorgeous move to the net, switched to his backhand and fired in his 14th.

On Tavares' second goal he was left all alone in front and Josh Bailey found him for a tap-in. Enroth had 16 saves after two periods.

Rasmus Ristolainen was in the dressing room for the second period. This is a team that's already without Tyler Myers and Tyson Strachan. After the game, Ted Nolan mentioned that Ristolainen was not feeling well.

"It's what's going through our whole team right now," Nolan said. "He just didn't feel very good. He just didn't have enough energy."

The Sabres were getting badly outshot in the third, but finally broke through when Drew Stafford found Nic Deslauriers out front and he fired home his fourth of the season.

Stafford took a goaltender interference call at 9:39 and believe it or not, that ignited the team. Deslauriers found Zemgus Girgensons up ice and he split the defense to fire home a shorthanded goal at 10:01.

"That was a big goal," Nolan said. "For Nic to have the patience and wait for the right time to give it to

Girgensons, and Girgensons' strength to hold off the defender, to take that shot. It was a big goal for us and then the momentum really started switching to our side."

Just 1:50 later, Stafford came out of the box and worked a gorgeous give and go with Stewart who cut in sharply from the right circle and backhanded home his fifth to tie it.

Neither side could find the net in overtime and Tyler Ennis was the only skater to find the net in the shootout, giving Buffalo the 4-3 win.

"After the second period, we told ourselves in the locker room, it's time to step up, pick it up and come out hard in the third," said Girgensons. "It's pretty much about giving your best at the end there, not getting frustrated [being down 3-0]. I think we have to keep doing that throughout the season when we're down."

"I thought we were playing a pretty good game, minus the goals," said Stewart. "In the third period, we cleaned up our own end. We can show what we're doing when we're playing with confidence."

Sabres make a recall

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 28, 2014

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Sabres have recalled Mark Pysyk from Rochester.

Pysyk is joining the Sabres for his second recall this season. The Sherwood Park, Alberta native is currently tied for second among Amerks defensemen with 11 points (1+10) in 30 games. Buffalo's first-round pick (23rd overall) in the 2010 NHL Draft, Pysyk has tallied 12 points (2+10) in 65 games for the Sabres since making his NHL debut in 2012.

Rasmus Ristolainen is sick while Tyler Myers and Tyson Strachan are injured. Andrej Meszaros did not practice on Sunday.

The Sabres leave today for a game in Ottawa Monday night.

Sabres end skid with shootout win over Islanders

By Mark Ludwiczak
The Sports Xchange
December 27, 2014

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- The Buffalo Sabres snapped their four-game losing streak in impressive fashion Saturday night, overcoming a 3-0 deficit to defeat the New York Islanders 4-3 in a shootout.

Buffalo scored three goals in a span of 5:12 in the third period and center Tyler Ennis scored the lone goal in the shootout.

"It's one thing we said going into the third period, you just never know," Sabres head coach Ted Nolan said. "Throw some pucks on net ... but for us to say it was going to happen was a different story. It was just a great third period."

Left winger Nicolas Deslauriers, center Zemgus Girgensons and right winger Chris Stewart scored in regulation for Buffalo (14-19-3). Goalie Jhonas Enroth made 33 saves and stopped all three New York shooters in the shootout. In the shootout, Ennis beat Islanders goalie Kevin Poulin with a wrist shot to the blocker side.

New York came up empty on its final attempt when captain John Tavares, who had two goals in regulation, was stopped by Enroth. Nick Leddy also scored in regulation for the Islanders (23-11-1), who suffered their first shootout loss of the year. Poulin made 23 saves in his first start of the year.

It was quite the comeback from the Sabres, who have shown the ability to beat top teams around the league after a slow start to the season.

After falling behind 3-0, Deslauriers got the Sabres on the board 6:39 into the third period with his fourth goal of the year. Following some strong work down low by right winger Drew Stafford, Deslauriers jumped on the puck in the slot and picked up his third point in his last three games.

It was a bounce-back performance for the young forward after he made a critical mistake in Buffalo's 6-3 loss to Detroit on Tuesday. Deslauriers took a penalty late in the second period against the Red Wings and Detroit went on to score four unanswered goals.

"The puck just popped out at me, I took a shot and it went in," Deslauriers said. "From there we built momentum ... I knew I had to jump back from Detroit. I felt calm with the puck and that helped me a lot tonight."

Girgensons pulled the Sabres within one with a shorthanded tally midway through the third period. Following a breakout pass from Deslauriers, Girgensons used his strength to hold off Islanders defenseman Johnny Boychuk and beat Poulin with a hard wrist shot. It was Girgensons' team-best 10th goal of the season.

"That was a big goal," Nolan said. "Nic to have the patience and to wait for the right time to give it to Girgensons and Girgensons' strength to hold off the defender and take that shot. It was a big goal for us and then the momentum really started switching to our side."

Stewart tied the game at 11:51 on a terrific give-and-go with right winger Drew Stafford. The power forward rushed with speed from the right and beat Poulin with a backhand through the goaltender's legs.

"I think the last couple of games he's really coming on," Nolan said of Stewart. The comeback spoiled a quick start from the Islanders.

Leddy opened the scoring 4:33 into the game with a quick slap shot from the left point.

Tavares increased New York's lead to 3-0 with a two-goal burst in the second period. His first strike was a highlight-reel goal 8:06 into the period: Tavares burst into the left circle, split two defenders and put a backhand shot into the back of the net.

Tavares scored his second goal just over three minutes later on a tap-in in front of the Sabres' net.

"We talk about mental durability," Islanders head coach Jack Capuano said. "If we didn't play well, it would be one thing, but we played a pretty solid game ... you want to make sure as a group that you move forward because it can seep in. We did a lot of good things, we've just got to make sure mentally we stay dialed in."

NOTES: RW Brian Gionta (upper body) and D Tyler Myers (lower body) were scratched for the Sabres. ... Sabres RW Marcus Foligno recently had surgery on his injured hand and will be out a month or two, coach Ted Nolan said. ... LW Eric Boulton, D Brian Strait and D Matt Donovan were scratched for the Islanders. ... This was the first of three games between the two teams this season. Their next meeting takes place Feb. 8 in Buffalo. ... New York won the season series against Buffalo with a 2-0-1 record last year.

Sabres return from holiday break to face Isles at home

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

December 27, 2014

Fresh off the three-day holiday break, the Buffalo Sabres are back in action Saturday night against the New York Islanders.

Faceoff is scheduled for 7 p.m. with the Tops Gamenight pregame show beginning at 6:30 p.m. The game can also be heard live on WGR 550.

Buffalo will be getting some healthy bodies back in the lineup after fielding five call-ups from the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League in their last game on Tuesday.

Matt Moulson, who has missed the past three games due to the flu, is feeling better and is ready to contribute again on the team's top line.

Center Cody McCormick will be back in as well. He's been out since Dec. 13 with a lower-body injury and defenseman Mike Weber, who has missed the past six games due to minor knee surgery, will also make his return to the ice.

Moulson was one of a few players who was sick over the course of the past week and used the break to get better. He skated on his own Friday and feels like his conditioning is where it needs to be. In the last five games he's played, Moulson has four points (2+2).

"I started feeling better Sunday or Monday," he said after the morning skate at First Niagara Center. "I had all the tests done to make sure it wasn't anything more serious than the flu and luckily it was just the flu. Unfortunately, I had to wait for all the tests so I couldn't play in any of the games before the break because of the precautions with the NHL and making sure everyone else doesn't get sick."

Buffalo is 0-3-1 in its past four games, coming off a stretch in which they had won 10 of 13. They had a late one-goal lead against Boston on Sunday heading before the Bruins tied it up and won it in overtime.

The Sabres then held a 3-2 advantage against the Detroit Red Wings on Tuesday heading into the third period. Detroit then scored four goals in the final frame, including three on the power play, to close out the game and take the two points.

Weber thinks having some veterans back to the lineup should add some stability, particularly when the game is on the line.

"We need to get back to playing the right way. I definitely feel like Boston and Detroit, if we had our full lineup and guys weren't so banged up, tired and things like that, those are games that a week ago, two weeks ago, we were winning those," he said.

"Up a goal in the third period, we were starting to understand how to win games and how to be winners. It slipped away from it here a little in the last couple."

Playing at home might help the cause as well. Buffalo is 9-2-0 in their past 11 at First Niagara Center.

Jhonas Enroth will start in goal. He's 9-3-1 in his last 13 games. He'll be looking for his first career win against the Islanders. He's 0-3-0 with a 2.72 goals-against average and a .924 save percentage in three games against them.

RECALLS FROM ROCHESTER

Two forwards from Rochester are still needed as the team continues to deal with some injuries. Captain Brian Gionta will not play due to an upper-body injury. Marcus Foligno's injury to his hand required surgery so Nolan said he could be out for up to two months and Torrey Mitchell remains sidelined with a lower-body injury.

Johan Larsson stayed up with the club through the break but with only 11 healthy forwards, they also recalled Mikhail Grigorenko after the morning skate.

Grigorenko has one assist in four games played with the Sabres this season.

On defense, Tyler Myers will miss his third-straight game due to a lower-body injury. But with Weber back and Tyson Strachan close to returning, the team sent Mark Pysyk down to the Amerks on Wednesday.

PROJECTED LINEUP

26 Matt Moulson – 28 Zemgus Girgensons – 63 Tyler Ennis
19 Cody Hodgson – 25 Mikhail Grigorenko – 80 Chris Stewart
44 Nicolas Deslauriers – 65 Brian Flynn – 21 Drew Stafford
22 Johan Larsson – 8 Cody McCormick – 36 Patrick Kaleta

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

1 Jhonas Enroth
34 Michal Neuvirth

Injured: 12 Brian Gionta (upper body), 57 Tyler Myers (lower body)
Injured Reserve: 17 Torrey Mitchell (lower body), 24 Tyson Strachan (lower body), 31 Matt Hackett (knee), 82 Marcus Foligno (hand)

POWER PLAY

First Unit

Moulson-Girgensons-Ennis
Stafford-Ristolainen

Second Unit

Hodgson-Flynn-Stewart
Zadorov-Meszaros

Sabres rally back from 3-goal deficit in 3rd period against Islanders

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

December 27, 2014

Sometimes momentum in a hockey game can change without warning. The Buffalo Sabres were down 3-0 to the New York Islanders heading into the third period Saturday night.

Buffalo hadn't overcome a three-goal deficit in the third since April 3, 2012.

They had only overcome a 3-0 third-period deficit twice before in franchise history, the last time on April 2, 2003.

They hadn't won a game this season when trailing after two periods. They were 0-15-0 in that situation heading into the game.

But once the pucks started going in, none of that mattered. Buffalo scored three times in the third to rally back, beating the Islanders 4-3 in the shootout at First Niagara Center.

"In this game, that's the fun thing," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. "We said going into the third period, 'You just never know.'"

Nicolas Deslauriers, Zemgus Girgensons and Chris Stewart scored the Sabres' goals in regulation. John Tavares scored twice for the Islanders and Nick Leddy added the other. Tyler Ennis put home the only goal in the shootout.

Jhonas Enroth shut the door for Buffalo, stopping Kyle Okposo, Frans Nielsen and then Tavares to improve to 5-0 this season in the shootout. He's stopped 20 of 21 shooters this year.

He made 30 saves in regulation and came up huge on three more Islanders shots in overtime for a total of 33 stops.

"That was a heck of a comeback," Sabres forward Drew Stafford, who recorded two assists, said. "It just goes to show you the type of character we have in this room – a no-quit attitude. Especially down 3-0, the way they were controlling the play – especially in the second period – we might've folded up shop, but it's not so anymore."

FIRST BLOOD

The comeback began when Deslauriers spoiled Kevin Poulin's shutout bid 6:39 into the third period.

Deslauriers placed the blame for Tuesday's loss in Detroit squarely on his shoulders. He took a roughing penalty in the second period that he thought turned the tide in the Red Wings' favor. In that game, the Red Wings scored four goals in the third period to win.

He atoned for that mistake with a goal and an assist against the Islanders. Deslauriers is now riding a three-game point streak. He has two goals and two assists over that span.

"I'm just putting the puck on net and getting lucky, odd bounces," he said. "But I'm not a guy who looks at his stats like that. I'm more of just finishing my hits and if I have a chance to bury one, I'll do my best."

His teammates were happy to see him rebound in that fashion.

"He's done a little bit of everything and you like to see guys like that succeed because they work so hard and put so much effort in and they care so much," defenseman Mike Weber said. "It's nice for him to start putting them away for us."

HOLLA AT THAT SHORTY

The Sabres fans in the crowd found themselves back in the game when Girgensons tallied shorthanded with 9:59 remaining to make it 3-2. Deslauriers sprung him with a swift outlet pass and Girgensons made no mistake for his 10th goal and second shorthanded marker of the year.

The penalty killing units stymied the Islanders power play in both of their opportunities with the man advantage. They had yet to allow a shorthanded goal this season.

It's a big step from that game in Detroit as well. Three of Detroit's four third-period goals came on the power play and they had scored with the extra attacker earlier in the game as well.

BACK TO BASICS

Weber has been with the team since 2007 and said this is probably the tightest group he's been with during his tenure as a Sabre.

"We never thought we were out of it," he said. "That's the sign of a close team and a team that's headed in the right direction."

Buffalo was on a 0-3-1 skid heading into the game but only one of those losses was on home ice. Prior to that, they had won 10 of 13 games. Weber, who had missed the past six games after undergoing minor knee surgery, thought that the team came back to life in the third.

"That's the type of hockey we were playing before we went on our little slump here with the injuries and stuff like that. We're really starting to turn a page," Weber said. "...We're having a lot of fun. We're working hard."

TYING IT UP

To extend his point streak to four games, Stewart took a pass from Stafford down the right wing cut in tight and slipped a backhand in underneath Poulin's pads. The goal tied the game with 8:10 remaining in regulation and just 1:49 after Girgensons' goal.

Stewart now has two goals and two assists during his streak.

Buffalo is now 10-2-0 in their past 12 games at home.

"That was a hack of a move by him and to come back like that, it's great to hear that sound in this building," Stafford said. "It's been a long time since I've heard it that loud."

"It just goes to show you the fans here, they still want a winning product on the ice and we're doing our best to, like I said – no quit in here. To put on a show for them like that and get them involved, we only feed off that even more."

BITTEN AGAIN BY THE FLU BUG

Defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen left the game with the flu early in the second.

Nolan said it's likely that they'll have to call up a defenseman for the team's game against Ottawa on Monday. Several of Buffalo's players have been under the weather in the past week.

Matt Moulson missed three games with an illness before returning Saturday night. Patrick Kaleta and Michal Neuvirth have also missed time because of the flu but have been well enough to play the past two games.

The Sabres and Senators are scheduled to face off at 7:30 p.m. on Monday from Canadian Tire Centre in Kanata, Ontario.

Shootout wins prove valuable for Sabres

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

December 28, 2014

It's been a tough-go lately for the Buffalo Sabres, but the players are feeling all right after a come-from-behind victory Saturday night.

Down 3-0 in the third period to the New York Islanders on home ice, the Sabres were able to tie the game and then win it in the shootout.

Jhonas Enroth stopped all three shooters in the skills contest and sealed the win by stopping Islanders captain John Tavares, who had scored twice in the game.

Enroth is now 5-0 in the shootout this season and has allowed only one goal on 21 attempts against.

"I've got to keep fighting and give the team a chance to win. In the shootout there, I was pretty patient," he said after practice Sunday at First Niagara Center. "I kind of knew [Tavares] was going to do something like that. I've seen him do similar stuff before. I just tried to stay patient and wait for his move."

Enroth is aware that it's going to be difficult for him to keep up this torrid pace, but as of right now, he's confident in his ability and both the coaching staff and his teammates know they can count on him when the pressure's on and he's staring down some of the best shooters in the League.

"Right now he's full of confidence and he sees the puck real well," Sabres coach Ted Nolan said. "He's following it very well and knock on wood, in the shootouts, they don't have too much to shoot at every time they come down on him, which means he's in a great position."

The Sabres are 6-1 in shootouts this season in large part because of Enroth's play and also because Buffalo's top shooters have also been performing well. Nolan has relied on Matt Moulson, Tyler Ennis and Zemgus Girgensons more than any other players so far this season. Each has taken six attempts. Ennis, now 3-for-6 this year, scored the game-deciding goal on Saturday.

The victory snapped an 0-3-1 slide for the Sabres and they'll look to pick up another two points Monday night in Ottawa when they face the Senators.

"We need to go into Ottawa and play the same way we played in the third last night," Ennis said. "But it's nice. We got contributions from everyone. It's been like that for a while and there's a lot of positives moving forward. We've got to play with that confidence."

COME TOGETHER

The Sabres had gone on a 10-3-0 run before that latest winless streak. They're 6-5-1 in the month of December, a big improvement from the first month of the season; they finished October 2-8-1.

The players and coaches believe being able to rally back like they did against the Islanders is a byproduct of them really becoming a team. It's a process that began before the first game of the season.

"There were two ways we could handle it. We could come together and learn how to fight and win games and stick together or we could give up," defenseman Tyson Strachan said. "I think you can tell in what we've done turning it around, the season right now, getting some wins, we came together as a group and it's a lot of fun in here right now."

Nolan credited his assistant coaching staff – consisting of Bryan Trottier, Danny Flynn, Tom Coolen and Arturs Irbe – and the veterans on the roster with helping to foster a new culture.

“One thing you want to do is give a team some structure and some discipline, let them mold and let them build upon themselves,” Nolan said. “You don’t police them and you don’t have to control them, they control themselves. They’re doing a tremendous job.

“And with [captain Brian] Gionta, he’s really led this team. Matty Moulson’s a little more vocal in the room. Tyler Ennis is starting to come forward and the guys are really starting to feel good about themselves.”

OPTIONS ON DEFENSE?

Nolan may have some decisions to make when it comes to personnel on the blue line. Tyler Myers remains out with a lower-body injury and Rasmus Ristolainen may be unavailable due to the flu. Ristolainen left Saturday’s game early in the second because he wasn’t feeling well and he did not practice on Sunday.

Andrej Meszaros also did not skate because he was given a maintenance day.

Strachan did practice and he’s close to returning after missing the past four games with a lower-body injury. He’ll make the trip to Ottawa and Nolan said he’s pretty close to coming back.

The Sabres called up Mark Pysyk from the American Hockey League in case they need a healthy body. Nolan is confident Pysyk will be able to step in without missing a beat. Pysyk has played in two games for Buffalo so far this season and has an even plus-minus rating.

“I’m very comfortable with him. I think he’s a very intelligent player and he’s paid his dues down in the American [Hockey] League,” Nolan said. “He did very well when he was here.”

As far as forwards go, Mikhail Grigorenko remains with the team as Brian Gionta, Torrey Mitchell and Marcus Foligno are still out with injuries. Nolan said Gionta could be out for at least another week with an upper-body injury and that Foligno could be back within six weeks as he recovers from surgery to repair damage done to his hand.

SUNDAY’S PRACTICE

26 Matt Moulson – 28 Zemgus Girgensons – 63 Tyler Ennis
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22 Johan Larsson – 8 Cody McCormick – 36 Patrick Kaleta

Defense: 3 Mark Pysyk, 4 Josh Gorges, 6 Mike Weber, 24 Tyson Strachan, 51 Nikita Zadorov, 61 Andre Benoit

1 Jhonas Enroth
34 Michal Neuvirth

Did Not Skate: 12 Brian Gionta (injured, upper body), 17 Torrey Mitchell (injured reserve, lower body), 31 Matt Hackett (injured reserve, knee) 41 Andrej Meszaros (maintenance day), 55 Rasmus Ristolainen (flu), 57 Tyler Myers (injured, lower body), 82 Marcus Foligno (injured reserve, hand)